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Pramod Boro Alleges Rising Unrest in BTR Under BPF

CHIRANG
Pramod Boro, president of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), on Friday alleged that unrest has resurfaced in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) following the return of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) to power. Speaking at a gathering during a peace motorcycle rally organised by the UPPL at Kajolgaon in Chirang district of Assam, Boro said the party is considering contesting all 15 constituencies in the region independently in the upcoming elections. He added that a final decision on whether the party will contest alone or as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will be announced within the next few days. According to Boro, many residents across the region have been urging the UPPL to contest the elections independently. He expressed confidence that the party could secure between 10 and 12 of the 15 seats if it decides to go it alone.

The UPPL leader alleged that the region has witnessed increasing unrest in the last four months following the formation of the BPF-led administration in the BTR. He claimed that incidents of houses being burnt, communal tensions, distrust among communities and growing social divisions have emerged during this period.

Boro contrasted the current situation with the previous five years when the UPPL was in power, stating that such disturbances were largely absent during that time. Highlighting the history of the Bodo movement, Boro said the community has made significant sacrifices over the years. "Nearly 8,000 Bodo people have lost their lives in various movements, but many issues concerning the community still remain unresolved," he said.

WHO SAID WHAT



"A seat for India in the UN Security Council is of utmost importance." ~ Alexander Stubb, Finnish President

NSF Condemns Nagaland Minister Temjen Imna Along Over 'Vande Mataram' Remarks in Assembly

DIMAPUR
The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) has strongly criticised Temjen Imna Along, a minister in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly and a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for supporting the recitation of Vande Mataram in the Assembly.

In a statement issued on Thursday, the federation expressed "deep displeasure and condemnation" over Along's remarks, accusing him of attempting to justify and normalise the use of the national song in institutions across the state despite the organisation's earlier opposition.

The NSF said it had already voiced strong objections on February 20 to any move aimed at introducing or institutionalising the recitation of Vande Mataram in official spaces in Nagaland. According to the student body, the minister's recent comments risk undermining longstanding efforts by the Naga people to safeguard their identity,



faith and constitutional rights.

"By advocating for the normalisation of Vande Mataram within the Assembly, he risks undoing what generations of Nagas have sacrificed so much to defend the preservation of our identity, our faith, and our rights," the federation said in the statement.

The organisation further asserted that no political representative or individual holds the authority to dilute or compromise the rights and protections that the Naga community has historically defended.

The NSF also referred to instructions reportedly issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) that called for the playing or singing of Vande Mataram before the Indian national anthem Jana Gana Mana during certain high-level official functions. According to the federation, there were concerns that such directives might eventually be extended to educational institutions in the state.

The student body argued that Vande Mataram carries religious connotations rooted in the worship of Hindu deities. It said attempts to

mandate or institutionalise the recitation of the song within public institutions in Nagaland raise serious concerns for communities whose faith traditions differ from the religious imagery associated with the composition.

According to the federation, enforcing such practices would contradict the constitutional safeguards provided under Article 371A of the Constitution of India, which grants special protections to Nagaland in matters relating to religious and social practices, customary laws, and ownership of land and resources.

"Any attempts to enforce or institutionalise the recitation of such a song within the Nagaland Legislative Assembly or any public institution in the Naga homeland directly violate the spirit and safeguards enshrined under Article 371A," the NSF said.

The federation also criticised attempts to portray Vande Mataram as purely secular or historical, arguing that such interpretations overlook the concerns of communities whose

cultural and religious identities do not align with the song's symbolism. Expressing disappointment with the minister's stance, the NSF said it was "extremely unfortunate" that Along had chosen to publicly defend the recitation of the song. The organisation alleged that the minister appeared more focused on aligning with political leadership at the national level than on addressing the sensitivities of the Naga people.

The controversy comes amid ongoing debates in Nagaland over cultural autonomy, constitutional protections and the role of national symbols in institutions within the state. Observers note that discussions surrounding the recitation of Vande Mataram have periodically sparked strong reactions in the region, reflecting broader concerns about identity, faith and constitutional safeguards.

The issue is expected to remain a subject of public debate as student bodies, civil society groups and political leaders continue to express their views on the matter.

IAF Sukhoi-30MKI Crash in Assam's Karbi Anglong Kills Two Pilots During Training Mission

GUWAHATI

Two pilots of the Indian Air Force (IAF) were killed after a Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighter aircraft crashed in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, officials confirmed on Friday.

The aircraft, which was on a routine training sortie, reportedly lost radar contact shortly after taking off from the Jorhat Air Force Station on Thursday evening. The jet is believed to have gone down near Nilip Block in Chokihola, a remote and forested area located about 60 kilometres from Jorhat.

The deceased pilots have been identified as Squadron Leader Anuj and Flight Lieutenant Purvesh Duragkar. The IAF expressed deep condolences to their families and paid tribute to the officers for their service.

Local residents in the area reported hearing a loud explosion at around 7 pm on Thursday. Witnesses said smoke was seen rising from the surrounding hills



shortly afterward, prompting authorities to launch search and rescue operations.

The suspected crash site lies in a densely forested and hilly region, which has made access difficult for rescue teams. Personnel from the IAF and local authorities have been deployed to the area to locate the wreckage and assess the situation.

In a post on X, the Indian Air Force

said it stands firmly with the families of the deceased pilots during this time of grief. Officials have not yet released further details regarding the cause of the crash. The Sukhoi Su-30MKI is a twin-seat, long-range multirole fighter aircraft designed by Russia's Sukhoi and manufactured under licence in India by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The aircraft forms a key component of the Indian Air Force's combat fleet, with more than 260 such jets currently in service.

Over the years, however, the aircraft has been involved in a few accidents. Previous crashes involving the same fighter jet were reported near Nashik in Maharashtra in June 2024 and close to the Gwalior airbase in January 2023.

Authorities are expected to initiate a detailed investigation to determine the circumstances that led to the crash. Meanwhile, search teams continue operations in the remote terrain of Karbi Anglong to recover debris and gather evidence from the site.

Manipur Assembly Session to Resume on March 9



IMPHAL

The Seventh Session of the Twelfth Manipur Legislative Assembly will resume on March 9, 2026, with the state government expected to present the annual budget during the proceedings.

According to an official notification issued on Friday, the House will reconvene at 11:00 am in the Assembly Hall in Imphal. Officials indicated that the presentation of the state budget is likely to be one of the key agenda items of the session.

The seventh session had initially opened on February 5, 2026, with the address by the Governor of Manipur. The House was adjourned on the same day by Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh after completing the scheduled proceedings.

That brief sitting came a day after Yumnam Khemchand Singh took oath as the 13th Chief Minister of the state on February 4, 2026. His swearing-in marked the restoration of an elected government in Manipur following the end of President's Rule in Manipur (2025-2026), which had been imposed since February 13, 2025.

President's Rule had been enforced amid prolonged instability in the state, which has been grappling with ethnic

violence since 2023. The formation of the new government paved the way for the Assembly to reconvene.

During the February 5 sitting, the House conducted several key procedural and political activities. Govindas Konthoujam, the state's Home Minister, moved the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, which was seconded by Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho.

The Report of the Business Advisory Committee for 2026 was also tabled in the Assembly. Following this, Chief Minister and Leader of the House Yumnam Khemchand Singh introduced a motion of confidence in the government.

The confidence motion triggered participation from several legislators, including Leader of the Opposition Okram Ibobi Singh, along with MLAs K Ranjit Singh, Khumukcham Meghachandra Singh, Thokchom Lokeshwar Singh and Surjakumar Okram.

The motion of confidence was eventually passed, reaffirming the majority support for the newly formed government.

After completing the scheduled business for the day, Speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh adjourned the sitting of the Assembly sine die.

With the session set to resume on March 9, attention is expected to focus on the presentation of the state budget and discussions related to governance and development priorities. The upcoming sitting will be closely watched as the government outlines its fiscal plans and policy direction amid the continuing social and security challenges facing the state.

Indigenous Muslims Support BJP, Donated Rs.11,000

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam, on Friday said members of the state's indigenous Muslim community have expressed support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and contributed to the party's election fund during the holy month of Ramadan.

Addressing a public gathering at Rangoli Pathar in Naharkatia under Dibrugarh district, Sarma said the contribution was made by members of the indigenous Muslim community as a gesture of their backing for the BJP.

"Our indigenous Muslim community fully supports the BJP in Assam, and we have witnessed the same here. Members of this community have contributed ₹11,000 to the party's election fund, for which I thank them from the bottom of my heart," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma also highlighted that the contribution came during Ramadan, the sacred period observed by Muslims through fasting and prayers. He expressed hope that members of the community would continue to extend their blessings and support to the party.

"This is the month of Ramadan, and everyone is observing fasts. I hope everyone prays and blesses the BJP party," he added. The Chief Minister's remarks came during his visit to the Naharkatia area amid increasing political activity in the state as parties prepare for upcoming electoral contests.

NIA Court Grants Bail to 'Kukiland' Leader Mark Haokip in UAPA Case

IMPHAL

The Special Court of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in Manipur's Imphal West district has granted bail to Mark Thangmang Haokip, the president of the self-proclaimed "Government of People's Democratic Republic of Kukiland," in a case registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) along with several sections of the Indian Penal Code.

The order was issued by the Special Judge of the NIA court in Imphal West on February 27, 2026. Haokip was released on bail after furnishing two sureties of Rs 3,00,000 each along with a personal bond of Rs 3,00,000. The court has directed him to appear through video conferencing on March 10, 2026 for further proceedings in the case.

The court's decision came after charges were formally framed against Haokip on February 2, 2026.

The 40-year-old, a resident of Molmoh village in Churachandpur district and son of Limkhosei Haokip, has been accused of involvement in activities linked to a conspiracy aimed at secession from India and attempts to wage war against the Union government. According to the prosecution, Haokip faces charges under Section 13 of the UAPA for alleged unlawful activities. Investigators claim that he played a key role in spreading propaganda and mobilising support for a separate political entity referred to as the "Democratic Republic of Kukiland."

Haokip was arrested on May 30, 2022, in Kishanganj, New Delhi. Authorities alleged that he had been actively using social media platforms to disseminate propaganda that could

fuel instability and incite communal tensions in Manipur. The charge sheet submitted in the case states that his online activities allegedly promoted communal animosity and attempted to aggravate tensions between the Meitei and Kuki communities in the state.

Investigators also claimed that a diary recovered from Haokip during the investigation contained references to plans for establishing a sovereign entity called "Kukiland." According to the charge sheet, the proposed territory was said to include certain areas spanning across India, Myanmar (formerly Burma), and Bangladesh.

The NIA further alleged that Haokip had formed a group that maintained an online platform - www.kukigovt.com - to promote the idea of the proposed republic and to propagate views considered hostile to the sovereignty and integrity of India.

Authorities argued that such activities were part of a broader conspiracy against the Union government. The prosecution maintained that the accused's actions contributed to escalating communal tensions at a sensitive time in Manipur's already fragile ethnic landscape.

Meanwhile, media platforms associated with the Kukiland movement presented a contrasting narrative. According to reports circulated by Kukiland Media, Haokip has long advocated for justice and political recognition for the Kuki community. His supporters contend that he had raised concerns regarding the rights and security of the Kuki population well before the outbreak of large-scale ethnic unrest in Manipur.



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BIHAR-BENGAL BORDER

After a long five years' of enigmatic predicament, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has come out with the repaired manifesto of creating the ninth Union Territory (UT) in India comprising of five districts of Bihar and carving out two districts from West Bengal including 'Chicken's Neck' area or 'Siliguri Corridor' in West Bengal and for accomplishing the mission he has even fashioned Demography Commission.

It is worth mentioning that some years back while addressing the nation on Independence Day Prime Minister Narendra Modi from the ramparts of the Red Fort had announced the formation of a "high-powered demography mission" to find the infiltrators. Unambiguously he made his intentions clear. He had said "No country can hand itself over to infiltrators. No nation in the world does so - how then can we allow India to do so?" He said that through the mission, "the severe crisis now looming" over the country will be addressed in a "deliberate and time-bound manner".

Prime Minister had a well defined mission; to weed out Muslims. Usually Hindu rightist groups use the term "Bangladeshi infiltrator" to target Bangla-speaking Muslims mainly in the states of Bihar, West Bengal and Assam. In Assam, where Modi's BJP has been in power since 2016, the state government has been running a campaign against Bangla-speaking Muslims, labelling them "outsiders" and accusing them of trying to alter the regional demography.

An insight into the implication of the two phrases would unravel the real intention of Shah, whether it has got a connotation of hate Muslim politics, or simply an administrative exercise. A Union Territory (UT) and a Demography Commission (or related initiatives regarding demographic shifts) are entirely different concepts in the Indian administrative structure. A Union Territory is a type of administrative division, while a Demography Commission is a body tasked with studying or acting upon population data. UT is a federal territory in India that is, unlike a state, is governed directly by the Union (Central) Government. The UT is formed for region that is too small to be an independent state and had distinct cultural identities, or held strategic/national importance.

While a Union Territory is an administrative unit directly controlled and governed by an Administrator or Lieutenant Governor appointed by the President of India. They do not have the same level of legislative and executive autonomy as states. Demography Commission refers to bodies or studies aimed at analysing population changes, often to address security challenges or socioeconomic shifts, especially in sensitive border areas. It focuses on analysing population trends, immigration, and security concerns related to demographic changes in particular regions. It also refers to the broader, political, and security-focused investigation of population structure, often with the aim of addressing changes in that structure. The five demographics include age, gender, religion, income, and education. These are referred to as the family life cycle and socioeconomic status.

A closer look makes it apparent that creation of the ninth UT is not at all an administrative. It is purely a political move. If it really has an administrative orientation, Shah should have directed his ministry officials to carry out the basic studies long back, at least coinciding with the move when the idea of creating UT was mooted. The archetypes of creation of UT are well defined: it can be created for Political and administrative reason to ensure better governance, or, to conserve and secure culture of a region distinctive from surrounding state. None of the reasons apply to the latest move of Amit Shah for creating India's ninth UT. Even after 1947 partition of India, these districts continued to exist and the compulsion to create a UT was never felt. True enough Malda and West Dinajpur are like any other district of Bengal.

Pre-requisite for clubbing the areas for creating a UT is basically similarity in the language, culture, food habit and social relations. None of these four indices has similarity in both the regions. For Amit Shah the only commonality is the Muslims domiciled in the regions of Seemanchal and Malda have their roots in present Bangladesh. Historically the migration of Urdu-speaking Muslims—often referred to Biharis in East Pakistan—are from Bihar's Nalanda and Nawada. They had shifted to East Pakistan at the time of Pakistan. Following riots in 1950, a reverse migration occurred where Muslims returned from East Pakistan to West Bengal (including Malda) and Seemanchal. These migrants, many of whom were poor artisans, farmers, or labourers, often found themselves in a state of flux, shifting between the two countries due to safety concerns and economic hardships.

In the Seemanchal region, particularly during election cycles, these migrants are referred to by terms "Bhatia" or "Maldahiya". A specific community mentioned in this context is the Shershahbadi Muslims, who claim to be the original inhabitants of the Malda-Murshidabad region, though they are sometimes wrongly labelled as "Bangladeshi infiltrators". The seven districts which will constitute UT have a high concentration of Muslim residents. Around 28% of Bihar's 2.31 crore Muslim population resides in this region. The average Muslim population in these four districts of Seemanchal is approximately 49%. Kishanganj has highest concentration of around 68% of the population.

While Malda has 52 per cent of Muslims, Uttar Dinajpur has 49.92% of the population. Both regions are highly sensitive due to their border location and high Muslim demography, often featuring prominently in election analyses and discussions about population shifts. Seemanchal region has highest percentage of Muslim population in eastern state. Though Modi, Amit Shah and other saffron leaders consistently harped Seemanchal being the heaven for Ghuspaithiya and illegal migrants, the SIR conducted in Bihar could not corroborate the narrative of the BJP. However poll panel cut 65.6 lakh names from draft voter list, published on 1 August. Seemanchal region encompasses five districts of Saharsa, Araria, Kishanganj, Purnia and Katihar.

It is worth mentioning that Amit Shah had vowed to remove every infiltrator from Seemanchal (Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, and Katihar districts in Bihar) and Bengal (west Dinajpur and Malda), claiming that illegal migration has significantly altered the region's demography. Obviously the entire region has become a major strategic target for RSS and the "saffron system". The initiative specifically targets border districts that are considered sensitive gateways, including the "Chicken Neck" (Siliguri Corridor) to the Northeast.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I was never aware of any other option but to question everything." -Noam Chomsky

INDIA'S TRADE DIPLOMACY BOOM: DIVERSIFYING FOR GLOBAL DOMINANCE



R. BHATT

India has historically remained central to global trade, with ancient trade routes connecting the subcontinent to markets across Asia, Africa, and Europe. Today, India is once again emerging as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing markets. A pivotal moment in India's modern trade journey was the economic liberalization reforms of the 1990s, which opened the Indian market to international investors and goods. Another pivotal phase is unfolding now; as global supply chains undergo transformation and geopolitical alignments shift, India is leveraging its diplomatic approach of multi-alignment while diversifying its trade partnerships at an unprecedented pace. At present, nearly 70 percent of global GDP and two-thirds of global trade are open to India through existing or negotiated trade arrangements, reflecting the country's expanding footprint in international commerce.

India's trade agreements are not uniform in structure or ambition. They include Free Trade Agreements (FTA), Trade and Economic Partnership Agreements (TEPA), Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPA), Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreements (CETA), and Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements (CECA). Each framework involves varying levels of commitments in trade, services, investment, and regulatory cooperation. These distinctions help India balance its domestic economic priorities while deepening global integration.

Types of India Trade Agreements: FTA vs CEPA vs TEPA Explained
India's trade agreements have gradually evolved in scope and depth, moving from tariff-focused arrangements to comprehensive economic partnerships.

A standard Free Trade Agreement (FTA) primarily focuses on reducing or eliminating tariffs on goods traded between partner countries. Expanding on this structure, a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) includes additional elements such as liberalization of selected services, investment provisions, and broader economic cooperation.

A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) represents a deeper framework of economic engagement. It typically covers trade in goods and services, investment flows, intellectual property rights (IPR), government procurement, competition policies, and institutional cooperation. Such agreements are often used for strategic bilateral partnerships with major economies.

More recently, India has also adopted

the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) model. This framework emphasizes modern trade priorities, including trade facilitation, supply-chain integration, technology cooperation, and mobility of professionals. India's agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an example of this evolving structure.

At the most comprehensive level, Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreements (CETA) incorporate deeper regulatory cooperation, sustainability provisions, government procurement commitments, and broader economic harmonization. These agreements represent the most advanced level of trade integration.

Game-Changing Deals and Tangible Outcomes

India's free trade agreements reflect a deliberate strategy to expand market access across key economic regions while strengthening supply chains and investment flows.

Middle East Partnerships: The Middle East has emerged as one of India's most dynamic trade corridors. In 2022, India signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with the UAE, granting preferential market access to 99 percent of Indian exports to the country and expanding opportunities across 111 service subsectors. The agreement has already delivered substantial results. India-UAE merchandise trade more than doubled from \$43.3 billion in FY 2020-21 to over \$100 billion in FY 2024-25. Key sectors such as gems and jewellery, which form a significant component of India's exports to the UAE, have benefited considerably from the agreement. Similarly, the India-Oman Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, signed in 2025, focuses on strengthening cooperation in strategically important sectors such as minerals, chemicals, base metals, and machinery, reinforcing India's economic engagement with the Gulf region.

Indo-Pacific Trade Expansion: India has also expanded its trade engagement in the Indo-Pacific, a region central to global supply chains and economic growth. India's Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement with Australia, signed in 2022, has produced notable gains. Bilateral trade increased from \$12.2 billion in 2020-21 to more than \$24 billion in 2024-25, effectively doubling within a short period. India's Free Trade Agreement with New Zealand further strengthens its economic presence in the Pacific region. The agreement includes a first-of-its-kind component on Health and Traditional Medicine, reflecting recognition of India's traditional knowledge systems. New Zealand's geopolitical position enhances the significance of the agree-

ment, as it serves as a gateway to Oceania and the wider Pacific region. The agreement includes commitments across service sectors and extends most-favoured-nation treatment across 139 sectors for India, deepening the scope of bilateral economic cooperation.

Europe Engagement: Europe represents another critical pillar of India's trade strategy. In 2024, India signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein. This agreement covers goods, services, investment, and phytosanitary measures, making it one of the most comprehensive trade arrangements India has concluded. A key feature of the agreement is the commitment by the EFTA bloc to invest \$100 billion in India over a 15-year period and generate one million direct jobs, highlighting the agreement's long-term developmental significance. India has also advanced a trade deal with the United Kingdom, resulting in a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement framework that eliminates 99 percent of tariffs covering 100 percent of trade value. The agreement also includes provisions beneficial to Indian professionals, particularly the removal of dual social security payments for three years, and aims to double bilateral trade to more than \$100 billion by 2030. Among India's most significant deals is the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement. The European Union remains one of India's largest trading partners, with merchandise trade reaching nearly \$137 billion in 2024-25. The agreement aims to provide market access covering around 90 percent of India's export value, increasing to 97 percent over time, along with access across 144 service subsectors.

Global South Cooperation: India's trade diplomacy also prioritizes engagement with the Global South. In 2021, India signed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement with Mauritius, marking India's first-ever trade agreement with an African country. The agreement included 315 export items and expanded access for Indian professionals to more than 100 service subsectors. The agreement has already shown measurable results. India's trade with Mauritius increased from \$690 million in 2019-20 to \$887 million in 2024-25, reflecting growing economic cooperation between the two countries.

Ongoing Negotiations and a Pragmatic Trade Strategy

In recent years, India has concluded eight trade agreements with 37 developed countries, while negotiations continue

with several key partners. These include the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Mercosur Group, and Latin American economies such as Mexico, Chile, and Peru, as well as Israel and Canada. Alongside expanding trade partnerships, India has adopted a cautious and pragmatic approach to liberalization. Many agreements incorporate phased tariff reductions and safeguards for sensitive sectors, ensuring that domestic industries and small businesses are protected during the transition. Taken together, these agreements illustrate a broader transformation in India's economic diplomacy. India's approach, unlike China's volume-driven model or EU's rules-heavy blocs, bets on selective integration exemplifying India's carefully calibrated strategy.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Happy to note that India has renewed the Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Cooperation signed in 2020, deepening cooperation on pollution prevention and control, waste management, climate change, forests and natural resource management through knowledge and technology cooperation. ~

Bhupendra Yadav, Union Cabinet Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change



Gaurav Gogoi Accuses Himanta Biswa Sarma of Seeking AIUDF Support for Rajya Sabha Seat

GUWAHATI

Gaurav Gogoi, president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, on Thursday accused Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Chief Minister of Assam, of seeking support from the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) to secure a Rajya Sabha seat, describing the move as evidence of what he termed the Bharatiya Janata Party's "power-driven" politics.

Gogoi alleged that the BJP leadership in the state had turned to the AIUDF despite repeatedly portraying the party as a threat to Assam's social and political fabric. According to him, the development exposes contradictions in the ruling party's political narrative.

The Congress leader's remarks came after three AIUDF legislators - Karim Uddin Barbhuiya, Nizamuddin Choudhury



and Zakir Hussain Laskar - reportedly signed the nomination papers of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate Pramod Boro, president of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), for the Rajya Sabha elections from Assam.

Gogoi argued that the support from AIUDF MLAs contradicts the BJP's long-standing criticism of the party. He said Chief Minister Sarma had frequent-

ly described the AIUDF as a communal force and accused it of representing divisive politics. "For years, the Chief Minister has projected the AIUDF as a threat to Assam, often using polarising language and referring to the minority community with terms such as 'Miya' and 'Osina-ki'," Gogoi said while criticising what he described as a shift in the ruling party's stance.

He further alleged that the state government has encouraged social divisions through measures such as eviction drives and what he termed "bulldozer politics." According to Gogoi, once the BJP realised it lacked sufficient numbers to secure the third Rajya Sabha seat, it turned to the same party it had previously criticised.

Questioning the political inconsistency, Gogoi asked why the BJP needed AIUDF support to ensure Boro's victory if

the party genuinely viewed the AIUDF as a threat to the state.

"The Chief Minister often speaks about ideology and values, but when his authority is at risk, those principles disappear," Gogoi said, adding that protecting Assam's interests appeared to have taken a backseat to preserving political power.

Meanwhile, Debabrata Saikia, Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly, also criticised the development. He claimed the situation demonstrated that the AIUDF functions as the BJP's "B-team."

Saikia noted that although a UPPL minister is already part of the state cabinet led by Himanta Biswa Sarma, the ruling alliance still required the backing of AIUDF legislators to ensure the election of Pramod Boro to the Rajya Sabha.

He further alleged that while both the BJP and AIUDF publicly deny any ideological alignment, their actions suggest a tacit understanding aimed at maintaining political power.

According to Saikia, public confrontations between the two parties may be intended to create an impression of rivalry while concealing what he described as a deeper political relationship.

"The BJP relies heavily on the AIUDF, and its support acts like oxygen for the ruling party," Saikia claimed, accusing both parties of misleading voters about their actual political dynamics.

The statements from the Congress leaders come amid heightened political activity in Assam ahead of the Rajya Sabha elections, with parties positioning themselves to secure crucial seats in the Upper House of Parliament.

Sivasagar seat undecided as BJP, AGP seek ticket; Don't trust Akhil Gogoi on alliance: Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam, on March 6 said that the ruling alliance has not yet taken a final decision on who will contest the Sivasagar Assembly constituency, while also launching a sharp attack on Akhil Gogoi over alliance politics.

Addressing reporters, Sarma said the Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance was still deliberating on the candidate for Sivasagar as both the Bharatiya Janata Party and its ally, the Asom Gana Parishad, have aspirants seeking the nomination.

"For the Sivasagar seat we have not decided yet as our ally AGP as well as BJP candidates are seeking the candidature and hence we are still discussing the matter," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma also took a swipe at Gogoi, alleging that the Rajior Dal leader was staging a "drama of alliance-building" ahead of the elections. He claimed that such political manoeuvring would continue until the final day for withdrawal of nomination papers.

"Do not trust Akhil Gogoi when it comes to alliances. The drama will continue till the last day of nomination withdrawal," Sarma remarked.

The Chief Minister's comments come amid ongoing political developments and negotiations within the ruling alliance regarding seat-sharing and candidate selection for key constituencies in Assam.

BJP's Jogen Mohan, Terash Gowalla and UPPL chief Pramod Boro file nominations for Rajya Sabha polls from Assam

GUWAHATI

Three candidates backed by the ruling alliance in Assam - Jogen Mohan, Terash Gowalla, and Pramod Boro - on Thursday filed their nomination papers for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections from the state.

The nominations were submitted on the final day for filing papers for the polls scheduled to be held on March 16.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has fielded Assam Cabinet Minister Jogen Mohan and Duliayan MLA Terash Gowalla for two of the three vacant Rajya Sabha seats from the state, while the third seat has been allotted to alliance partner United People's Party Liberal (UPPL).

UPPL president Pramod Boro, who earlier served as the Chief Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial

Council, filed his nomination in the presence of party leaders and supporters. Several UPPL leaders accompanied him during the filing process and expressed confidence that he would secure victory in the election.

The Rajya Sabha elections in Assam are being conducted to fill three seats that are set to fall vacant as the terms of the current members conclude.

According to the election schedule, scrutiny of nomination papers will take place on March 6, while the last date for withdrawal of candidature is March 9. Polling, if required, will be held on March 16.

With the ruling alliance holding a comfortable majority in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the BJP and its allies are widely expected to secure all three seats unless an unexpected contest emerges.

GUWAHATI

The Government of Assam has carried out a major administrative reshuffle, transferring and posting several officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Assam Civil Service (ACS) across key departments and districts in a move aimed at strengthening governance and improving administrative efficiency.

According to an official notification, senior IAS officer Partha Pratim Majumdar, who was serving as Commissioner and Secretary in the Home and Political as well as Women and Child Development departments, has been transferred and posted as the District Commissioner (DC) of Bajali.

IAS officer Narendra Kumar Shah, currently Director of Employment and Craftsmen Training and Managing Director of the Assam Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation

(AIIDC), has been appointed Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Chief Minister's Secretariat. He will continue to hold additional charge as Managing Director of AIIDC.

Meanwhile, Aditya Vikram Yadav, who was serving in the Chief Minister's Secretariat, has been transferred and posted as District Commissioner of Lakhimpur.

Among other appointments, Preeti Kumari has been posted as District Commissioner of West Karbi Anglong, while Ayushi Jain has been appointed District Commissioner of Darrang.

Senior ACS officer Pubali Gohain, who was previously serving in Darrang, has been transferred and posted as District Commissioner of Golaghat.

In another key move, Saranga Pani Sarma, the outgoing DC of West Karbi Anglong, has been appointed Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Transport Department. He has also

been given additional charge as State Project Director of the Assam Inland Water Transport Development Society.

Similarly, Gautam Das, who was serving as District Commissioner of Baksa, has been posted as Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Panchayat and Rural Development Department.

Former DC of Chirang, Jatim Bora, has been appointed Secretary to the Government of Assam in the General Administration Department as well as the Department of Innovation, Incubation and Start-Ups.

Among other transfers, Pronab Jit Kakoty has been moved from Lakhimpur and posted in the Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Department as Additional Secretary and Director of Employment and Craftsmen Training.

Parag Kumar Kakoty, previously DC of Golaghat, has been appointed Additional Secretary in the Revenue and Disaster

Management Department and given additional charge as Additional Chief Executive Officer of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority.

Meanwhile, Mridul Kumar Das, former DC of Bajali, has been transferred as Additional Secretary in the Home and Political as well as Women and Child Development Departments. He has also been assigned additional responsibilities related to the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the e-FT project.

At the district level, Dhiraj Saud has been appointed District Commissioner of Baksa after his services were withdrawn from the Welfare of Bodoland Department, while Gakul Chandra Brahma has been posted as District Commissioner of Chirang.

Officials said the reshuffle is part of the government's broader administrative exercise to optimise efficiency and strengthen governance across departments and districts in Assam.

Assam orders major bureaucratic reshuffle; several IAS, ACS officers transferred

Tripura signs MoU with Guwahati's GNRC to establish superspecialty hospital at Hapania

AGARTALA

The Tripura government has signed a memorandum of understanding with Guwahati-based Guwahati Neurological Research Centre (GNRC) to establish a superspecialty hospital at Hapania in West Tripura district, Chief Minister Manik Saha announced on Thursday.

The facility is proposed to come up on vacant land belonging to Tripura Jute Mills Ltd and is expected to strengthen advanced healthcare services in the state.

"We have signed an MoU with GNRC, a Guwahati-based medical institution, to set up a superspecialty hospital at the vacant land of Tripura Jute Mills Ltd. A team from our health department has already visited Guwahati to examine the infrastructure and facilities available at GNRC," Saha told reporters.

However, the Chief Minister,



who also holds the health portfolio, did not disclose further details about the agreement.

Saha also highlighted a series of initiatives aimed at improving healthcare infrastructure and services at Agartala Government Medical College and Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital in Agartala.

He said the state government has signed an MoU with All India Institute of Medical Sciences Delhi to streamline healthcare services at

the GBP Hospital.

"Based on recommendations from AIIMS, we have decided to increase ICU beds at GBP Hospital from 156 to 326. The hospital is also directly connected with AIIMS through telemedicine to provide better medical care to patients," Saha said.

On Thursday, the hospital inaugurated a 16-bed dedicated ICU for patients with severe respiratory conditions as well as a fully equipped

ICU facility at its trauma centre, marking a significant upgrade in critical care services.

The Chief Minister further said the state Cabinet has discussed the establishment of a medical university in Tripura to regulate medical colleges and other healthcare institutions in the state.

He said the initiative aims to reduce the need to refer patients outside the state by strengthening existing medical infrastructure and improving specialist services locally.

Currently, Tripura has three medical colleges offering 450 MBBS seats along with 119 postgraduate courses.

Earlier, the state government had also signed an agreement with Srija Hospitals and Research Institute in Imphal to establish a superspecialty hospital and medical college at RK Nagar in West Tripura district.

45 villages in Mizoram still without electricity; repair delays hit power infrastructure



AIZAWL

At least 45 villages in Mizoram remain either un-electrified or de-electrified, the state Assembly was informed on Thursday by Power and Electricity Minister F Rodingliana.

Responding to queries raised by BJP legislator Prova Chakma, the minister said efforts are underway to bring electricity to these remote villages under the Centre-backed Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).

Rodingliana said sanctions for the electrification work have already been secured and three contractors - including two from outside Mizoram - have been finalised to execute the project.

"The Guaranteed Technical Particulars (GTP) drawings for supply of materials have already been approved, and initial supplies have begun reaching some of the designated sites," he told the House in a written reply.

The minister also highlighted widespread transformer damage as a major challenge affecting the state's power distribution network.

According to him, 71 damaged transformers are currently awaiting allotment for repair, though electricity supply in many affected areas has not been completely cut off.

"In most cases, power is being maintained by back-feeding supply from nearby functioning transformers," Rodingliana said, noting that this temporary arrangement has helped ensure continued electricity supply to residents in several localities.

Explaining the delay in repairing transformers, the minister said the process involves multi-

ple administrative and logistical steps.

Each Distribution Transformer (DT) must first undergo a formal survey and receive approval from the department's head office before it can be transported to a specialised repair workshop in Silchar in neighbouring Assam.

Rodingliana said the repair process has been slowed by a shortage of technical staff required to prepare Survey Estimate Reports. In addition, the poor condition of the Aizawl-Silchar road over the past year has significantly delayed the transportation of transformers to the repair facility.

However, he noted that when road conditions are stable and adequate staff are available, the department usually maintains a backup stock of repaired transformers to minimise service disruption.

The minister also addressed public concerns regarding the safety of ageing power infrastructure across the state.

He confirmed that severely corroded electric poles that pose a risk of collapse will be replaced, with ₹2.70 crore sanctioned in the 2025-26 financial year for the purpose.

High demand for new connections

Rodingliana further informed the Assembly that there is growing demand for Low Tension (LT) line extensions across several parts of the state.

He said the government is prioritising the work based on the availability of additional funds, as it continues efforts to expand electricity coverage and improve power distribution in remote areas of Mizoram.

CAG Flags Meghalaya Government Over Alleged Misuse of Rs. 2.15 Crore Disaster Relief Fund

GUWAHATI

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has raised concerns over the utilisation of disaster relief funds by the government of Meghalaya, pointing out that money meant for emergency response was reportedly used for purposes unrelated to disaster management.

According to the audit report, more than ₹2.15 crore from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) was spent on activities such as providing financial assistance to other states and covering sanitation expenses at the state Secretariat in Shillong.

The audit noted that ₹2 crore from the SDRF was transferred to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund without obtaining the mandatory approval of the State Executive Committee, which is required for such financial decisions under the prescribed guidelines.

Auditors also observed that ₹1 crore of the transferred amount was recorded as a "loan" to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund. However, the report pointed out that the SDRF is specifically designated for disaster response activities and cannot be used for lending or transferring money to other government funds.



Further examination revealed that the funds moved to the relief fund were later utilised to provide assistance outside the state. The report stated that ₹1 crore was sent to support relief efforts in Kerala, while another ₹1 crore was allocated for victims of Cyclone Fani in

Odisha.

While these allocations were described as contributions during emergencies, the CAG emphasised that the SDRF has strict guidelines governing its use and that such funds are meant primarily to address disaster-related needs

Quest!

A cloud can weigh more than a million pounds. Clouds are not as light and fluffy as they appear. In fact, researchers have found that a single cloud weighs about 1.1 million pounds.

‘Coups, betrayal of people’s mandate’: Opposition parties criticise Nitish’s Rajya Sabha entry

PATNA

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Thursday called Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s decision to enter the Rajya Sabha a ‘betrayal’ of people’s mandate.

Nitish Kumar on Thursday confirmed that he will be resigning from the post he has held for over 20 years, and move to the Rajya Sabha.

“The BJP has done a Maharashtra in Bihar,” Yadav said.

He alleged that Nitish Kumar leaving the Chief Minister post confirmed the party’s earlier claim that BJP will not let Nitish Kumar remain in the post after the elections. “This development is against the mandate of the people and amounts to a betrayal of it,” he said.

Yadav, the leader of the opposition in the state assembly, also alleged that BJP has always been opposed to Dalits and OBCs, and with Kumar leaving the CM’s post, it will seek to implement its agenda in the socialist stronghold. He alleged that the BJP had ‘hijacked’ Nitish Kumar, and that was the reason for the veteran leader to move to the Rajya Sabha.

Tejashwi Yadav accused the BJP of using “tricks” against Nitish Kumar, defying their election slogan ‘2025 se 30 phir se Nitish’. “BJP is against OBCs and Dalits. They never want a leader from these communities to occupy the top post. They want a chief minister who will function like a rubber stamp for the top BJP leadership,” he alleged.

“I had said – ‘Nitish ji ko ghoda toh chadhaya hai dulha banake, lekin phera kisi aur ke saath dila raha hai’ (They made Nitish Kumar mount the horse like a groom, but are getting someone else to take the wedding vows),” he added.



The 75-year-old leader, who took oath as the chief minister of Bihar for a record 10th time in November last year, expressed gratitude to the people of the state for “consistently” placing their trust in him. He is the state’s longest-serving chief minister.

Reacting to the development, Congress called it a “coup” and a “huge betrayal of the mandate of the people.”

“What the Indian National Congress was repeatedly saying during the Bihar election campaign has now been proven true. Under a conspiracy hatched by G2, a coup has been carried out in Bihar to seize power. In many ways, this is a major betrayal of the people’s mandate,” Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X.

The decision has taken Janata Dal (United) workers and supporters by surprise, reported.

The JD (U) workers and supporters, protesting outside the Chief Minister’s residence in Patna, refused to believe that Nitish Kumar has decided to give up the Chief Minister post.

“It is possible that his account has been hijacked,” a JDU worker said, reacting to Nitish Kumar’s confirmation on a post on X.

Congress’ Maharashtra MLA Nana Patole accused BJP of “deceiving” their alliance partners and equated Nitish Kumar’s situation with Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, who was not re-elected as CM after Mahayuti gained majority in Maharashtra Assembly Elections in 2024, with the BJP emerging as the largest party.

“Maharashtra is the biggest example of this. Elections were fought under the leadership of Eknath Shinde, and the government came to power, but Eknath Shinde did not become the Chief Minister. In Bihar, elections were fought under the leadership of Nitish Kumar; they (the BJP) won there as well... Now he is being removed from the post of Chief Minister. The BJP has always deceived its alliance partners,” he said.

Nitish Kumar presented the nomination for Rajya Sabha in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president Nitin Nabin.

Shah hailed Nitish’s move to Rajya Sabha. Welcoming his return to national politics, he called his tenure as Chief Minister a ‘golden chapter’ in Bihar’s history.

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha will witness a rare moment most likely on Monday next when Om Birla will not chair proceedings but will be seated amongst the members as the House takes up a notice seeking his removal from office.

As Parliament meets for the second phase of the Budget session on March 9, the Lok Sabha is likely to take up the resolution moved by the opposition against Birla’s for allegedly acting in a “blatantly partisan” manner.

According to the rules and laid down procedure, Birla will get a right to defend himself when the resolution is discussed by the lower house.

He will also have the right to vote against the resolution, Constitution expert P D T Achary explained.

The expert said while Birla will not chair the proceedings when the resolution comes up before the House, he will be seated in the prominent rows in the Treasury benches.

At least 118 opposition members had submitted a notice for moving the resolution to remove Birla from office for not allowing Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders to speak in the House on the Motion of Thanks to the President’s address, as well as for suspending eight MPs.

Congress member and chief whip K Suresh submitted the notice to the Lok Sabha secretariat on behalf of several opposition parties, including his party, Samajwadi Party and DMK.

TMC MPs, however, did not sign the notice.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

Debate, vote on motion to remove LS Speaker Om Birla to be taken up on March 9: Rijiju Achary, a former Lok Sabha secretary general, told, that the “allocation of the seat, which the Speaker occupies under such circumstances is not mentioned in the Rules”.

He said Birla will also not be able to vote on the resolution using the automated vote system, but will have to fill a slip to register his vote.

He presumes that a seat belonging to a Union minister, who is from the Rajya Sabha, could be given to him as only Lok Sabha members will be able to cast their votes for or against the resolution.

Deputy speaker of the Lok Sabha and

deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha have their earmarked seats in their respective Houses when they are not presiding over.

Front seats in the opposition benches are allocated to them.

Article 96 of the Constitution bars a speaker or a deputy speaker from presiding over the House sitting while a resolution for his removal from office is under consideration.

The speaker has a constitutional right to defend himself in the House if the resolution is discussed in the Lok Sabha.

At least two Lok Sabha members have to sign the notice to move a resolution for the speaker’s removal.

Any number of members can sign the notice but a minimum of two is mandatory.

The speaker can be removed from office by a resolution passed by the House through a simple majority.

Article 94C of the Constitution has provisions for such a move.

“All the members of the House are counted to compute the majority, not the members present and voting, which is the normal practice. It means the effective membership of the House, except for the vacancies, is used to calculate the majority,” Achary said.

The notice has to be submitted to the Lok

Sabha secretary general, and not the deputy speaker or anyone else, he said.

The document is then examined at the preliminary stage to see whether it contains “very specific charges”, he said.

“At the threshold itself, there is a process of admissibility. At that stage, it is seen whether it contains specific charges. Specific charges are required as only then the speaker will be able to respond,” Achary explained.

The resolution must not contain defamatory language or content.

Article 96 gives the speaker the opportunity to defend himself or herself in the House. The language of the proposed resolution is usually examined by the deputy speaker, but since the present Lok Sabha does not have a deputy speaker, it may be examined perhaps by the senior-most member of the panel of chairpersons.

The panel helps the speaker run the House in his or her absence.

“The speaker examining a resolution that seeks his removal looks absurd,” Achary said, adding that the rule is silent on the subject.

Once the processing part is over, the resolution reaches the House.

But it can go to the House after 14 days, Achary said.

The chair then places it in the House

for consideration.

It is actually the House which admits it, or as the rule says, “grants permission”.

Achary further said, “The chair then asks members in favour of the resolution to stand up. If 50 members stand up in support of it and if the criteria is fulfilled, the Chair announces that the House has granted permission. Once the House grants permission, it has to be taken up for discussion and disposed of within 10 days.”

Lok Sabha sources said it will be taken up for discussion on Monday itself.

There are precedents of resolutions being moved.

However, none has been adopted so far.

“The reason – governments have a majority,” Achary said.

The resolution alleges that Speaker Birla had acted in a “blatantly partisan” manner in conducting the business of the House and “abused” the constitutional office he occupies.

The Opposition also accused the speaker of making certain false allegations against members of the Congress.

Three Lok Sabha speakers – G V Mavlankar (1954), Hukam Singh (1966) and Bahram Jakhar (1987) – had faced no-confidence motions in the past, which were negated.

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North East Conference 2026 in Delhi Highlights Culture, Development and Integration



NEW DELHI

The North East Conference-2026, organised by North East Sanstha, concluded successfully at the Constitution Club of India in New Delhi on Thursday. The event brought together scholars, policy experts, social leaders and cultural practitioners to discuss the diverse aspects of Northeast India.

The day-long conference featured several thematic sessions focusing on the region's cultural heritage, customary traditions, development, policy perspectives and future opportunities. Speakers and participants discussed the historical importance of the North-eastern region and the changes taking place in recent years.

In the inaugural session, former IAS officer and former Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism Madan Prasad Bezbaruah highlighted the

unique character of the Northeast and its gradual integration with the rest of the country. Bikram Banerjee, Additional Solicitor General of India, spoke about the importance of customary laws in protecting indigenous identity and maintaining social balance in the region.

Narendra Thakur, Akhil Bharatiya Sah Prachar Pramukh of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), reflected on the long civilizational history of the Northeast, linking it to narratives from the Mahabharata era. Samudragupta Kashyap, Chancellor of Nagaland University, highlighted the contribution of freedom fighters from the region to India's national movement. In another session, Delina Khongdup, member of the National Commission for Women, spoke about prominent personalities from Meghalaya who contributed to the region's cultural landscape. Social worker Premananda Sharma from Manipur spoke about the Northeast's achievements in sports, while Oinam Bhagat, professor at Jawaharlal

Nehru University, discussed the colonial legacy that shaped narratives about the region. Arun Sharma, Director General of the North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), highlighted recent development in the region, pointing to improved infrastructure, connectivity and new policy initiatives.

The valedictory session was addressed by senior journalist and Padma Bhushan awardee Ram Bahadur Rai, president of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA). He spoke about historical factors shaping present-day North-east India and noted the increasing development focus on the region.

Poonam Gunindra, Vice-Chancellor of

Manipur University of Culture, highlighted expanding connectivity through road, rail and air networks linking the Northeast with the rest of India. Sunil Mohanty, Northeast Prachar Pramukh of the RSS, stressed the importance of social harmony for sustainable economic growth in the region.

During the event, individuals from different Northeastern states were honoured with the North East India Achievers 2026 awards for their contributions in areas such as arts, agriculture, education and social service. Among the awardees were Tana Yami from Arunachal Pradesh for sustainable agriculture, Ananya Talukdar from Assam for promoting Sattriya dance among un-

derprivileged communities, Leimapokpam Lakpati Singh from Manipur for performing arts, Lalanzauva from Mizoram for preserving indigenous Mizo traditions, Yose Chaya Angami from Nagaland for promoting Angami Naga cultural heritage and Dhammapiya from Tripura for contributions to education and community development.

The conference ended with a collective call to strengthen national integration, cultural pride and sustainable development initiatives aimed at ensuring holistic progress of the Northeastern region. Participants noted that the Northeast continues to emerge as an important pillar of India's cultural diversity and developmental future.

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