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PERSPECTIVE

The older you get, the fewer people you trust.

Assam Cabinet clears Rs.103 crore five-star hotel project in Silchar

SILCHAR
The Assam Cabinet has approved a ₹103 crore project to construct the first five-star hotel in Silchar, a move aimed at strengthening hospitality infrastructure and boosting tourism in the Barak Valley.

Announcing the decision, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the project will be developed by the Polo Hotels Group with an investment of about ₹103 crore. "Our Cabinet has given the go-ahead for the construction of a five-star hotel in Silchar. Polo Hotels Group will invest around ₹103 crore in the project, which will be the first five-star hotel in the city," Sarma said. Officials said the proposed hotel will introduce international-standard luxury hospitality infrastructure to the Barak Valley region for the first time. Silchar, regarded as the commercial and administrative hub of southern Assam, is expected to benefit from enhanced capacity to host high-value tourism, corporate engagements and major events.

The hotel is expected to feature around 100 premium rooms and suites designed to meet global hospitality standards while incorporating elements reflecting the cultural identity of the Barak Valley.

Planned facilities include specialty restaurants and bars, a resort-style swimming pool, a spa and wellness centre, a fitness facility, and modern banquet and conference halls capable of hosting corporate summits, exhibitions, weddings and government events.

Industry experts noted that India's hospitality sector has seen strong recovery in recent years, driven by rising demand for business travel and MICE tourism.

WHO SAID WHAT



If you file a motion, have the courage to debate it. Parliament runs on procedure, not political theatrics. ~ Kiren Rejju, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minister of Minority Affairs

Northeast now defined by opportunity, not distance from Delhi: Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan

AIZAWL
Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan on March 7 said the Northeast is no longer defined by its geographical distance from New Delhi but by its growing proximity to emerging economic opportunities.

Addressing the 20th convocation ceremony of Mizoram University in Aizawl, the Vice President highlighted the transformation in the region's development narrative over the past decade, attributing it largely to the Centre's focus on the Act East Policy.

He said major infrastructure initiatives, including the recently inaugurated Bairabi-Sairang railway line, along with central schemes such as UDAN and PM-DevINE, are helping integrate the region more closely with the national



mainstream. Congratulating the graduating students, Radhakrishnan urged them to view themselves as the "architects of Viksit Bharat" and contribute actively to the country's development journey. He described Mizoram University, located in the scenic hills of Aizawl, as an example of how education can drive transformation when rooted in peace, purpose and community values. "The youth of the Northeast must look beyond seeking employment and instead focus on creating it," he said, highlighting sectors such as tourism, bamboo-based industries, organic agriculture, handicrafts and digital services as areas where the region possesses strong global potential. The Vice President also expressed concern over the growing problem of sub-

stance abuse among young people and urged graduates to take leadership in combating drug abuse within their communities. He further advised responsible use of social media, encouraging the youth to utilise digital platforms for constructive purposes and social good rather than becoming distracted by them. Radhakrishnan also praised Mizoram's strong environmental consciousness and commended Mizoram University for its efforts to operate sustainably on solar energy. The convocation ceremony was attended by Vijay Kumar Singh, who serves as the Chief Rector of the university, Lalduhoma, Chief Minister of Mizoram, and Vice Chancellor Dibakar Chandra Deka, among other dignitaries.

Manipuri woman, third-gender friend from Assam assaulted near Saket Court in Delhi; probe underway

NEW DELHI
A woman from Manipur and her third-gender friend from Assam were allegedly assaulted after objecting to harassment by a group of men near a park close to the Saket District Court in south Delhi on Sunday evening, police said.

According to preliminary information, the two were taking a walk in the park when a group of men allegedly passed derogatory remarks at them. The situation escalated after one of the victims objected to the comments.

"When one of the women objected to the remarks, an argument broke out and the accused allegedly assaulted her," a police officer said.

The woman sustained minor injuries in the incident and was taken to Safdarjung Hospital for medical examination and treatment.

Police said a team reached the spot soon after receiving information about the incident and contacted the victim. "Teams are in constant touch with her, and further action will be taken based on



her statement," the officer added.

Sources said efforts are underway to identify and trace the accused persons involved in the assault. The victims reportedly told police that they had also faced similar verbal harassment in the area on previous occasions.

The incident has drawn condemnation from several quarters, including leaders from the Northeast.

Reacting to the incident, Conrad K. Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, expressed anger over repeated attacks on

people from the region and urged authorities to take strict action.

In a post on X, tagging Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Sangma wrote that he was "angered by the repeated attacks on Northeast people in mainland India."

"The physical attack on two of our people from Manipur and Assam near Saket Court, Delhi is sickening. Racial bullying should not be accepted as the new normal and we must act against it. Urge the authorities to take stringent action," he said.

The incident adds to a series of recent cases in which people from the Northeast have reported racial discrimination in other parts of the country.

In February, the Delhi Police arrested a married couple after three women from Arunachal Pradesh filed an FIR alleging racial abuse and intimidation. The accused, identified as Ruby Jain and her husband Harsh Jain, were taken into custody following an investigation into the complaint registered at Malviya Nagar Police Station.

Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express to halt at Diphu station, boosting connectivity in Karbi Anglong

DIPHU
The Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express will now have an official stoppage at Diphu Railway Station, following approval by the Ministry of Railways, a move aimed at improving rail connectivity for residents of the hill districts of Assam. A special ceremony was held at the station on Sunday to mark the introduction of the new stoppage. The event was attended by local Member of Parliament Amarsing Tisso as the guest of honour, along with officials from the Northeast Frontier Railway.

Railway authorities said the addition of the stoppage would significantly benefit people living in Diphu and nearby areas of Karbi Anglong, offering easier access to long-distance rail travel. The Rajdhani Express connects Dibrugarh in Upper Assam with New Delhi, providing one of the fastest and most comfortable rail links between the Northeast

and the national capital. Officials said the new halt at Diphu would make travel more convenient for students, business travellers, tourists and residents of the hill districts who previously had to travel to other stations to board the train. The stoppage comes after the Ministry of Railways approved new halts for several trains across Assam in response to longstanding demands for better rail connectivity in under-served regions.

Local leaders and residents welcomed the move, saying the additional stop would help improve regional transport, promote tourism and support economic activity in the hill areas of the state.

The ceremony began around 9 am to coincide with the scheduled arrival or departure of the Rajdhani Express at the station, drawing participation from members of the local community, four operators and railway officials.

VP C.P. Radhakrishnan urges Nagaland youth to embrace change at Nagaland University convocation



DIMAPUR

Vice President C. P. Radhakrishnan on Friday urged the youth of Nagaland to adapt to changing global realities and prepare themselves for emerging opportunities while addressing the 8th convocation ceremony of Nagaland University at its headquarters in Lumami in Zunheboto district.

Delivering the convocation address as the chief guest, Radhakrishnan told graduating students that a convocation should be seen as the beginning of a new journey rather than the conclusion of academic pursuits. He encouraged them to set clear goals and move forward with determination instead of comparing themselves with others.

Emphasising the importance of national participation, the Vice President called on the youth of Nagaland to actively engage in national services and appear in greater numbers for competitive examinations, particularly those conducted by the Union Public Service Commission.

Highlighting India's diversity, he said the country remains united by shared ideals and values, adding that unity continues to be the nation's greatest strength.

He noted that the vision of a "Viksit Nagaland" would contribute significantly to the broader national goal of a "Viksit Bharat". Radhakrishnan also stressed the need for inclusive development, respect for differences within a democratic framework and the importance of maintaining peace to ensure sustained progress.

Expressing happiness at visiting Nagaland for the first time, he praised the state's rich cultural heritage and the resilience of its people, describing it as a place where nature, culture and courage coexist in remarkable harmony.

Referring to the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority agreement, he said peace, dialogue and mutual respect are crucial for ensuring long-term development and stability in the region.

The Vice President also lauded Nagaland University for its contributions to higher education and research in the Northeast, noting that the institution has steadily expanded its academic reach while making quality education accessible to students across the region.

He highlighted several initiatives undertaken by the university, including the establishment of a cancer research laboratory and projects aimed at documenting indigenous Naga languages and customary laws, which he said are vital for preserving the region's cultural heritage.

During the ceremony, Radhakrishnan conferred degrees and presented gold medals to meritorious students. A total of 107 PhD scholars, 825 postgraduate students, 846 graduates from professional programmes and 5,106 undergraduate students were awarded degrees.

In recognition of outstanding academic performance, 54 gold medals were also presented to students across various disciplines.

Three detained after Silchar man dies from Holi day assault; highway blockade sparks tension

SILCHAR

Three persons have been detained after a man died following an alleged assault during an altercation in the Rangpur area of Silchar on the day of Holi, police said on Monday.

The deceased has been identified as Sajan Deb. According to police, he sustained serious head injuries during a scuffle with a group of miscreants.

"Based on the complaint filed by the victim's family, three persons have been detained in connection with the incident, and an investigation is underway," said Rajat Pal.

Deb was rushed to Silchar Medical College and Hospital where he was placed on ventilator support due to the severity of his injuries. However, he later succumbed to his injuries on Saturday.

News of his death triggered protests in the Rangpur locality on Sunday, with angry residents staging a demonstration demanding strict action against those responsible.

Protesters placed the body on the Silchar-Imphal National Highway at Rangpur, near a bridge over the Barak River, blocking traffic and causing major disruption in the area.

A large police contingent was deployed to the site to control the situation and restore normalcy. Authorities said the blockade was lifted after discussions were held with the victim's family members and local protesters.

Police said further investigation into the incident is underway.

Assam to transfer Rs. 9,000 each to 40 lakh Orunodoi families on March 10



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday announced that financial assistance of ₹9,000 will be provided to around 40 lakh beneficiary families under the Orunodoi Scheme on March 10.

The announcement was made during a live interaction on social media before the Chief Minister began the seventh day of the Jana Ashirwad Yatra in Margherita. Sarma said the financial assistance will be distributed to beneficiaries across the state through special meetings organised at the local level.

"On March 10 at 10:30 am, 40 lakh Orunodoi families will receive ₹9,000. Meetings will be organised in panchayats across Assam, including municipal and town committee areas of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao, as well as in the VC-DC areas of the Bodoland Territorial Region and ward areas," the Chief Minister

said. He urged beneficiaries to attend the meetings organised in their respective localities.

"In Assam there are about 40 lakh Orunodoi beneficiary families, and the total amount to be disbursed will be around ₹3,600 crore," Sarma said, describing the initiative as one of the largest financial assistance programmes in the state. The Chief Minister added that such welfare initiatives have been made possible due to the support and encouragement of the people of Assam. Earlier, after a Cabinet meeting on February 26, Sarma had said the disbursement would mark the highest single-day transfer of funds to beneficiaries in the state's history.

He said meetings would be held in every panchayat, municipal ward and autonomous council area to mark the distribution, with the central programme scheduled at the Jyoti Bishnu Kala Kendra in Guwahati.



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NITISH'S EXITS FROM BIHAR POLITICS

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's exit from Bihar politics not only marks the most consequential political transition in Bihar but also has greater implications on BJP's national strategy and realization of its dream that it may appear at first glance. With negotiated removal of the CM Nitish Kumar, a significant regional political force has been cleared out of the way of the BJP.

Nitish Kumar has already filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha election scheduled on March 16. This implies he will soon step down as Bihar Chief Minister and transition to the Upper House of Parliament.

Though CM Nitish Kumar has said that becoming Rajya Sabha MP was his long-held wish, but the opposition has called it "leadership coup" and "political abduction" orchestrated by the BJP betraying the people's mandate given in the Bihar election just held about 5 months ago. At that time, it was said that BJP will make him chief minister as against it has done in Maharashtra where it did not allow its ally and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde to remain chief minister. Nevertheless, it kept Nitish on the CM, and now Nitish is leaving Bihar politics, though he says that he would be supporting the new government and expressed his "resolve to work together to build a developed Bihar will remain steadfast".

Before assessing about the detail, it should be recalled that BJP has suffered a great setback in the 9 Hindi heartland states in Lok Sabha Election 2024. BJP had won 203 seats out of 225 in 2019 elections, but had lost 55 seats in 2024. To form government in the country, 272 seats are required. It has made the BJP to recalibrate its political strategy in the Hindi belt, and if possible, complete delimitation exercise to substantially increase the Lok Sabha seats to its control over the governance in the country for many years.

For years, Bihar has been one of the few large Hindi-belt states where BJP was powerful but not the primary face of governance. With Nitish's exit from Bihar, BJP gains effective control of the state government. Then it would be easy for the party to strengthen its hold in the eastern corridor (UP-Bihar-Jharkhand belt). It would reduce the party's dependence on strong regional satraps. Bihar will then be aligned more directly with central leadership's narratives. This will support BJP's long-term strategy of expanding from western/northern strongholds into eastern India, and will be able to convert its alliance states into BJP-led states.

BJP will also be able to rebalance the NDA structure. Within the National Democratic Alliance, Nitish's exit from Bihar politics will weaken JD(U)'s bargaining power. BJP will become even more structurally dominant, which will result in shift of coalition politics from "negotiated equality" to "centralized leadership".

It matters the most for BJP's national design, because it minimizes unpredictability from regional allies. It should be noted here that CM Nitish Kumar is nicknamed as "Palatu Ram" since he has been known for shifting his political loyalties and breaking or making alliances. Therefore, Nitish's exit reduces the risk of alliance instability in Bihar. It gives a clear message that BJP is the permanent anchor of NDA. This strengthens BJP's long-term coalition management model.

Nitish in Patna has been an autonomous regional power centre. Nitish in Rajya Sabha though will be influential, but not administratively autonomous. He will be dependent on parliamentary space rather than executive control. For BJP's national dream of centralized ideological and organizational coherence, this shift weakens alternative regional power poles and reinforces Delhi-centric decision-making. This fits BJP's structural evolution under strong central leadership.

Back in Bihar, it is most likely BJP will be in full charge of governance, and can take full credit for governance. The shift can change the caste-politics in Bihar, and BJP will have more chance to consolidate its support base among the OBCs and EBCs under its own banner than under the banner of Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) supreme.

What will happen to the Bihar politics is now only in the domain of speculation. It should be noted that Nitish has successfully managed EBC coalitions, Mahadalit outreach, and minority balancing. Here lies the BJP's risks, and if BJP fails in performing successfully in this space, opposition forces could take advantage of that.

There is no denying the fact that JD(U) may erode sharply, and it could lose a moderate-secular ally image in the state. People will take the party as controlled ally, controlled by the BJP leadership. BJP has already given a symbolic national message that BJP has risen from a junior partner in several states to a dominant partner in coalition politics. Nitish's exit has again confirmed this, which marks a decline of a regional "kingmaker" era. It is a clear transition from coalition era federal balancing to centralized party hegemony. This is a structural advantage for BJP for its long-term national ambition - to be a default governing party across most of India, especially, in the Hindi Belt.

It is already known that many JD(U) leaders have been working with the BJP, because they are not happy with Nitish Kumar. However, the genuine Nitish support would have to struggle in keeping its flock together. JD(U) is likely to weaken considerably in this scenario. With Nitish's exit, an era of politics has just ended in Bihar, giving way to a new era of politics in the state.

This new era of politics is likely to be dominated by BJP, but it will also make Bihar a more open terrain for the opposition politics in absence of the regional satrap like Nitish Kumar. Cast coalition politics may re-fragment further, and it is uncertain if BJP will be able to take advantage of it. Bihar politics will undergo a restructuring.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Anything that makes weak - physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject it as poison." - Swami Vivekananda

A SPOTLIGHT SEEKING TRUMP



HARSHA KAKAR

On July 19th last year, as part of Operation Midnight Hammer, seven US B2 bombers dropped fourteen GBU-57 (Guided Bomb Unit) MOP (Massive Ordnance Penetrator) bombs alongside two dozen Tomahawk missiles, launched from US submarines, on Iran's three key nuclear facilities of Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan. The US employed fighter aircraft to enable the bombers to achieve their objectives without hinderance.

Immediately after the strikes, Pete Hegseth, the US defence secretary mentioned, 'Iran's nuclear ambitions have been obliterated.' Trump added, 'Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated.' He also said, 'It would take years to bring them back into service.'

Hegseth went even further and said, 'Thanks to President Trump's bold and visionary leadership and his commitment to peace through strength, Iran's nuclear ambitions have been obliterated.' It is now less than a year and the US launched strikes again at the same targets, employing far more power. Why was there a need to strike if the last US attack was successful and it would take years for them to rebuild.

The implications are that US strikes of 2025 were a failure, which Trump tried to hide. Steve Witkoff, Trump's special envoy mentioned, 'They've been enriching well beyond the number that you need for civil nuclear. It's up to 60%. They are probably a week away from having industrial-grade bomb-making material, and that's really dangerous.' The US Vice President, JD Vance stated, 'Our primary interest here is, we don't want Iran to get a nuclear weapon.'

It is also possible that Iran is just an excuse to shift focus from internal pressures as also failures in US policies. Trump has repeatedly been stating that he would prefer peaceful resolution but in the midst of the talks, he ordered air strikes.

On bringing about a ceasefire in Operation Sindoor, Trump's claims of aircraft downed in the conflict have been increasing every time he speaks. He started with seven aircraft and numbers have now reached double digits. Similarly, he commenced with saving 25 million people, subsequently increasing to 35 million.

Does Trump believe that Indian air strikes which damaged military and terrorist targets including a few posts are enough of an excuse for a war going nuclear? There were no civilian casualties or collateral damage. If he believes this, then his intelligence levels are way below par or possibly is hinting that the next time Pak must threaten nuclear strikes inviting global interjection and

bringing Kashmir into international limelight.

On the contrary he refused to intervene in the Pak-Afghanistan war claiming he supports Pakistan. Evidently, Pakistan is attempting regime change in Afghanistan on the directions of the US aiming to hand over the Bagram airbase to the US.

Trump also behaved like a spoiled child after being ticked off by his own supreme court on tariffs. Apart from insulting the judges for questioning his actions, he imposed a 10% across the world tariff which he has subsequently announced could be increased to 15%. All this using the same statute in US law, that his own legal team had dismissed as irrelevant a few months ago.

He believes that as President he has absolute authority on anything and everything and can challenge the world. He refuses to be questioned on any of his demands. Europe rejecting his annexation of Greenland were threatened with additional tariffs, which he later withdrew. He still has been unable to convince nations on the necessity for Greenland.

He had on 01 Apr last year agreed with UK on handing back Chagos Islands to Mauritius, less Diego Garcia. He had announced that this was the best deal. He has now backtracked because UK refused to allow Washington to use its bases to target Iran. He commented that on Chagos that UK was 'making a big mistake' despite deal enabling continued use of Diego Garcia.

Trump announced his Board of Peace (BoP) with great fanfare expecting the world, which he had threatened with tariffs, to bow to him. The BoP, which he would head as an individual, not as per appointment, would have given him immense power as he envisaged it having a

greater role than the UN. However, its first meeting was in itself a damp squid. Not a single nation which mattered joined.

The BoP lacks resources as also the ability to influence any global conflict zone, let alone Gaza. While he has maintained silence, there is no doubt he is hurting within. Trump hates failures and cannot accept the fact that nations rejected his invitation. The blowback will come in some form soon.

In addition, Trump threatened increased tariffs on Canada solely because he disliked a TV commercial quoting Ronald Reagan verbatim. He withdrew his invitation for the BoP from Mark Carney because of his speech criticizing the US at Davos. He threatened additional tariffs on Switzerland because he disliked the tone of Switzerland's president in a tele-conversation. His maximum tariffs on Brazil are because they jailed his ally, the former president Jair Bolsonaro.

A person as unreliable and media spotlight crazy as Trump is like a bull in a China shop. He can either be molycoddled or ignored. Pakistan is possibly the only nation which has adopted the policy of molycoddling him.

Its PM Shehbaz Sharief leaves no opportunity to praise Trump including mentioning at the BoP meeting, 'You have truly proved to be a man of peace Mr President and let me say, you are truly the saviour of South Asia.'

The opposite approach is ignoring Trump's ranting and is adopted by India and most others. They do not comment on Trump's statements aware that whatever they mention would be twisted by him to remain in the limelight. Many leaders, who initially flocked to Washington, including PM Modi, have begun staying away from

events where Trump would be present. The intent is to avoid being dragged into controversies. Even at the World Economic Forum in Davos, most world leaders spoke and departed before Trump arrived and made a splash by inking the charter of the BoP.

The world will have to bear his theatrics and illogical statements for as long as he remains in office. There will be announcements followed by counter announcements as also exaggerated claims which everyone knows are post truth.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Cheetahs cross half-century □ A moment of great pride for Project Cheetah as Jwala, the Namibian Cheetah and a successful third-time mother, gave birth to five cubs today at the Kuno National Park. With this birth, the number of Indian-born thriving cubs has risen to 33, marking the 10th successful cheetah litter on Indian soil—another important milestone in India's cheetah conservation journey. This achievement reflects the dedicated efforts, skill, and commitment of the veterinarians, field staff and all involved who continue to work tirelessly on the ground. With the arrival of these cubs, the total cheetah population in India has now reached 53. A historic and heart-warming moment for wildlife conservation. May Jwala and her cubs grow strong and race ahead, carrying India's cheetah story to even greater heights. ~ Bhupendra Yadav, Union Cabinet Minister for Environment, Forest & Climate Change



Opposition unity hit in Assam as Congress-Raijor Dal alliance talks collapse

GUWAHATI

Efforts to build a united opposition front ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections have suffered a major setback after alliance negotiations between the Indian National Congress and the regional party Raijor Dal collapsed, with Raijor Dal accusing the Congress leadership of arrogance and unilateral decision-making.

Raijor Dal president Akhil Gogoi alleged that the Assam unit of the Congress, led by Gaurav Gogoi, deliberately excluded his party from the proposed opposition alliance during a meeting of four parties held in Guwahati on March 6. According to the regional party, the meeting effectively finalised an alliance arrangement without its participation, bringing negotiations to an end.

In a statement, Raijor Dal leaders claimed that they were not invited to the

alliance meeting or the subsequent press conference held at Greenwood Resort in Beltola, Guwahati. The party described the move as "deeply disrespectful" and said it signalled the final collapse of talks aimed at forging a broader anti-BJP coalition in the state.

Raijor Dal further alleged that the conduct of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president during the press conference reflected a lack of genuine commitment to an inclusive opposition alliance. The party claimed that when questioned about Raijor Dal's inclusion, Gaurav Gogoi avoided giving a clear answer and instead made general remarks that "the doors are open".

Party leaders also referred to the Assam United Civil Society Convention held on July 6, 2025, alleging that Gogoi had then similarly avoided giving a clear commit-

ment to building a wider opposition platform. The primary point of disagreement between the two parties revolved around seat sharing for the 2026 Assembly elections.

Raijor Dal initially demanded 27 constituencies in the proposed alliance, a figure it said was comparable to the 26 seats sought by the Assam Jatiya Parishad. However, after objections from the Congress, the party said it reduced its demand to 20 seats and later to 15 in an attempt to reach a compromise. According to Raijor Dal, the Congress ultimately offered 13 seats through its four-member negotiation committee. Of these, the regional party said only four constituencies were of its own choice, while four were proposed as "friendly contests" and five were constituencies suggested by the Congress.

Raijor Dal leaders argued that the ar-

rangment effectively reduced their bargaining position to just four seats where they could field candidates of their choice.

The dispute intensified over the Dhing Assembly constituency in Nagaon district, which Raijor Dal said it considered crucial due to its organisational presence in the area. According to the party, it proposed a compromise during negotiations, stating that it would accept the Congress' conditions if it was allowed to contest the Dhing seat. However, the Congress reportedly declined to vacate the constituency.

Instead, Raijor Dal said it was offered the Dalgaoon seat. The party alleged that even this proposal faced opposition from local Congress workers who reportedly launched protests and campaigns against the idea of a Raijor Dal candidate contesting from the constituency.

Raijor Dal further claimed that the

state Congress leadership did not take disciplinary action against party workers who opposed the arrangement. Another point of contention was the Congress' decision to announce candidates during the ongoing negotiation process. Raijor Dal alleged that the Congress unilaterally declared candidates in several constituencies, including Dimou, Borsola, Margherita, Dispur and Dulaijan-areas that Raijor Dal said were part of its own shortlist for potential candidates.

Despite these developments, Raijor Dal claimed it had refrained from announcing candidates in disputed constituencies in order to keep the possibility of an alliance open.

Beyond seat sharing, Raijor Dal pointed to ideological differences between the two parties. While the Congress positions itself as a national political party, Raijor Dal

describes its political ideology as regional nationalist, federalist and rooted in socialist and progressive principles. The party said it was nevertheless willing to set aside ideological differences in order to build a wider coalition against what it described as the "communal and fascist politics" of the BJP-RSS combine. However, Raijor Dal leaders alleged that the Congress leadership was unwilling to discuss a Common Minimum Programme, which the regional party said was essential for forming a meaningful alliance.

The party also cited earlier episodes of friction with the Congress, particularly during the 2021 Assam Legislative Assembly election, when it alleged that the Congress altered earlier commitments after entering into an arrangement with the Bodoland People's Front.

Assam consumers' body demands 125 units of free electricity for poor households

GUWAHATI

The All Assam Electricity Consumers Association has demanded that the state government provide 125 units of free electricity free of cost every month to poor households, stating that the newly announced power tariff for the 2026-27 financial year offers no real relief to consumers. In a statement issued after the tariff announcement by the Assam Electricity Regulatory Commission (AERC), the association said the existing tariff structure has been retained despite widespread objections raised by the public against the proposal submitted by Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL). Association convenors Ajay Acharya and Hillol Bhattacharya said that although the regulatory body did not raise tariffs following public protests, maintaining the previous rate structure still fails to provide any meaningful relief to consumers. They also claimed that the state government earned around ₹400 crore in profit from last year's electricity tariff, suggesting that consumers had been charged in excess. In such circumstances, they argued, tariffs should have been reduced instead of being retained at the same level.

The association further pointed out that several states, including Bihar and Delhi, provide a certain amount of electricity free of cost to domestic consumers under welfare schemes.

However, it said that despite repeated public demands, the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Assam has not introduced any such initiative.

Reiterating its demand, the organisation urged the state government to ensure that at least 125 units of electricity per month are supplied free of cost to economically weaker domestic consumers in the state.

Unidentified body falls from soil-laden dumper in Assam's Sribhumi; police launch probe

SRIBHUMI

Panic gripped parts of Sribhumi after an unidentified body reportedly fell from a soil-laden dumper near the Telikhal area on the outskirts of the town, prompting a police investigation. According to sources, the incident occurred on March 7 when the body fell along with soil from a moving dumper in the Telikhal locality. Residents who witnessed the incident immediately alerted the police. Personnel from the local police station soon reached the spot and secured the area before launching a preliminary investigation. A forensic team was also deployed to the site and began examining the scene using specialised equipment from a forensic van. Officials said the identity of the deceased has not yet been established.

Soon after the body was discovered, a large number of curious onlookers gathered at the site, creating a tense atmosphere in the locality. Local residents claimed the body did not emit a strong foul smell, leading

to speculation that it may not have been at the site for long. The incident has raised several questions among investigators, including whether the body had been buried under the soil or was deliberately placed inside the dumper carrying the load.

Police have initiated a detailed probe to determine how the body ended up in the dumper and to establish the identity of the deceased. alliance, Sarma said differences over seat sharing between the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and Raijor Dal are likely to persist until the nomination process.

"Until the last moment of nomination and withdrawal, this drama will go on," he remarked.

The Chief Minister also noted that since Jogen Mohan, the MLA from Mahmorra, has been nominated as a candidate for the 2026 Rajya Sabha elections in India, the BJP will field a local candidate for the Mahmorra Assembly constituency in the upcoming state polls.

Manipur journalists' union honours women media professionals on International Women's Day

IMPHAL

The All Manipur Working Journalists' Union (AMWJU) on Sunday honoured women media professionals for their contributions to journalism during a programme marking International Women's Day at the Manipur Press Club.

Held under the theme "Give to Gain," the event recognised women working in various capacities across media organisations in the state. They were presented with gifts as a token of appreciation for their role in strengthening the media sector.

Speaking as a presidium member, Khumanthem Daina said women's empowerment requires mutual support among women themselves.

She noted that although the status of women has improved considerably compared to earlier times, many challenges still persist and must be addressed through collective efforts.

Daina also stressed the need



for constructive criticism rather than outright condemnation when women are found to have made mistakes, saying such an approach would encourage positive change.

Another speaker, Yengk-

cial independence for women, noting that women across different walks of life continue to face multiple challenges.

"Every woman, whether working or not, faces difficulties. Those who are in better positions should extend support to women who are living in difficult conditions," she said.

AMWJU vice president Sonia Sorensangbam said the participation of women in the media industry in Manipur has been gradually increasing.

"Earlier, the number of women in media was very small, but now it is steadily rising. According to AMWJU records, around 60 out of 450 members are women, indicating growing participation, though more progress is still needed," she said.

The programme was also attended by Manju Adhikari-mayum along with journalists and members of the public.

On Women's Day, CM Sarma urges voters to back BJP, highlights 'Nari Shakti' initiatives



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday urged voters to support the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), saying the party has consistently prioritised women's empowerment across the state.

Marking International Women's Day, Sarma took to social media to say that a single vote has the power to transform households and strengthen

the voice of women in society.

"One right vote can change the voice inside every home," the Chief Minister wrote, emphasising the importance of public participation in the democratic process.

Highlighting the BJP's approach towards women's empowerment, Sarma said the party's policies and initiatives in Assam have been guided by the goal of strengthening "Nari Shakti".

"Empowering women has been central to Assam's growth story. From financial security to education, healthcare and entrepreneurship, our initiatives are helping lakhs of women step forward with confidence and independence. Today, we celebrate the strength and spirit of Assam's #NariShakti," he wrote.

He added that the government will continue to intensify efforts to ensure women benefit from development programmes and welfare initiatives in the coming years.

"This effort will continue in the coming days. Choose wisely, choose BJP," Sarma said in his appeal ahead of the Assembly polls.

Since coming to power, the BJP-led government in Assam has launched several women-centric welfare schemes aimed at strengthening financial security and promoting entrepreneurship among women.

The flagship Orunodoi Scheme provides direct cash transfers of ₹1,250

per month to women from economically weaker households and currently benefits over 19 lakh families.

The government has also launched the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan to encourage rural women to become entrepreneurs by providing seed capital and institutional support, with a target of benefiting up to 12 lakh women.

Another initiative, the Lakhpati Baideo Scheme, focuses on empowering women associated with self-help groups by providing phased financial assistance - ₹10,000 in the first year, ₹25,000 in the second year and ₹50,000 in the third year - to help them establish sustainable micro-enterprises.

Political observers note that women voters have increasingly emerged as an influential voting bloc in Assam, with major political parties placing significant emphasis on welfare schemes and campaign messaging centred on women's empowerment.

Over Rs. 700 crore development works underway to transform Tura: Conrad Sangma



SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma on Saturday said development works worth more than ₹700 crore are currently underway to transform Tura into a modern and well-connected urban centre, while emphasising the importance of community participation in maintaining civic discipline and cleanliness.

Speaking after inaugurating the Nehru Ading Locality Beautification Project at Hawakhana in Tura, the Chief Minister said the state government has been implementing multiple initiatives to strengthen infrastructure and improve urban facilities in the town.

"I am happy to visit this locality for the first time in my official capacity. Transformations are gradually and steadily taking place in Tura, though much more still needs to be done," Sangma said while addressing residents and community leaders at the event organised by the Nehru Ading Development and Welfare Committee.

He said projects worth more than ₹700 crore are currently being implemented across Tura to boost development and improve urban infrastructure.

Highlighting initiatives under the Smart Cities Mission, the Chief Minister said ₹60 crore has

been allocated for paving internal roads across various localities in the town. He added that ₹15 crore has already been spent during Phase I for street lighting and beautification works, while another ₹15 crore has been sanctioned specifically for the beautification of Tura Bazar.

The Chief Minister also spoke about the ongoing city beautification drive, under which surveillance and lighting infrastructure are being expanded.

According to Sangma, around 350 CCTV cameras and nearly 500 street lights are being installed across the town.

"For Nehru Ading locality, four CCTV cameras and six street lights have already been provided," he said. Sangma emphasised that infrastructure alone cannot transform a city unless citizens also contribute by maintaining civic discipline.

Citing Japan as an example, he said responsible public behaviour and cleanliness must come from within the community, urging residents to preserve the improvements made in their locality.

During the interaction, residents also raised several issues, including the need for a community hall, upgrades to school infrastructure and concerns over drug-related activities in certain areas.

Over 1 lakh trees felled in Assam since 2016; 65,000 cut during Sarma's tenure, RTI reveals

GUWAHATI

More than one lakh mature trees have been felled across Assam over the past decade for various development projects, according to official data obtained through a Right to Information Act, 2005 query.

The information, sought from the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Force under the Assam Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department, shows that 1,06,896 full-grown trees have been cut across the state since May 2016, when the Bharatiya Janata Party formed its first government in Assam.

Data was collected from 15 of the state's 44 wildlife and territorial forest divisions that provided relevant details. Twelve divisions responded without furnishing data on tree felling, while 16 divisions have not responded to the RTI queries so far.

Significantly, none of the 27 divisions that replied reported conducting any ecological impact study before or after the felling of such a large number of trees.

Official figures show that more than 26,000 trees were cut in notified forest areas, while the rest were felled in non-forest locations across the state.

Of the total, nearly 84,000 trees were



removed for government projects such as roads, bridges, flyovers, factories, medical colleges and police battalions. Over 10,000 trees were cut for private projects, the data indicates.

The RTI data also suggests that the pace of tree felling accelerated in recent years.

Approximately 65,000 trees were cut between 2021 and 2025 during the tenure of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, while more than 18,000 trees were felled during the previous government led by former chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

Defending the tree-cutting, Assam Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said the felling was undertaken out of "dire necessity" to facilitate development projects.

"These trees have been cut across the state for various development projects. It was necessary for infrastructure development," Patowary said.

According to the minister, several

major projects required clearing of trees, including the four-laning of National Highway 17 from Guwahati to Goalpara, construction of Darrang Medical College and Hospital, and exploration activities by companies such as Oil and Natural Gas Corporation and Oil India Limited.

Responding to concerns about declining green cover, the government highlighted plantation drives aimed at compensating for the loss.

Patowary said the state planted over 3.5 crore saplings in the past two years under various afforestation programmes. One major initiative, Amrit Briksha Andolan, involved planting one crore saplings in a single day.

According to official reports submitted by forest divisions, more than 70 per cent of the planted saplings have survived due to proper care and monitoring.

However, environmental experts say comparing the felling of mature trees with

planting saplings is scientifically misleading.

Narayan Sharma, Assistant Professor of Environmental Biology and Wildlife Sciences at Cotton University, said mature trees provide ecological benefits that saplings cannot replace for decades.

"A full-grown mature tree represents decades of ecological value that cannot be quickly or easily replaced," Sharma said, adding that sapling plantations rarely compensate immediately for the loss of mature trees.

He also stressed the need for proper ecological impact assessments whenever large-scale tree felling occurs to evaluate impacts on biodiversity, local microclimate and ecosystem stability.

Echoing similar concerns, Minakshi Bora, Assistant Professor of Environmental Science at Gauhati University, said the figures should be interpreted cautiously.

"Felling over one lakh mature trees and planting saplings are ecologically unequal actions," Bora said, noting that mature trees store significant carbon, support wildlife habitats and play a critical role in maintaining ecosystems.

She also described the absence of ecological impact assessments as "scientifically concerning", warning that cumulative ecological damage may remain unnoticed until impacts become severe and irreversible.

Quest!

The world's oceans contain nearly 20 million tons of gold.

CM Mamata counters President's 'protocol lapse' allegations, accuses BJP of targeting West Bengal ahead of polls



KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday asserted that the state government followed protocol and that the BJP was unnecessarily politicised the issue, a day after President Draupadi Murmu alleged 'protocol lapses' during her programme in Siliguri.

The CM said that the responsibility of mismanagement at the function, if any, lay with its private organisers and the Airports Authority of India who provided the venue of the event, not the government.

CM Mamata responded to criticism from top BJP leaders and Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the TMC government has "insulted a woman tribal leader" with an enlarged photograph of PM Modi seated alongside veteran BJP leader LK Advani while the President stood next to them.

"The picture shows that the PM is seated when the President is standing. We never do that. It is the BJP which carries the culture of insulting the President, not us," she claimed, while displaying the photograph as "evidence".

"We have full respect for the chair of the President and the Constitution of India, which we consider our mother; do not blame us," Banerjee said.

President Draupadi Murmu had expressed her anguish at not finding either the chief minister or any of her cabinet ministers to receive her at the Bagdogra Airport on Saturday, where she reached to attend an international tribal conference. Murmu had also expressed her displeasure over the change of venue of her programme near Siliguri.

Maintaining that the state government wasn't even aware of the details of the President's programme

and that it wasn't taken into confidence by the private organisers, Banerjee said that the responsibility of the alleged garbage, green room malfunction and lack of women's toilets should be shouldered by the event managers and the AAI on whose plot the function was held. "We did not pick the venue, you did," she said.

Banerjee said that Goutam Deb, the mayor of Siliguri, honoured protocol and was present to receive her in Bagdogra.

"I am sitting in a dharna to protect people's rights. How can I leave?" she said, while speaking from the central Kolkata sit-in platform.

"You are targeting Bengal on the eve of assembly elections by saying whatever pleases you. Why? Why? Why?" Banerjee added.

Banerjee further accused the BJP of misusing the President's title to target her government.

India taps alternative crude supplies as Iran conflict drags on

NEW DELHI

Indian refiners have begun negotiating for additional crude cargoes from the US, Russia and West Africa to ensure supplies remain adequate in the event of the Middle East conflict drags on for a longer period, industry officials and analysts said.

Refineries, which convert crude oil into fuels like petrol and diesel, have deferred planned maintenance shutdowns and are maintaining normal processing rates to create buffers that could meet the country's requirement in the near term, they said.

India imports about 88 per cent of its crude oil requirement, with roughly half of those supplies in February passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane between Iran and Oman that serves as a key energy transit route for global markets.

The recent military strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran, and Tehran's retaliatory attacks on US bases in neighbouring countries as well as Israel, have sharply escalated tensions in the region, leading to a near halt in tanker movements through the strategic waterway.

"Non-strait sources are fully operational and we are sourcing more and more supplies from non-conflict zones," a top oil ministry source said. "Non-strait sources accounted for 60 per cent of supplies in 2025 which after the Middle East conflict climbed to 70 per cent."

Indian refiners are tapping crude from West Africa, Latin America and the US, he said adding the US Treasury Department issuing a 30-day waiver to allow the sale and delivery of sanctioned Russian oil that has already been loaded on vessels to India has opened up another avenue.

The waiver permits the sale, delivery or discharge of crude oil and petroleum products of Russian origin that were loaded on vessels on or before March 5, including ships subject to certain sanctions. The exemption remains valid until April 5, allowing cargoes already in transit to be completed without violating sanctions restrictions.

There were 120 million barrels



of Russian crude on the water. Of this, as many as 15 million barrels of Russia-origin crude are sitting on tankers close to India - in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal - while another 7 million Russian crude barrels are idling near Singapore.

Industry sources said Indian refiners have started buying Russian oil.

Reliance Industries, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd, which had halted purchases of Russian crude following US sanctions imposed last year on Moscow's leading producers Rosneft and Lukoil, have returned to the market to secure Russian cargoes, they said.

Before the United States imposed sanctions on Russia's leading oil producers Rosneft and Lukoil in October 2025, Reliance Industries was the largest buyer of Russian crude, importing more than 500,000 barrels per day under a long-term supply agreement with Rosneft.

The Oil Ministry official said India never stopped buying Russian oil - it imported some 1.04 million barrels per day of Russian crude in February, down from 1.6-1.8 million bpd levels seen in 2023-2025.

"We are in a very comfortable position as far as crude and finished products are concerned," he said, adding the combined inventory

can meet the country's demand for 50 days.

The country currently holds approximately 144 million barrels of crude in onshore storage, equivalent to around 30 days of coverage at 2025 import levels.

Importantly, the supplies are being constantly replenished, he said.

India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves have the capacity to cover about 9.5 days of net oil imports. In addition, state-run oil companies have storage for crude and petroleum products equivalent to 64.5 days of net imports, taking the country's total storage capacity to roughly 74 days of net imports, according to petroleum ministry data.

While India may be able to secure adequate physical crude through alternative sources, analysts cautioned that the overall cost structure could worsen due to higher crude prices, increased freight and insurance premiums, and longer shipping routes. International crude oil prices have jumped to over USD 92 per barrel from around USD 70 when the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices have more than doubled to USD 24-25 per million British thermal unit.

The higher prices will add to India's import bill, analysts said,

adding sourcing from non-Middle Eastern suppliers mean longer shipping and higher freight. Also, insurance premiums have jumped.

Every USD 10 increase in crude prices could add 20-25 basis points to the consumer price index if passed on to consumers, or widen the fiscal deficit if taxes are cut to neutralise the impact.

The immediate impact will be a higher import bill, a widening current account deficit and pressure on the rupee. India, the world's third-largest crude importer, depends on Middle East supply for about half of its imports, and the de facto halted tanker traffic in the Strait of Hormuz has put severe pressure on its supplies. In February 2026, India received 2.8 million bpd crude, accounting for 53 per cent of total imports, from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar. For the world, around 15 million barrels per day of crude and 5 million bpd of oil products passed through the Strait of Hormuz in 2025. India's exposure to crude flows through the Strait of Hormuz was lower at about 41 per cent in 2025, but has increased in recent months as refiners curtailed purchases of Russian crude. Imports from Russia averaged around 1.15 million barrels per day in the first two months of 2026, compared with about 1.7 million bpd in 2025.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran clerical panel reaches consensus on next supreme leader; formal announcement awaited

TEHRAN

The clerical body responsible for choosing Iran's next supreme leader to succeed the slain Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has broadly reached a majority consensus, Assembly of Experts member Ayatollah Mohammadmehdi Mirbaqeri said on Sunday.

According to a Reuters report, Mirbaqeri told the Mehr news agency that the panel had "more or less" reached agreement on a successor, though "some obstacles" in the process still needed to be resolved.

A senior cleric in the Assembly of Experts had said on Saturday that members would meet "within one day" to formally select the next leader.

Two members of the panel, Ayatollah Mohsen Heidari Alekasir and Ahmad Alamolhoda, also said the assembly had already chosen a successor, Iranian media reported, according to Reuters. Alamolhoda added that the head of the assembly's secretariat, Ayatollah Hashem Hosseini Bushehri, would be responsible for announcing the decision, the report added.

However, Iranian media reported that there was some disagreement within the body over whether members needed to meet in person to issue the final decision or bypass that formality.

Heidari Alekasir said in a video released by Nournews, cited by Reuters on Sunday, that an in-person meeting was not possible under the current circumstances and suggested remote or written alternatives.

"This is an extraordinary situation, the assembly cannot meet in a plenary," he said, adding that targeting the assembly would benefit Iran's enemies and "harm the revolution".

Israeli and US strikes since the war began on February 28 have killed dozens of Iranian officials and commanders, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It has also been reported earlier that strikes had flattened an



auxiliary building of the Assembly of Experts in the city of Qom.

Heidari Alekasir said the chosen candidate had been selected based on the late supreme leader's advice that Iran's top leader should be someone "hated by the enemy" rather than praised by it, the report added.

"Even the Great Satan (the United States) has mentioned his name," the cleric said, referring to comments by US President Donald Trump.

Trump said on Thursday that Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, a mid-ranking hardline cleric, appeared to be the most likely successor, according to Axios, but warned he would oppose

such a move and suggested he should have a role in selecting Iran's next leader.

Mojtaba Khamenei, 56, was not in Tehran when his father was killed in air strikes early in the war, said Reuters citing an Iranian source.

He has close ties to Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards and is considered one of the most influential figures in the country's clerical establishment due to the influence he has wielded behind the scenes and his role as his father's gatekeeper, according to people familiar with the matter cited by Reuters.

Despite never holding a formal government position beyond working in his father's office, he has long been viewed as

one of the leading contenders to succeed the elder Khamenei.

Ali Khamenei had served as Iran's supreme leader since 1989 after previously serving nearly eight years as president.

Mojtaba Khamenei also drew criticism from protesters during the nationwide unrest in 2022 following the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman in police custody after she was arrested for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code rules. He is widely seen as having influence over Iran's security apparatus, which has suppressed several waves of protests in recent years.

12 years on, renewed hunt for missing Flight MH370 comes up empty as families press for answers



KUALA LUMPUR

Twelve years after Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 vanished with 239 people aboard, a renewed deep-sea search in the Indian Ocean has so far failed to locate the missing aircraft, Malaysian authorities said on Sunday, as families pressed for the effort to continue.

The Air Accident Investigation Bureau said in a statement that a seabed search conducted by marine robotics company Ocean Infinity between March 2025 and January 2026 surveyed thousands of square kilometers of ocean floor but has not produced any confirmed findings of the aircraft wreckage.

Malaysia gave the nod to the Texas-based company last year to renew the search for Flight 370 under a "no-find, no-fee" contract at a new 15,000-square-kilometer (5,800-square-mile) site in the southern Indian

Ocean where it was believed to have crashed. Ocean Infinity will be paid \$70 million only if wreckage is discovered.

The search was carried out for 28 days in two phases — March 25-28 last year and Dec 31, 2025, to Jan 23 this year, covering about 7,571 square kilometers (2,923 square miles) of seabed, the bureau said. Weather periodically disrupted operations, it said.

"The search activities undertaken have not yielded any findings that confirm the location of the aircraft wreckage," it said in a statement. It didn't give details on when the search will resume.

The Boeing 777 plane vanished from radar shortly after taking off on March 8, 2014, carrying 239 people, mostly Chinese nationals, on a flight from Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur, to Beijing. Satellite data showed the plane turned from its flight path and headed south to the far-southern Indian

Ocean, where it is believed to have crashed.

An expensive multinational search failed to turn up any clues to its location, although debris washed ashore on the East African coast and Indian Ocean islands. A private search in 2018 by Ocean Infinity also found nothing.

Voice 370, representing the families of some of those aboard the missing plane, urged the government to extend Ocean Infinity's contract and to consider similar arrangements with other deep-sea exploration companies.

Although Ocean Infinity's contract runs until June, the group said the company's vessel has been redeployed for other work and is unlikely to return soon to complete the remaining search areas due to the approaching winter months and deteriorating sea conditions.

"The government pays nothing unless the aircraft is found. Any request by Ocean Infinity to extend the search contract should therefore be granted without hesitation," it said in a statement.

"If the present search is unsuccessful, we would also urge Malaysia to kindly consider extending similar no find, no fee opportunities to other capable deep sea exploration companies."

The group vowed to "continue the fight for answers. We will never give up!"

Congress's Assam Gamble: Between Renewal and Resentment in the Age of 'Parachute Politics'



The announcement of the first batch of candidates by the Indian National Congress for the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly elections was intended to project a message of readiness, strategy, and renewed confidence. Instead, the list has sparked an intense internal conversation within the party: is Congress attempting to reinvent itself in Assam, or is it quietly abandoning the organisational culture that once sustained it?

The debate began soon after the All India Congress Committee released its first list of 42 candidates on March 3 through a statement signed by party general secretary K. C. Venugopal. The list includes several prominent names. Among them is Gaurav Gogoi, deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, who has been nominated from Jorhat. Senior leaders such as Ripun Bora from Barchalla and Debabrata Saikia from Nazira also feature prominently.

At first glance, the candidate slate appears to reflect an attempt at balance. The party has fielded candidates across a wide range of constituencies representing Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, including Majuli, Bokajan, Rongkhang, Boko-Chaygaon, Jonai, Barpeta, Jagiroad, Raha and Ramkrishna Nagar. The selection seemingly aims to signal inclusiveness and outreach to communities that have historically felt politically marginalised.

Yet beneath the optics of diversity and representation lies a more complicated political story - one that has triggered unease among sections of the party's grassroots workers.

The growing debate over "parachute politics" - a situation in which individuals with limited engagement in the party's organisational structure suddenly appear as electoral nominees.

For a party that once prided itself on rewarding long-term grassroots commitment, this shift has raised questions about whether political pragmatism is replacing organisational loyalty as the primary criterion for candidature.

Political defections are not uncommon in India's electoral landscape. Leaders frequently switch parties in search of better opportunities, and political organisations often welcome such entrants if they bring with them strong local networks.

From one perspective, Congress could argue that attracting

leaders from rival parties indicates renewed political momentum. The willingness of politicians from competing camps to join the party may signal a belief that Congress is regaining electoral relevance in Assam.

But within the party's grassroots network, a different narrative is emerging. In several constituencies, long-time workers who have spent years building local support structures reportedly feel sidelined. For many of them, the sudden elevation of newcomers to electoral candidacy appears less like strategic expansion and more like an erosion of internal fairness.

Local party organisers who have worked at the booth and block levels say they expected the election to be an opportunity for experienced workers to step forward. Instead, some see the candidate list as evidence that political "winnability" has begun to outweigh organisational loyalty.

These concerns are not merely emotional reactions. For political parties, the morale of grassroots workers often plays a decisive role in campaign mobilisation. When local cadres feel ignored or overlooked, the enthusiasm that drives election machinery can weaken.

Another dimension of the candidate list reflects a strategy associated with the broader political vision of Rahul Gandhi - strengthening the organisational role of district Congress committees.

Several district presidents have been nominated as candidates. Among them are Girish Baruah from Bongaigaon, Utpal Gogoi from Sonari, and Raton Engti from Bokajan.

The logic behind this approach is clear. By empowering district leaders, the party hopes to revitalise local structures and ensure

that candidates have strong connections with the grassroots.

Yet even this experiment appears uneven in its execution.

While some district-level leaders have indeed been rewarded with nominations, many grassroots workers claim the principle has been applied inconsistently. In several constituencies, long-serving organisers say they have been bypassed in favour of individuals who joined the party only recently.

This apparent contradiction - between strengthening organisational leadership and simultaneously accommodating defectors - has become the central grievance voiced by many within the party ranks.

Social media posts by Congress workers in Assam reflect a mix of frustration and disappointment. Some describe themselves as "aggrieved" by the decisions, while others speak openly about feeling "humiliated" after years of service.

In a few areas, the resentment has reportedly escalated into quiet protests and symbolic resignations from local organisational posts.

Among the constituencies attracting particular attention is Barpeta.

Often referred to as the "Satra Nagari," Barpeta occupies a special place in Assam's cultural and religious history. The town is closely associated with the legacy of the 16th-century Vaishnavite reformer Madhabdev and remains deeply influenced by the satra monastic institutions that shape the region's spiritual life.

In this culturally sensitive constituency, the Congress has fielded Mahananda Sarkar.

The nomination has sparked discussion among observers because the candidate is considered a relative-

ly new entrant to the party. In a region where cultural identity and historical legacy often influence political behaviour, introducing a fresh political face carries both symbolic significance and electoral risk.

Supporters of the decision argue that the move signals an attempt to broaden the party's social appeal. Critics, however, caution that such choices could provoke backlash in constituencies where voters value deep-rooted local connections.

All of these developments must be viewed against the larger political backdrop in Assam.

Since coming to power in 2016, the Bharatiya Janata Party has steadily expanded its influence across the state. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the party has consolidated support among multiple social and regional constituencies - including many areas that were once traditional Congress strongholds.

This political consolidation has created enormous pressure on the opposition to innovate.

For Congress, the challenge is not merely to contest an election but to rebuild relevance in a political landscape that has changed dramatically over the past decade.

Welcoming defectors with established local networks may therefore appear to be a pragmatic response to this challenge. Leaders who have previously won elections or built personal followings can sometimes provide immediate organisational strength.

Yet such strategies also come with risks.

Political parties are not only electoral platforms; they are also communities built on shared experiences, ideological commitments and organisational discipline. When loyal workers feel that their contributions are overlooked, the internal cohesion that sustains a party can begin to erode.

The Congress leadership may well argue that bold decisions are necessary to challenge an entrenched ruling party. Electoral politics often rewards adaptability and pragmatism.

However, the dilemma confronting the party is deeper than a simple question of candidate selection.

At its core lies a fundamental tension between two political philosophies. One prioritises organisational loyalty and long-term cadre development. The other emphasises electoral pragmatism and the ability to attract influential leaders from outside.

Balancing these approaches is never easy. Lean too heavily toward organisational loyalty, and a party risks stagnation. Emphasise opportunistic recruitment, and it may alienate the very workers who form its backbone.

The Congress in Assam now appears to be navigating this delicate balance.

As campaigning for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections intensifies, the candidate list has

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