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PERSPECTIVE

Happiness is increased when intangible goals such as making someone smile are made.

CRPF chief reviews security preparedness in Manipur, stresses swift response



IMPHAL

CRPF Director General G P Singh reviewed the force's operational preparedness in Manipur and stressed the need for a swift response to emerging security situations, the force said.

Singh chaired a high-level meeting at the M&N Sector headquarters here during his two-day visit to the state.The meeting focused on strengthening ground-level preparedness and ensuring a rapid response to any emerging situation, the CRPF said in a post on social media.

Singh emphasised “zero tolerance towards violence and rapid peace restoration” in Manipur and complimented personnel for their “adequate and appropriate response” during recent developments, it said.The CRPF chief also stressed maximising the use of force multipliers to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of security operations.Earlier, Singh, accompanied by senior officials, laid the foundation stones for a Transit Officers' Mess and a Strategic Operations Conference (SOC) Hall at the CRPF Group Centre in Imphal.

WHO SAID WHAT



We are so proud of our @mirabai chanu who is making India proud time and again in Weightlifting events

~ Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister & MP, Arunachal Pradesh



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Assam sets January 1, 2027 deadline for fully paperless government offices

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has set January 1, 2027, as the deadline for all government offices in the state to shift to a paperless e-Office system, expanding its ongoing drive to digitise administrative processes.

The Chief Minister's Office announced the deadline on Wednesday, describing it as a new phase in Assam's digital governance initiative.

“Save the Date: 1 January 2027. A new chapter in Assam's digital governance,” the CMO said in a post on X, adding that all government offices would transition to a paperless e-Office system aimed at making public services more transparent, efficient and citizen-centric.

The state has already implemented the National Informatics Centre (NIC)-developed



e-Office platform across the Assam Secretariat. According to NIC, all 58 Secretariat departments are currently using the system, while implementation is being extended to selected directorates and Deputy Commissioner's offices.

The e-Office platform replaces conventional paper-based file handling with electronic workflows. It allows offices to receive and diarise documents digitally, create and move files online, prepare notes and drafts, and digitally sign and archive documents.

The system also enables officials to track the movement and status of files, creating an electronic record of administrative processes and decision-making.

Assam began working towards wider adoption of e-Office several years ago. The state initiated implementation in districts and set up a

dedicated state-level steering mechanism in 2021.

In 2026, the government launched e-Office District, aimed at extending digital file management and paperless administrative processes across district-level government offices.

The January 2027 deadline will therefore expand an existing digital framework rather than introduce e-Office from scratch. The statewide rollout will require uniform implementation across government offices and is expected to reduce dependence on physical files while improving monitoring of administrative processes.

The effectiveness of the transition will depend on how consistently the system is adopted across departments and whether digital file movement helps reduce delays and improve public service delivery.

Eight UDP MLAs join BJP in Delhi



NEW DELHI

Eight legislators of Meghalaya's United Democratic Party (UDP) joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in New Delhi on Wednesday in the presence of Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju.

Welcoming the legislators into the BJP, Rijiju said they had been impressed by the development work undertaken in the Northeast under Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led governments over the past 12 years.

“We welcome eight elected members of the Assembly, MLAs of Meghalaya, into the BJP family. They earlier belonged to UDP, a very prominent regional party,” Rijiju said at a press conference.

Rijiju said the legislators had been influenced by what he described as the transformation of the Northeast under the BJP-led government and Modi's engagement with the region.

“Looking at the progress of North-

east and Meghalaya under Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the last 12 years and the transformation which has taken place, the heart-to-heart connection of Narendra Modi ji with the people of Northeast and the way BJP has changed the politics of development in Northeast. All eight MLAs are extremely impressed and influenced by Modi ji and our BJP-led government's performance,” he said.The induction comes ahead of the next Meghalaya Assembly election and is set to alter the political composition of the state.

The UDP is one of Meghalaya's major regional parties and has been part of successive coalition governments in the state. The move marks a major organisational change for the party, with eight of its elected legislators shifting to the BJP.

The development also gives the BJP a larger bloc of legislators in the Meghalaya Assembly and could have a bearing on the state's coalition politics ahead of the next election.

Mirabai Chanu ends 28-year wait with Asian Games silver in 49kg weightlifting

IMPHAL

Indian weightlifter Mirabai Chanu secured silver in the women's 49kg category at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games on Wednesday, finally adding an Asian Games podium finish to her decorated career.

The 32-year-old Manipur lifter totalled 198kg, lifting 87kg in the snatch and 111kg in the clean and jerk at the Nagoya City Trade and Industry Centre. Her performance made her India's first Asian Games weightlifting medalist since Kamam Malleshwari's silver in Bangkok in 1998.

North Korea's two-time Asian Games and world champion Ri Song-gum won gold with a total of 210kg, including 94kg in the snatch and 121kg in the clean and jerk. Indonesia's Wijayana Luluk Diani Tri took bronze with 191kg.

For Chanu, the result completed her collection across the Olympics, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games. She has an Olympic silver, a world title and three Commonwealth Games gold medals.

Her Asian Games journey has been marked by setbacks. She finished ninth on her debut at the 2014 Games in Incheon and missed the 2018 edition in Jakarta because of injury. At the 2022 Hangzhou Games, she narrowly missed out after a thigh injury affected her clean-and-jerk attempts, leaving her fourth.

The Nagoya competition also marked another milestone in a career that has seen Chanu overcome significant disappointments. At the Rio 2016 Olympics, she failed to register a valid lift before bouncing back at Tokyo 2020, where she won Olympic silver.

With her latest performance, Chanu became only the second Indian weightlifter after Malleshwari to win medals at the Olympics, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and World Championships.

NEP has brought new perspective to education system: NCERT chief



AGARTALA

NCERT Director Dinesh Prasad Saklani on Tuesday said the National Education Policy has brought a new perspective to the country's education system and stressed the role of teachers in its effective implementation.

Saklani was speaking at the inauguration of a five-day teacher training programme at the International Fair Complex here, organised by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in collaboration with the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT).

The programme is being conducted under the National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement (NISHTHA) and aims to strengthen the professional skills of teachers and improve the quality of teaching.

Saklani said teachers participating in the programme have an important role in ensuring the effective implementation of the NEP.

He said children in remote ar-

reas often gain knowledge through close interaction with nature and their surroundings, and encouraging their creativity should be an important objective of education.

The NCERT director also emphasised the need for regular review and feedback to improve educational programmes.

“The feedback and suggestions received from participants through this workshop will help improve the programme in the future,” he said.

Tripura School Education Department Secretary Milind Rameteke also addressed the gathering and said the training programme places particular emphasis on primary and school education.

Rameteke said Tripura currently ranks third among states in terms of literacy rate and expressed hope that the workshop would help strengthen teachers' professional capabilities and improve the quality of school education in the state.

The programme was formally inaugurated by Saklani in the presence of senior officials and participating teachers.

Arunachal's Tawang identifies 7 high-risk glacial lakes, launches GLOF awareness drive

TAWANG

At least seven high-risk glacial lakes have been identified in the Mago area of Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district, posing a major Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) risk to communities living downstream.

The Arunachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA), in collaboration with the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Tawang, and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), has launched an extensive awareness and training programme on GLOF risks for communities living downstream of the high-risk glacial lakes in the Mago area under Thingbu Circle.

The awareness campaign commenced at Mago village, with a special focus on vulnerable downstream habitations, including Duri village, as well as the Indian Army camp situated in the area.

During the programme, residents were briefed on the location, altitude and distance of the identified high-risk glacial lakes from their settlements and the potential threats that could arise in the event of a

sudden glacial lake outburst.

Senior Consultant Dr Bhupen Mili explained the causes and mechanisms of GLOFs, their possible impact on downstream settlements, and the estimated time floodwaters could take to reach Duri village, the Army camp and other vulnerable locations following such an event.

Participants were sensitised on the importance of identifying safe evacuation routes and designated safe locations, following systematic evacuation procedures and developing effective community-level evacuation plans to minimise risks to human lives and property.

Deputy Director, SDMA, Dorjee Khandu said seven high-risk glacial lakes have been identified in the Mago area, of which six share a common downstream drainage system passing through several villages, including Duri.

He stressed the need to establish locally suitable and effective early-warning mechanisms so that alerts can reach every resident in time. He also emphasised prompt dissemination of warnings to downstream settlements in the event of a GLOF, particularly as Duri village would be among the

first settlements likely to experience the impact of floodwaters.

Referring to recent incidents of devastating flooding in the Himalayan region, Khandu urged residents of vulnerable locations to remain prepared and, wherever necessary, gradually shift towards safer locations. He said that although natural disasters of such magnitude cannot always be prevented, preparedness, effective early warning and timely evacuation can significantly reduce risks to lives and property.

DDMO, Tawang, Gendan Tsomu, urged villagers to participate in the training with utmost sincerity and make the best use of the life-saving techniques being imparted by resource persons.

She also appealed to participants to share the knowledge and skills acquired during the programme with their family members, friends and the wider community so that preparedness reaches every household.

Later, the SDRF team led by Sangey Thinley imparted hands-on training in first aid, basic search and rescue techniques and the proper use of search and rescue equipment. Demonstrations of various rescue

equipment were followed by mock drills, providing participants with practical experience in responding effectively during emergency situations.

The ongoing awareness and training programme has so far covered residents of Mago village, personnel of the Indian Army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) stationed at Mago, people from the Thingbu Hydel area, and residents of New Maling and Tongsheng villages.

The team will further extend the awareness and capacity-building programme to other vulnerable downstream settlements, including Phonda, Chaksam, Grenkhar and Dungshegmang villages, with the objective of strengthening community preparedness and building a more resilient response mechanism against potential GLOF emergencies. The initiative underscores the importance of community awareness, early warning, preparedness and coordinated response in safeguarding lives and property in vulnerable high-altitude areas of Tawang district.

Meanwhile, APSDMA, in collaboration with DDMA, Tawang, and SDRF, conducted another awareness programme at Chag-

zam village under Kyidphel Circle on Monday.

Villagers residing along the downstream areas of Tawang Chhu were sensitised about the potential risks associated with GLOFs and advised to remain alert and vigilant, particularly in view of changing climatic conditions and possible emergencies.

The awareness campaign aims to sensitise vulnerable downstream communities about high-risk glacial lakes and strengthen community-level disaster preparedness. During the programme, senior officials and experts from APSDMA, DDMA and SDRF briefed villagers on the location, altitude and distance of identified high-risk glacial lakes, their potential impact on downstream settlements, and the importance of preparedness and timely response. ZPM Kyidphel Tenzin Yendra Monpa also joined the team in creating awareness among the villagers and shared important information related to GLOF risks.

He appealed to people not to panic but to remain informed, vigilant and prepared, and to follow advisories issued by competent authorities during any emergency.



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BRICS Must Become an Economic Bridge

The grouping's economic weight is growing, but intra-BRICS trade remains well below its potential. India's challenge is to turn declarations into practical mechanisms that expand trade, investment and access to finance-especially for smaller enterprises.

The global economy is being reshaped by geopolitical tensions, fragmented trade, disrupted supply chains and rapid technological change. At the same time, economic weight is steadily shifting towards emerging markets and the wider Global South. In this changing landscape, BRICS has moved far beyond its origins as a grouping of emerging economies. It now represents a substantial share of global economic output and trade.

For India, therefore, BRICS is more than another multilateral forum. Its importance lies in whether it can help build practical economic bridges among emerging economies and connect them more effectively with the wider global economy. India's 2026 chairship comes at a moment when the grouping has an opportunity to move from articulating aspirations to delivering measurable economic outcomes.

Trade is the obvious starting point. Intra-BRICS merchandise trade has expanded dramatically, reaching \$1.17 trillion in 2024 from \$91 billion in 2003. Yet the scale of trade remains modest compared with the combined economic weight of the member countries. The gap points to an unfinished agenda.

The next phase must therefore concentrate on the everyday obstacles that make cross-border business expensive and complicated. Faster customs procedures, compatible standards, better logistics, digital documentation, expanded trade in services and easier investment flows can do more to deepen economic integration than grand declarations alone.

The greatest gains could come from bringing smaller businesses into these networks. Micro, small and medium enterprises frequently struggle with access to finance, technology, information and overseas markets. If BRICS is to become an economic bridge rather than simply another diplomatic platform, its benefits must reach these enterprises.

This is where the Jaipur Consensus and its guiding principles for credit assessment of export-oriented MSMEs acquire significance. Improving access to trade finance can help smaller firms participate in cross-border value chains instead of leaving international commerce largely to large corporations. The objective should be to translate such principles into accessible financial products and simpler procedures.

Financial connectivity more broadly also deserves greater attention. BRICS need not begin with the politically and technically complicated objective of a common currency. More practical steps include greater use of local-currency settlements where commercially viable, interoperable payment systems and stronger financial links among member economies.

The Rio Declaration's call for continued work on cross-border payments and greater interoperability among national payment systems provides a useful foundation. India's experience with UPI demonstrates how digital payment infrastructure can reduce friction and widen access. The challenge is to explore interoperability in ways that improve choice, efficiency and resilience without creating another fragmented financial architecture.

Technology offers another avenue for cooperation. India brings considerable strengths in information technology, digital public infrastructure, start-ups and digital payments. Other BRICS economies possess complementary capabilities in manufacturing, energy, natural resources, research and advanced technologies. Connecting these strengths could create new innovation and investment networks.

The same logic applies to the green transition. Cooperation in renewable energy, green infrastructure, clean technologies and climate-resilient systems could generate investment and technology partnerships while addressing the development priorities of member economies. Green finance, in particular, can become an important area for practical cooperation.

For India, the larger opportunity is to use BRICS to deepen its engagement with emerging markets while expanding exports of engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, electronics, automobiles, chemicals, textiles and processed foods, alongside services. But BRICS should not become an economic silo.

India's engagement with BRICS will inevitably coexist with its partnerships with the G20, Quad, European Union, United States, ASEAN and Gulf economies. These relationships need not be mutually exclusive. Indeed, India's interest lies in ensuring that different platforms reinforce rather than undermine one another.

That also means keeping the World Trade Organization at the centre of the rules-based global trading system. BRICS can contribute to a more representative and inclusive global economy without becoming another source of fragmentation.

The test of India's BRICS chairship, ultimately, will not be the number of communiqués issued but the economic opportunities created. Can businesses trade more easily? Can smaller enterprises obtain finance? Can payments cross borders more efficiently? Can technology and investment flow more freely?

If the answer to these questions becomes yes, BRICS will have begun to fulfil its larger promise-not as an alternative economic bloc, but as a bridge connecting emerging economies with a more open, resilient and inclusive global economy.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"We feel that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all."

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

THE PRICE OF DIGITAL INDIA: A BURDEN ON BANKS, THE 'CASHLESS' SYSTEM IS A MYTH

SHIVAJI SARKAR

The discussion over partially introducing charges on UPI-the ₹29 lakh crore free digital payment system-for merchants making sales of more than ₹2,000 has caused widespread concern. From the Opposition to shopkeepers and ordinary users, everyone is worried and questioning the move.

Perhaps the government has, after many years, taken a practical decision in the interest of banks. Banks are under considerable pressure because of the hidden costs and risks arising from the 2016 demonetisation, the hurried launch of Jan Dhan accounts, the merger of several public-sector banks, and the substantial outflow of funds to pay dividends to the government.

People tend to forget that when UPI was launched in 2016, it was not free. A uniform Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) of 0.065 per cent was applicable to all transactions. Despite being a new product and carrying a charge, UPI expanded rapidly. It was only during the COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020 that UPI and other digital payment services were made free of charge.

For years, banks have been facing a growing deposit crunch. Credit growth has been outpacing deposit mobilisation, as household savings are shifting towards mutual funds and the stock market. Intense competition for retail deposits is increasing banks' interest expenses. To maintain their net interest margins, banks are moving towards riskier retail loans, thereby increasing the cost of lending.

Gradually, the banking system is realising that replacing cash with digital money is not as practical as had been antici-

Digitisation has not eliminated banking costs; it has shifted those costs from physical cash management to expensive and seemingly never-ending technological burdens. Nor has it reduced the printing of currency. Compared with 2016, the number of banknotes in circulation in 2026 has more than doubled. In 2016, India had approximately 90.26 billion individual currency notes in circulation, with a value of ₹15.4 lakh crore, and their printing cost ₹3,420 crore. By March 2026, their number had risen to approximately 176 billion, with a value of ₹41.23 lakh crore, while the printing cost stood at ₹4,875.2 crore. Undoubtedly, digital transactions have increased costs and logistical challenges for the banking system.

On the surface, India's banking system appears stronger than it has been in several years. Non-performing assets (NPAs) have declined, capital buffers remain satisfactory, and profitability has improved. However, behind these reassuring figures, a different set of pressures is emerging. Banks are facing rising deposit costs, changing patterns of credit distribution, increasing expenditure on digital infrastructure, and new forms of risk. According to the Reserve Bank of India's June 2025 Financial Stability Report, the gross NPA ratio of scheduled commercial banks stood at 2.3 per cent and the net NPA ratio at 0.5 per cent at the end of March 2025. The subsequent Report on Trends and Progress of Banking in India 2024-25 put the gross NPA ratio at 2.2 per cent at the end of March 2025 and 2.1 per cent at the end of September 2025. But a decline in the NPA ratio does not mean that credit

hold savings towards mutual funds, equities and other financial assets is making deposit mobilisation more competitive for banks. This is increasing the cost of funding and forcing banks to offer attractive deposit interest rates, while it is not possible to raise lending rates by the same proportion.

According to the RBI's 2024-25 report, deposit growth in FY2025 was 11.1 per cent, while credit growth was 11 per cent. This underlines the importance of stable and low-cost deposits. Rising funding costs are also putting pressure on net interest margins. During the comparable period, the margin declined from 3.3 per cent to 3.1 per cent, increasing the cost of credit expansion.

For banks, particularly those dependent on retail deposits, this is not merely an accounting concern. It has a direct impact on the cost of expanding credit.

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana has significantly transformed access to formal banking services. As of February 28, 2025, 54.97 crore accounts had been opened under the scheme, of which 30.60 crore were held by women. The number of accounts in rural and semi-urban areas stood at 36.59 crore.

Basic savings accounts, which are exempt from minimum-balance requirements, generate limited direct fee income. Low-balance or inactive accounts, as well as operations in remote areas, increase administrative workloads. Despite approximately six crore zero-balance accounts, this does not mean that the Jan Dhan Yojana is a failure of banking. It does, however, raise a policy question: who will bear the continuing cost of universal finan-

have an average life cycle of 17 years, are putting pressure on commercial banks' balance sheets, mainly through various consortium loans. With deposit growth at around 12 per cent, banks are prioritising higher-return corporate capital expenditure and working-capital loans

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

India has set new goals for the eradication of drugs. Now our agencies are moving from MEETING to MISSION, REPORTING to RESULT, SEIZURE to NETWORK ELIMINATION, and CASE to CONVICTION. ~ Amit Shah, Union Home Minister



rather than expanding excessively into long-term, locked-in retail assets.

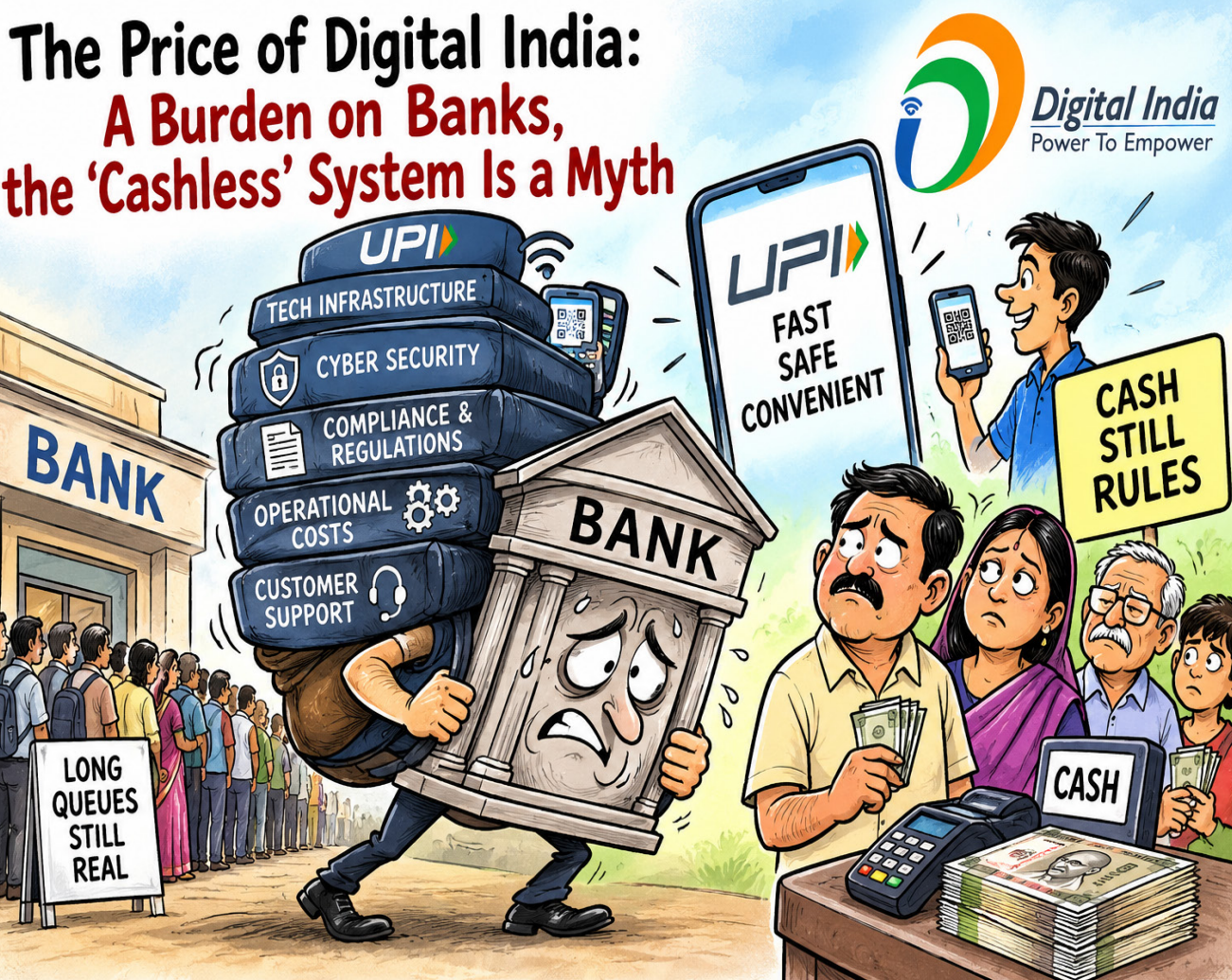
Digital banking is accompanied by rising costs related to cybersecurity, cloud systems, fraud detection and regulatory compliance. Card- and internet-related fraud accounted for 66.8 per cent of the total number of cases, while loan-related fraud accounted for 33.1 per cent of the amount involved.

Risks are now shifting towards the retail, microfinance, agricultural and real-estate sectors. The interconnectedness between banks and non-banking financial companies could potentially transmit financial stress from one sector to another. The RBI's stress tests projected a gross NPA ratio of 2.5 per cent by March 2027-but this is only a possible scenario, not a forecast.

India's banks have strong capital bases and asset quality has improved. According to the RBI, the Capital to Risk-Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) stood at 17.4 per cent in March 2025.

But financial stability cannot be assessed solely on the basis of NPAs and capital. Deposit costs, recoveries, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure and credit risks originating outside the banking system are also important. The real test is whether banks can remain profitable, protect depositors and withstand changing economic conditions.

Digital transactions should gradually be discouraged. They have not reduced the circulation of physical currency; rather, they have substantially increased costs for banks. The risks are known, but the agencies concerned are reluctant to speak about them. Higher charges, greater caution and a return towards a cash-based system would be more welcome. The myth surrounding black money has already been shattered.



pated. Its costs are continuously rising. Digital banking, once promoted as a cost-saving and seamless alternative, has increased expenses. Banks have begun making continuous investments in cybersecurity, fraud prevention, ageing technological systems, anti-money-laundering and Know Your Customer (KYC) compliance, as well as in dependence on cloud service providers, payment networks and software vendors, instead of the physical costs of vaults and cash transportation.

risks have disappeared. During 2024-25, approximately ₹2.26 lakh crore of fresh NPAs were added to the books of scheduled commercial banks.

According to the RBI, the overall reduction was approximately ₹2.75 lakh crore, of which ₹1.58 lakh crore resulted from write-offs and around ₹67,693 crore from recoveries. A write-off should not be mistaken for cash recovery. A reduction in NPAs is welcome, but the quality of resolution is also important.

Credit demand remains strong, while the shift of house-

cial access?

Digitisation does not automatically improve financial efficiency.

Over an extended period of 17 years, the relationship between long-term credit risk management and bank profitability indicates an inverse relationship. When banks have a high concentration of credit or when risk management remains ineffective over a 17-year period, their profitability is adversely affected.

Long-term loans, which generally run for 15 to 20 years and

Govt doors remain open for dialogue: Manipur CM calls for collective efforts towards economic development

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Tuesday emphasized that the state governments doors remain open for dialogue to resolve any grievance, appealing to the public to shun bandhs and blockades that disproportionately hurt daily wage earners and economic activity.

According to a release, addressing a gathering at the 'Seva Sankalp Abhiyan' programme organized by the Imphal West District Administration at Khoyathong Multipurpose Community Hall, the Chief Minister also revealed that the state has suffered an estimated revenue loss of around Rs 1,300 crore over the last three years following the unprecedented crisis that began on May 3, 2023.

"The unprecedented situation has caused a substantial setback to the



states economy. During the financial year 2023-24 alone, Manipur suffered a loss of around Rs 475 crore in GST collection, contributing to an overall revenue hit of nearly Rs 1,300 crore across the last three years," Chief Minister Khemchand Singh said, as per the release.

Underlining the economic toll of strikes, the Chief Minister appealed to people to abandon the path of bandhs and blockades, urging them instead to approach their local MLAs and the government to address their concerns. "The governments doors remain open for dialogue, and all problems can be resolved through discussion," he reiterated.

Citing Singapore's transformation, the Chief Minister noted that the small island nation achieved remarkable economic prosperity because its di-

verse communities united under a shared national identity. He urged the people of Manipur to work together harmoniously, rebuild the economy, and contribute towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat@2047'.

Referring to the recent deferment of the Census exercise in the state, the Chief Minister noted that the state government had conveyed the public's sentiments to the Centre, which subsequently deferred the exercise in view of local concerns and aspirations. He added that the central government had similarly accommodated the aspirations of Manipur's people by extending the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to the state in 2019.

Highlighting the purpose of the 'Seva Sankalp Abhiyan' being observed nationwide from September 17 to Octo-

ber 17, 2026, to mark 25 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modis public serviceSingh said the outreach will cover various Assembly constituencies to evaluate last-mile welfare delivery.

"Direct interaction with the public at the grassroots will help us identify gaps in scheme implementation and ensure eligible beneficiaries receive their due benefits without hurdles," he added.

During the event, the Chief Minister inspected over 30 stalls and service counters set up by various government departments and interacted with beneficiaries.

The event was attended by Thangmeiband MLA Khumukcham Joykisan Singh, Imphal West Deputy Commissioner Mayanglambam Rajkumar Singh, along with senior officials and local beneficiaries

Arunachal final voter roll records 6.96 lakh electors after SIR

ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh's final electoral roll published on Tuesday has 6,96,026 electors, marking a decline of 1,91,479 voters from the electorate recorded before the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

The final roll comprises 3,43,709 men, 3,52,315 women and two third-gender electors, according to election officials. The gender ratio stands at 1,025 women for every 1,000 men.

The SIR exercise began in the state on June 5. The draft electoral roll published on July 21 had 7,18,046 electors, of whom 6,32,871 were mapped as self or progeny, while 85,175 were categorised as unmapped.

Election authorities issued notices to the unmapped electors and 1,33,413 electors flagged for logical discrepancies. A total of 2,18,588 notices were issued during the verification process.

Authorities subsequently conducted hearings and examined documents submitted by electors, along with undertakings furnished by booth-level officers.

During the claims and objections period from July 21 to August 20, officials received 18,598 forms. The process resulted in the addition of 8,803 electors and deletion of 1,924 names from the draft roll.

The final roll brought the total electorate down from 8,87,505 before the SIR to 6,96,026.

According to the election office, 43.61 per cent of registered electors have a physical or digital Voter ID card.

Electors who are dissatisfied with the final roll can appeal before the district magistrate within 15 days of its publication. A second appeal can be filed before the chief electoral officer within 30 days of the district magistrate's order.

The final electoral roll for service voters was also published on Tuesday, with 5,552 service electors enrolled in Arunachal Pradesh.

Gauhati HC upholds Ripun Bora's acquittal in Daniel Topno murder case

GUWAHATI

The Gauhati High Court on Tuesday dismissed the CBI's appeal challenging the acquittal of Congress leader Ripun Bora in the 2000 murder case of tea community leader Daniel Topno, upholding the lower court's decision. Topno was murdered in Assam's Gohpur area in September 2000. The CBI took over the investigation in 2001 and subsequently named Bora as an accused in the case. The Kamrup District and Sessions Court had acquitted Bora and another accused, Pulin Phukan, in February 2014, holding that the material placed before it was insufficient to proceed against them. The CBI later challenged the order before the Gauhati High Court. Reacting to Tuesday's ruling, Bora said the verdict had vindicated his stand that the allegations against him were politically motivated.

"From the day the allegation was made against me, I had said that it was a political conspiracy. Now the truth has prevailed and I have got justice," Bora said.

Bora alleged that the case had damaged his political image and affected his career. He said the High Court's decision had now provided judicial relief after years of litigation.

He also referred to a separate case in which he had been accused of attempting to bribe CBI officials in connection with the Topno investigation, saying he had received relief in that matter as well.

Topno had contested the 1996 Assembly election from Gohpur against Bora. His murder in 2000 subsequently became the subject of a CBI investigation and a prolonged legal battle involving Bora.

The High Court's dismissal leaves the 2014 acquittal of Bora and Phukan intact.

SILCHAR

Ahead of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's proposed visit to Barak Valley later this month, Cabinet Minister Krishnendu Paul on Monday chaired a high-level meeting to review preparations and the progress of major infrastructure projects in the region.

The meeting, held at the Assam Secretariat, Barak Valley, focused on coordinating arrangements for the Chief Minister's visit and reviewing ongoing and proposed development projects across the three districts.

Paul reviewed the progress of construction of the Assam Secretariat complex in Barak Valley and discussed major road-related issues affecting the region. The status of several infrastructure projects was also examined during the meeting.



"Ahead of the Chief Minister's proposed visit to Barak Valley by the end of this month, I chaired a preparatory meeting at the Assam Secretar-

iat, Barak Valley, to assess and finalise the arrangements," Paul said after the meeting.

He said discussions also covered the progress of the

Secretariat complex, road-related issues across the region and various ongoing and proposed infrastructure projects.

Officials from the Barak Valley Development Department, NHIDCL, Public Works Department, Roads and Buildings and other line departments attended the meeting.

Barak Valley Development Department Joint Secretaries Pankaj Kumar Deka and Khaled Ahmed, Cachar Additional District Commissioner David Borah and other senior officials were present.

Paul directed officials to expedite pending works, address coordination gaps and complete preparations within the stipulated timeframe. He also asked departments to ensure that their respective responsibilities were carried out effectively ahead of the Chief Minister's proposed visit.

Dima Hasao journalists seek welfare support, press building from Assam CM

HAFLONG



A delegation of the Dima Hasao Press Club met Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Diphu and submitted a memorandum seeking better welfare measures and basic facilities for journalists working in the hill district.

The delegation drew attention to the difficulties faced by media professionals in Dima Hasao, particularly the infrastructural and logistical challenges involved in reporting from remote areas.

The journalists urged the state government to introduce welfare schemes and extend basic facilities to accredited media persons. They also sought the construction of a dedicated press building in Haflong to provide space for press conferences,

meetings, training programmes and other media-related activities.

The delegation further requested special consideration for the families of long-serving journalists and called for the revival of organised exposure tours for media professionals. Such tours, they said, had earlier helped reporters gain a broader understanding of Assam's cultural and socio-economic landscape.

The memorandum also underlined the role of the media in accurate reporting, highlighting public concerns and strengthening communication between the government and citizens.

The Dima Hasao Press Club representatives thanked Sarma for meeting them and requested his intervention for early consideration of their demands.

Ajmal claims Nagaon bypoll win



MORIGAON:

AIUDF chief and Nagaon Lok Sabha bypoll candidate Badrudin Ajmal on Tuesday claimed he would win the election and challenged BJP candidate Debashish Sharma to speak in English.

Ajmal made the remarks while campaigning in several minority-dominated areas under the Morigaon Assembly constituency.

"I will win the election, Inshallah," Ajmal told reporters after the campaign. He said Parliament needed representatives capable of delivering speeches and challenged Sharma to demonstrate his ability to speak in English.

Ajmal also claimed that Congress candidate Sibamoni Bora was trailing in fifth or sixth po-

sition in the contest, but did not provide any evidence or source for the claim.

Reacting to reports of resistance to Congress in minority-dominated areas, Ajmal said the development indicated a lack of public support for the party in those areas. He claimed voters would not support Congress in the bypoll.

On reports of members of the minority community joining the BJP, Ajmal alleged that some had been influenced through monetary inducements and intimidation. He further claimed that around 80 per cent of Muslims who had joined the BJP would return.

Ajmal maintained that the AIUDF would emerge as the leading party in the Nagaon Lok Sabha bypoll.

Green corridors to be created for ambulances during emergencies: Tripura CM Manik Saha

AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha said that special green corridors will be created in the state for the quick movement of ambulances carrying patients during emergencies.

According to a release on Monday, CM Saha said that he has held a series of meetings regarding ambulances carrying patients from outside.

We will set up a green corridor so that patients do not get stuck in traffic jams, he said.

Saha said that the state government is working responsibly to ensure better medical services for the people of the state.

"Currently, all the units of the main referral hospitals of the state are being connected with state-of-the-art medical infrastructure. The state government's goal is that no person in the state has to go outside the state for better treatment. Currently, the number of referral patients from the state has significantly reduced. The state government's goal is to bring that number to zero. One of the goals of the state government is to provide better medical services by providing better infrastructure, providing fast medical services and keeping the hospitals of the state clean, said the Chief Minister.



CM Saha said this while inaugurating the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and Central Sterile Supply Department (CSSD) units of the Super Specialty Block at Government Medical College and GBP Hospital in Agartala.

The ICU of the Super Specialty Block has nine beds each for men and women, according to the CMO

The Chief Minister, who is also the Health Minister of the state, said that in addition to improving health infrastructure, advanced training is being provided to doctors and health workers in a phased manner to efficiently run state-of-the-art medical units.

Currently, initiatives have been taken to provide digital services in all hos-

pitals. Digital services are already being provided in many hospitals. With the launch of the new ICUs and CSSDs at Agartala Government Medical College and GBP Hospital at a total cost of Rs 13.5 crore, it will be possible to provide fast and continuous advanced medical services to the people of the state, and the health safety of the patients will also be ensured. Currently, nine super-specialty blocks are operational to provide advanced medical services, said Saha.

He said that in addition to the main referral hospitals in the state, state-of-the-art health infrastructure is being developed at district and sub-divisional level hospitals as well.

One of the goals of the state government is to ensure more and better medical services for the people of the state through transparent work, said Saha.

The Chief Minister said that GBP Hospital will be brought under state-of-the-art CCTV cameras for 24-hour security, and a separate unit will be developed for this. Special initiatives will also be taken to ensure that necessary generic medicines are always available in the state.

The Chief Minister emphasised the development of health infrastructure as well as coordination between patients, doctors and health workers.

Health and Family Welfare Department Secretary Kiran Gitte, MLA and Chairperson of Rogi Kalyan Samiti Mina Rani Sarkar, Agartala Government Medical College Principal Dr. Tapan Majumder and GBP Hospital Medical Superintendent Dr. Bidhan Goswami were present.

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‘The UCC bulldozer is to permanently polarise society’: Congress



NEW DELHI
The Congress on Wednesday accused the Narendra Modi government of using the proposed Uniform Civil Code (UCC) as a political instrument to “divide, disrupt and divert” public attention, rather than as a measure of legal reform.
The party’s remarks came after former Bombay High Court judge RC Chavan resigned from the Maharashtra government-appointed committee drafting a framework for the UCC, citing reservations over the panel’s decision to seek public responses to complex social questions through a “yes or no” format. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Justice Chavan’s resignation raised questions about the committee’s functioning and the broader approach to UCCs being pursued by different States.
“Did the Constituent Assembly ever imagine a situation in which every State would enact its own separate version of a UCC?” Ramesh asked in a

statement posted on X. He also cited the 21st Law Commission’s 2018 consultation paper on family law, which concluded that a UCC was “neither necessary nor desirable at this stage” and instead recommended reforming discriminatory provisions within existing personal laws while preserving India’s legal and cultural diversity.
Ramesh alleged that the government had disregarded the Law Commission’s position because it did not suit its political agenda. He further argued that the State-level UCCs being pursued were not uniform. The UCC came into force in Uttarakhand in January 2025, while Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh have subsequently passed legislation on the subject, he said.
“These State-level UCCs ... are not uniform. They contain different provisions, different penalties, different procedures and significant exemptions,” Ramesh said, alleging that the Uttarakhand law had also led to

problems for residents.
Referring to Union Home Minister Amit Shah’s recent statement that NDA-ruled States would implement the UCC before the 2029 Lok Sabha election, Ramesh said the proposed legislation was being pursued without the broad consultations and consensus required for major legal reform.
Later, responding to questions on the party’s statement, Ramesh said: “The UCC bulldozer is to permanently polarise society.” In his resignation letter to committee chairperson and former Supreme Court judge Ranjana Desai, Justice Chavan said he had initially understood that the panel would seek public views and build consensus on issues such as delayed marriages, infertility, marital instability and delays in resolving matrimonial disputes.
He said he later realised that the exercise was primarily intended to collect responses in a “yes or no” format to facilitate data analysis.

‘Global South in front row of global crisis, back row of decision-making’: Jaishankar



NEW DELHI
External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called for greater solidarity among Global South countries, saying they were bearing the brunt of global crises while having limited influence over decisions shaping their future.
“The Global South today may be in the front row of the global crisis, but is in the back row of decision-making,” Jaishankar said at a high-level meeting of Like-Minded Global South Countries and Friends on the sidelines of the 81st UN General Assembly.
He said the meeting was taking place amid “considerable global

uncertainty”, marked by conflicts and geopolitical tensions, disrupted supply chains, rising trade barriers, fragmented investment flows and climate shocks.
Jaishankar said institutions created for a different era continued to reflect the power structures of that time.
“The Global South needs to be part of decision-making structures that deliberate on issues that directly pertain to our future,” he said, calling UN and multilateral reforms essential to address the region’s priorities.
He said the past year had seen an increase in active conflicts, posing significant risks to the global economy,

particularly developing countries.
“At a time when we needed to turn to multilateralism, we actually witnessed its dismantling. International organisations that we hope would deliver solutions have instead become a problem for us to solve,” he said.
Jaishankar called for greater cooperation among Global South countries on energy, food security, trade, connectivity, climate action and emerging technologies.
He said countries must “not accept or legitimise” chokepoints in supply chains, finance or connectivity, and stressed that energy availability and prices should not be manipulated for

political ends.
On food security, he called for greater attention to the supply of grains and fertilisers, while stressing that developing countries’ right to industrialise should not be denied.
On the West Asia conflict, Jaishankar said maritime routes must be secured, international law observed and the safety of seafarers and commercial shipping guaranteed.
He also cautioned that artificial intelligence should not create new divides and called for sharing indigenous AI tools and frameworks among Global South countries.
Jaishankar urged developing countries to use existing platforms to ensure their concerns were not “deprioritised” and called for closer economic cooperation to cushion them against overlapping global crises.
He also highlighted initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure as platforms that could advance climate action without relying solely on the Global North.
Jaishankar, who is leading the Indian delegation at the UNGA, also held bilateral meetings with counterparts from Uganda, Italy and Trinidad and Tobago.
His talks with Italian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani covered the Gulf situation, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and the Ukraine conflict.
With Uganda Foreign Minister Adonia Ayebare, Jaishankar discussed development partnership, capacity building, defence training and agriculture.
He also met Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and discussed the implementation of commitments made during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the country last year, including laptop supplies, solarisation, academic chairs and other development projects.

INTERNATIONAL

‘You should not be here,’ Trump tells CNN at UN as standoff with media outlets persists



WASHINGTON:
On a day of high-stakes diplomacy on the global stage, President Donald Trump began his United Nations visit by telling a prominent U.S. journalist, “You should not be here.”
“It’s an honor to be here,” Trump said as he entered U.N. doors Tuesday ahead of his speech to the General Assembly and faced Kaitlan Collins of CNN, a frequent target of his ire. “I’m surprised that CNN is here covering me. You should not be here covering me. You said you weren’t going to cover me.”
As Collins noted later on air, CNN said nothing of the kind. The administration had banned CNN from White House grounds days earlier — along

with MS NOW and Politico — and removed the network from pool duty. But CNN had been admitted into the U.N. as regularly credentialed media.
In any case, the tense moment was a stark reminder of how dramatically the bitter conflict between Trump and news outlets whose coverage he objects to as “fake news” has escalated in just a few days.
The current ban was the subject of a joint lawsuit filed Monday by the three outlets, asking a judge to find the administration’s move unconstitutional. The White House had until Tuesday to respond, and a hearing is scheduled for Wednesday afternoon.
Later Tuesday, Trump doubled down on his remarks and said negative coverage was dangerous for the

country.
Asked whether he would allow the outlets back in if the court rules against the White House, he said, “Well, it probably will, because this is a judge who’s not a particularly fair judge.” He was referring to U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly, whom he appointed in 2017 and who ordered a CNN journalist’s access restored in a similar case in 2018.
“So you never know,” Trump added. “I think we have a right to clean out fake news.”
Trump’s comments echoed others he’s made since announcing the ban Friday. He has referred to “purposely negative stories,” but cited no specific stories — only generally “fake news” — as justification for the ban.
The ban and lawsuit are part of a long-running conflict between the president — especially in his second term — and media outlets he finds unfavorable. Trump has responded in the courtroom, or with regulatory action. He’s also lashed out at individual reporters in person or over social media, sometimes in strikingly personal terms — as he has with CNN’s Collins, most recently in a speech at the White House Correspondents’ Association dinner.
On air, after her exchange with Trump on Tuesday, Collins said: “We never said we were not going to cover the president. We will do our best to cover him each and every day.”
Tuesday began with an item missing from the daily press schedule issued by the White House: It did not list the U.S. network pool, a departure from the norm. CNN had been the designated pool network for the president’s trip to New York, according to a schedule that divides coverage of certain events between the five major networks. But Trump’s ban removed it from pool duties.
The other pool members agreed, in solidarity, not to replace CNN with

another network on the coverage, and further to suspend all pool coverage until further notice. Other news outlets also took steps in solidarity. The Associated Press joined a number of news organizations, including The Washington Post and The New York Times, in a decision not to publish photographs of presidential events Monday.
It remains to be seen how long both the ban and the collective media action will continue.
In speeches and meetings Tuesday, Trump was seen plenty by global audiences, thanks to UNTV — the official United Nations broadcast arm — and pool journalists covering other international leaders.
Meanwhile, a sign was spotted in the White House workspace: “I stand with AP, CNN, MS NOW, Politico.”
One longtime TV analyst says the lack of constant coverage will prove damaging to a spotlight-loving president — which may be one reason the standoff ultimately ends.
“This ban is not going to go on forever because he doesn’t want that to happen, anymore than anybody else,” said Robert Thompson, director of Syracuse University’s Bleier Center for Television and Popular Culture.
In the short term, Thompson said, audiences won’t feel the impact in a lasting way — after all, he noted, there are many ways people get news outside of network coverage.
“We are not going to be deprived of important civic information,” Thompson said, as might have happened years ago when outlets and options were fewer.
On the other hand, if viewers were interested in what Trump said as he inaugurated a helipad at the White House on Monday, they were out of luck: The sound of Trump’s whirring, waiting helicopter drowned out his remarks. TV network crews usually work to capture clearer audio.

US sanctions tighten grip on Iran’s airlines as flights to Iraq, Oman cancelled



TEHRAN
Ever tighter US sanctions intended to cripple Iranian aviation come into force on Wednesday, after Washington vowed to “shut down” Tehran’s carriers and punish anyone doing business with them.
In their first acknowledgement of disruption, Iranian media reported late Tuesday that flights to the Iraqi and Omani capitals would be cancelled the following day, but other routes would be unaffected.
The new measures, announced by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Monday, follow earlier aviation sanctions as well as his threat of an “economic D-Day” meant to force the Islamic republic into submission, after military means of ending the Middle East war stall.
It remained unclear what their full impact would be, as the Iranian aviation sector has already been targeted for years by various sanctions.
The Tasnim news agency cited a civil aviation spokesman as saying that “Baghdad and Muscat airports will no longer accept Iranian flights” starting Wednesday.

“Other international flights, including Istanbul, will operate as scheduled and as usual, and at present there are no problems with these flights,” Tasnim reported.
According to Tasnim, Iran’s aviation authorities are in talks to reroute Baghdad flights to Najaf, a major destination for Iranian pilgrims.
Earlier in the day, flag carrier Iran Air said it had “not received any notification or official instruction from the civil aviation authorities of Turkey, the Republic of Azerbaijan, or Iraq”. On Monday, however, Georgia barred Iranian carriers, while the airline Mahan, a private Iranian operator, said it suspended service to Turkey at the request of its government.
The Iraqi government has not publicly announced plans to enforce a ban, but several sources, including a senior government official, told AFP that Baghdad would comply with the US measures.
Iraq is a top destination for Iranian airlines, mainly transporting pilgrims between holy sites.
The prospect of a suspension of flights between the two countries has sparked concerns from some Iraqi

travel agents.
In Najaf, home to one of the most revered Shia Muslim shrines, travel agent Haidar Shamaa said “most travel companies in the city depend on booking flights” to Iranian airports.
Several travel agencies said panicked clients were calling for updates and that they were considering switching to land routes, though that would mean much longer journeys for travellers.
Announcing the expanded measures on Monday, Bessent had said “all the Iranian airlines will be shut down around the world”.
“If they land, you cannot provide them with fuel, you cannot provide them with landing services, you cannot sell them tickets or you will be knocked out of the dollar system,” he added.
The restrictions further complicate the ability of Iranians to travel abroad or return to their country.
They have also drawn protest from China, a major trade partner of Iran, which said it “opposes illegal unilateral sanctions that lack a basis in international law or authorisation from the UN Security Council”.

Where Oars Carry Prayers

Manipur's 248-year-old Heikru Hidongba brings together faith, ritual and the thrill of the boat race



The first stroke of the oar cuts through the water, and almost instantly the quiet around the moat gives way to cheers. Along the banks, thousands watch as brightly decorated boats surge forward, their crews rowing in rhythm. Devotional music, prayers and the excited voices of spectators blend into a single festive chorus.

For Manipur, however, Heikru Hidongba is about more than a boat race. It is a socio-religious ceremony in which faith, agriculture and community life come together around the water.

The 248th edition was celebrated at the Bijoy Govinda moat in Sagolband, Imphal West, drawing devotees and spectators for a day of religious rituals, devotional music, cultural performances and the traditional boat race.

Organised by the Bijoy Govinda Sevayet Committee, the festival is observed on the 11th day of Langban, the sixth month of the Manipuri lunar calendar, usually in September. At its heart is a prayer for peace, prosperity, a good harvest and the well-being of the community.

A sacred ceremony on water

The most visible part of Heikru Hidongba is the boat race, but the race comes only after a series of religious rituals.

The festival has older roots in traditional Meitei religious practice and later acquired a strong Vaishnavite dimension, particularly during the reign of Maharaja Bhagyachandra. Its present form is closely associated with Shri Shri Bijoy Govinda, whose worship remains central to the ceremony at Sagolband.

Before the boats enter the water, a twin boat is ritually sanctified in the presence of the deity. Sankirtana, prayers and aarti accompany the ceremony, while offerings are made for peace, prosperity and agricultural abundance.

The boats therefore become part of the ritual itself. The race that follows is not merely a contest of speed and strength; it is the public culmination of a ceremony through which the community

seeks divine blessings.

That is what gives the spectacle its particular character. The solemnity of prayer can, within minutes, give way to the roar of the crowd as the rowers begin pulling together.

108 grains, 108 gooseberries

The symbolism continues in the offerings.

Among the traditional preparations are two special garlands—one made with 108 gooseberries, or heikru, and another with 108 rice grains. The rice grains are carefully selected by hand.

The garlands are offered to Shri Bijoy Govinda before being placed on the boat. Rice, central to the agricultural life of the region, carries an obvious association with nourishment and abundance, while the ritual use of 108 adds another layer of religious significance.

Small details such as these reveal the deeper meaning of the festival. The objects used in the ceremony are closely tied to hopes for food, prosperity and collective well-being.

From the royal court to the moat

The history of the festival reaches back into Manipur's royal past.

Historical accounts describe older forms of Heikru Hidongba within the Meitei religious tradition, while the present form at Sagolband is associated with the reign of Maharaja Bhagyachandra. In 1779, Shri Bijoy Govinda was brought from the royal palace to the Sagolband site, and the festival subsequently became an annual observance there.

Nearly two and a half centuries later, the boats still return to the same waters.

The continuity is striking precisely because everything around the festival has changed. Manipur is no longer the kingdom of Bhagyachandra. Imphal has grown into a modern city, and smartphones now record moments that were once passed down only through memory and oral tradition.

Yet the basic sequence remains familiar: the deity is honoured, offerings are made, the boats are blessed and the rowers take their positions.

A community gathers

This year's celebration once again turned the Bijoy Govinda moat into a meeting place for people from different walks of life.

Families arrived together, devotees participated in the rituals and spectators crowded the banks for the race. Traditional music and cultural performances added to the festive

atmosphere.

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, accompanied by his wife Jyoti Bhalla, attended the festival and witnessed the traditional boat race and other ceremonies.

MLA Rajkumar Imo Singh and other dignitaries were also present.

At the end of the race, the Governor presented the Governor's Trophy and a cash prize to the winning team.

For those gathered around the moat, however, the event was not defined by the trophy alone. The larger

significance lay in participating in a ceremony that connects religious belief with a shared cultural experience.

Where faith meets the thrill of competition

There is an unmistakable sporting excitement to Heikru Hidongba.

As the boats move, the rhythm of the oars becomes faster. Spectators shout encouragement from the banks. The calm atmosphere of the earlier rituals gives way to anticipation and celebration.

But beneath that excitement remains the original purpose of the ceremony: a collective prayer for a prosperous year.

That balance—between devotion and competition—is perhaps the festival's most enduring feature. It allows an ancient religious observance to remain part of everyday community life rather than becoming a ritual remembered only through history books.

For younger generations, the festival offers a direct connection with a past they did not witness. For older generations, it provides the familiarity of a ceremony they have seen throughout their lives.

And every year, the water becomes the meeting point between the two.

The memory that keeps moving

As the boats raced across the moat this year, the scene brought together several layers of Manipur's past and present: traditional Meitei religious heritage, Vaishnavite worship, agricultural symbolism and a community gathering around an intensely competitive race. The chants rose from the banks. The oars struck the water in rhythm. The boats moved towards the finish. Heikru Hidongba has travelled a long way from its royal-era revival in 1779. Yet it has retained the essential elements that give it meaning.

The prayers are offered. The deity is honoured. The boats are blessed.

Then the race begins.

For a few minutes, an old ceremony becomes a living spectacle—and the memory of generations continues to move across the water.

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