Manipur hosts the first 'North East Waree Leeba (storytelling) Festival 2026' – inaugurated by Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla

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News

On 2 Nov 2026 Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla inaugurated the first 'North East Waree Leeba Festival 2026' at the Irom Meijrao Mamang Community Hall, Imphal West. The five-day festival is organised by the Repertory of Waree Leeba, Manipur (Khurai) with the Irom Meijrao Women for Cultural Centre, funded by the Union Ministry of Culture's Cultural Function and Production Grant (CFPG). Artists from Manipur, Assam and Tripura took part, and gurus from Assam and Tripura were felicitated. Festival Director Takhellambam Shyamkanhai Singh narrated an episode from the Mahabharata. Manipur's Art & Culture Minister Kh. Loken Singh attended.

Key facts

Event	1st North East Waree Leeba Festival 2026 – opened 2 Nov 2026; five days
Venue	Irom Meijrao Mamang Community Hall, Imphal West, Manipur
Inaugurated by	Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla
Organisers	Repertory of Waree Leeba, Manipur (Khurai) + Irom Meijrao Women for Cultural Centre; funding – Union Ministry of Culture (CFPG)
Participation	Artists of Manipur, Assam and Tripura; souvenir 'Ningshing Chephong' released

Art form	Waree Leeba – traditional storytelling art of the Meiteis; traced to the reign of King Khagemba (1597–1652)

Background

- Waree Leeba means 'storytelling'. Usually a single performer narrates the Mahabharata, Ramayana and other religious tales using dialogue, rhythmic narration, dramatic technique and humour; striking a pillow placed beside him for emphasis is a distinctive feature. The Governor called it a 'living tradition' that passes knowledge, beliefs, myths and social values across generations; as the art is declining, the festival aims to revive it among the young.
- Manipuri culture: Manipuri is one of India's classical dances; the 'Ras Lila', depicting Krishna and the gopis, is its high point. 'Lai Haraoba' is an ancient ritual festival of the Meiteis; 'Thang-Ta' (sword and spear) is Manipur's martial art. The State's tourism festival held every November is the 'Sangai Festival', named after the Sangai deer, the State animal.
- Geography: Manipur's Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in the North-East, famous for its floating vegetation mats called 'phumdis'. Keibul Lamjao on it is the world's only floating national park and the only natural home of the endangered Sangai (brow-antlered deer).
- Polity: Manipur merged with India in 1949, became a Union Territory in 1956 and a full State on 21 Jan 1972 under the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 (along with Tripura and Meghalaya). Special provision for Manipur's hill areas – Article 371C.

Tamil Nadu link: storytelling is a strong tradition in Tamil Nadu too. 'Villupattu' (bow song) of the southern districts (Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli) is narrated to the beat of a large bow strung with bells, struck with sticks, accompanied by a pot (kudam) and udukkai; its noted exponent Subbu Arumugam received the Padma Shri in 2021. 'Kathakalakshepam' (Harikatha), narrating epics with music, grew in Tamil Nadu through the Thanjavur Maratha court.

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