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VOLUME:1, ISSUE 737 | SILCHAR MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2026. EAST AND NE INDIA EDITION | e-mail: krctimes@gmail.com , www.krctimes.com

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## Fast-track court begins trial in Zubeen Garg death case in Guwahati

**GUWAHATI**  
The fast-track trial into the death of Assamese singer Zubeen Garg commenced in Guwahati on Monday, marking a significant step in a case that has drawn sustained public attention and demands for judicial clarity.

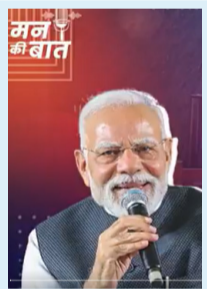
The proceedings are being conducted in Court No. 3 of the Sessions Court in Kamrup Metropolitan district, with Judge Sharmila Bhuyan presiding over the matter. She has been appointed to a specially created supernumerary post equivalent to that of a District and Sessions Judge to ensure focused and expedited handling of the case.

The case had earlier been investigated in Singapore, where authorities termed the incident an "unfortunate accident." However, the findings failed to convince many in Assam, triggering widespread scepticism and calls for a more comprehensive probe.

Amid mounting public pressure, Garg's family and supporters had urged authorities to fast-track the judicial process. Responding to these demands, the Assam government constituted a dedicated fast-track court to ensure timely adjudication.

Officials said the trial will proceed in accordance with established legal procedures, with an emphasis on swift disposal. Regular updates on the hearings are expected as the case moves forward.

## WHO SAID WHAT



**The Naga community has shown how tradition can be preserved and at the same time we can be futuristic in our approach. ~ Narendra Modi, PM at Mann ki Baat**

# AVSAR initiative inaugurated at Imphal International Airport

**BISWADEEP GUPTA**

**IMPHAL:** Digi Yatra, high-speed Wi-Fi, Flybrary, Kids Zone, and the CISF Canteen were virtually inaugurated and dedicated at Imphal International Airport from Rajkot International Airport on Sunday, by Union Minister of Civil Aviation, Rammahon Naidu Kinjarapu.

The inauguration ceremony at Imphal was attended by Anurag Bajpai, Additional Chief Secretary (Transport), the Transport Director, Airport Director and team, Chief Airport Security Officer (CASO), representatives of all airline operators at Imphal, and other key stakeholders.

This landmark occasion marks a significant milestone for Imphal International Airport, representing one of the largest rollouts of integrated passenger amenities and reaffirming the airport's commitment to delivering a seamless, modern, and enriching travel experience.



Among the key initiatives inaugurated is AVSAR (Airport as Venue for Skilled Artisans of the Region), an initiative of the Airports Authority of India. AVSAR provides a dedicated platform for Self Help Groups (SHGs) and local

artisans to showcase and sell indigenous products within the airport premises. The initiative aims to empower rural communities, particularly women, by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities while promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region to travellers.

The introduction of Digi

Yatra marks a transformative step towards digital aviation. Powered by facial recognition technology, it enables a seamless, contactless, and paperless travel experience, allowing passengers to move swiftly through airport checkpoints. With its official launch at Imphal Airport, travellers can now benefit from faster processing, reduced waiting times, and enhanced convenience.

Further strengthening passenger convenience and welfare infrastructure, the newly revamped Kendriya Police Kalyan Bhandar (KPKB), formerly known as CPC, has been upgraded and inaugurated to offer improved services, an expanded product range, and enhanced accessibility for both airport personnel and the general public. The inauguration of the CISF canteen complements this effort by reinforcing welfare support systems at Imphal Airport.

To enrich the passenger experience, several thoughtfully designed amenities have also been introduced. The Kids Zone offers a vibrant and safe environment for young travellers to play and unwind before departure. The Flybrary, a unique reading space within the terminal, encourages passengers to read, borrow, or share books, transforming waiting time into a meaningful and relaxing experience.

In addition, the availability of high-speed free Wi-Fi ensures uninterrupted connectivity, enabling passengers to stay connected with the world while at the airport.

These initiatives collectively reflect the ongoing efforts to transform Imphal International Airport into a modern, passenger-friendly hub that seamlessly blends technology, comfort, and cultural inclusivity.

## Court Seeks Urgent, Time-Bound Plan to Restore Aizawl-Silchar Highway



**AIZAWL**

The Gauhati High Court has sought a clear, time-bound execution plan from a highway contractor engaged in repairing critical stretches of the Aizawl-Silchar route, raising concerns over delays and incomplete work on the vital corridor.

Hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by the Mizoram Truck Drivers' Association, a division bench comprising Justice Michael Zothankhuma and Justice Nelson Sailo directed Haryana-based J Infratech Limited to submit an affidavit outlining how it plans to complete the remaining 65 per cent of the project within the stipulated timeline.

The contractor, working under the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd, is responsible for repair works across several key stretches, including Sairang Zero Point to Buichali Bridge, New Khamrang to

Kawnpui, and Kolasib to Bilkhawthlir. The highway serves as a crucial surface lifeline for Mizoram, making delays a matter of significant public concern.

The PIL, filed by MTDA general secretary Lalhmudika Tochwawng, flagged the slow pace of work and its adverse impact on transporters and daily commuters using the route.

During the hearing, the bench also directed NHIDCL to file, within two weeks, a detailed affidavit explaining the monitoring and inspection mechanisms in place to supervise the contractor's work. The agency has further been asked to clarify whether limestone rocks are being used in the construction process.

**NEW DELHI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that Assam has transitioned from a prolonged phase of instability to relative peace over the past decade under the BJP's "double-engine" government, as he addressed party booth-level workers ahead of the Assembly elections.

Speaking during the 'Mera Booth, Sabse Mazboot Samvaad' outreach programme, Modi said the state had once witnessed sustained violence but now reflects a "new confidence" due to efforts made by the BJP-led dispensation since 2016.

"We have seen the era when Assam was burning in violence. Assam saw a long span of instability, but things have changed in the past decade," he said, crediting the government's focus on peace-building measures.

Targeting the Indian National Congress, the Prime Minister al-



leged that earlier regimes signed agreements "only on paper" without effective implementation, leaving youth disillusioned and vulnerable to unrest.

Highlighting the Centre's approach, Modi said the BJP government has signed 12 peace accords with various organisations across the Northeast and is ensuring their implementation on the ground. He

also accused previous Congress governments of failing to address long-standing issues, including those related to Bodo groups.

"Peace is the primary requirement for a state's development," he said, underscoring that sustained stability has been central to Assam's progress in recent years.

With elections to the 126-member Assam Assembly scheduled for April 9, Modi urged party workers to intensify grassroots mobilisation, expressing confidence in securing a third consecutive term for the BJP-led NDA in the state.

He also cautioned workers against the circulation of AI-generated misinformation during the campaign, asking them to remain vigilant and inform voters accordingly.

The BJP-led alliance has been in power in Assam since 2016, and the upcoming polls are being seen as a crucial test of its electoral strength in the state.

## Centre earmarks Rs.25,000 crore for hill states under 'Pride of Hills'; Manipur gets Rs. 2,400 crore

**NEW DELHI**

The Centre has allocated Rs. 25,000 crore under the 'Pride of Hills' component of the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) 2026-27, aimed at addressing the structural and financial challenges faced by India's hill states. Among the nine states covered, Manipur has been allotted Rs.2,400 crore.

The highest allocation has gone to Arunachal Pradesh with 74,900 crore, while Mizoram has received the lowest share at 7100 crore. Other major allocations include 73,920 crore for Himachal Pradesh, 73,880 crore for Nagaland, 73,460 crore for Uttarakhand, and Rs. 3,450 crore for Tripura. Additionally, Meghalaya has been allocated Rs.2,070 crore, while Sikkim will receive Rs.820 crore. Officials said the scheme is designed to tackle persistent developmental constraints in hill regions, including difficult terrain, poor con-

nectivity, low population density, and limited avenues for revenue generation. These factors have historically contributed to weaker fiscal indicators such as high debt-to-GSDP ratios and low own-tax revenues.

Reacting to the announcement, Yumnam Khemchand Singh expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for introducing the 'Pride of Hills' component. In a post on X, the Chief Minister said the 2,400 crore allocation would help ease financial constraints and accelerate inclusive growth in the state, while thanking the Centre for its continued focus on the Northeast.

Officials added that the additional outlay will supplement existing funding streams and is expected to boost infrastructure development in remote and underserved regions, addressing both geographical and fiscal disadvantages faced by hill states.

## Assam HSLC results to be declared on April 10: CM

**GUWAHATI**

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that the results of the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examinations will be declared on April 10.

The Chief Minister made the announcement during an election campaign event after students sought clarity on the likely date of result publication. Responding to their queries, Sarma assured that the results would be released on the scheduled date.

The HSLC examinations, conducted by the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, were held from February 10 to February 27, 2026, at centres across the state.

Officials are yet to specify the exact mode of publication, though the results are typically made available through official websites and designated centres.

The announcement has drawn close attention from students and parents, as the HSLC results play a key role in determining admissions to higher secondary institutions across Assam.



## Saha attacks UPA, bats for BJP's 'decisive win' in Silchar



**SILCHAR**

Tripura Chief Minister campaigns for Rajdeep Roy, credits Modi-led government for development push and predicts sweeping mandate

Silchar, March 29: Manik Saha on Sunday sharpened his attack on the Congress-led UPA, branding it "corrupt," while pitching for a decisive victory for the BJP in Silchar ahead of the Assembly elections.

Addressing an election rally at Kirtana Ground, the Tripura Chief Minister expressed confidence that BJP candidate Rajdeep Roy would secure a "huge margin" win, citing what he described as strong public support for the party's development agenda.

Saha credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for steering the country on a path of steady progress, asserting that voters continue to repose faith in his leadership. "The people have immense trust in Prime Minister Modi.

Under his leadership, the country is progressing steadily," he said.

Campaigning for Roy, Saha maintained that the electorate is aware of the changes ushered in under BJP rule and would reflect that in the polls. He also drew parallels with political developments in Tripura, where the BJP ended over three decades of Left rule, describing it as a turning point driven by Modi's leadership.

The Tripura Chief Minister further highlighted cultural and emotional linkages between Silchar and Tripura, saying the two regions share longstanding ties.

Saha added that senior BJP leaders, including Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, are expected to campaign in the region in the coming days.

Emphasising the strategic importance of the Northeast, he said the Centre has renewed its focus on the region under the Act East Policy, describing it as key to India's broader growth trajectory.

## Assam Assembly Polls See 48-Year Low Candidate Count at 722, Raising Concerns Over Political Participation

**GUWAHATI**

A marked decline in the number of candidates contesting the 2026 Assam Assembly elections has raised fresh concerns about waning public engagement in electoral politics and a possible erosion of trust in political leadership. According to data released by the Election Commission of India, a total of 722 candidates are in the fray across the state's 126 constituencies this year—making it the lowest number recorded in nearly five decades. The drop is significant when compared with previous elections. Assam had 946 candidates in 2021, 1,064 in 2016, 981 in 2011, and 997 in 2006. The figure stood at 916 in 2001 and 1,029 in 1996, while the 1991 elections saw a peak of 1,657 candidates. Even in 1978, as many as 938 candidates contested.

While the 1983 Assembly polls recorded a lower figure of 471 candidates, that election remains an outlier due to its controversial nature. Polling was conducted in only 109 constituencies amid widespread unrest and low voter participation, limiting its comparability with other election years.

The sharp decline in 2026 has prompted debate among political observers and analysts. Many point to a combination of factors, including growing dissatisfaction with established political parties, the repeated nomination of long-standing candidates, and limited opportunities for new entrants—particularly younger aspirants.

Rising campaign costs and concerns over corruption and negative political discourse are also believed to be discouraging prospective candidates from entering the electoral arena. Additionally, the withdrawal of 67 candidates on March 26 further reduced the contesting pool, raising questions about the underlying reasons behind such decisions.

In a democracy where elections are often described as a "festival of the people," a higher number of candidates is typically seen as an indicator of vibrant participation. The current trend in Assam, however, has triggered a wider conversation about whether the electoral process is becoming less accessible or appealing to ordinary citizens.



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 737

## INDIA AT CROSSROADS OF GLOBAL TRUST

**D**iplomacy is not a game for amateurs, but for hardened professionals who master the art of converting failure into success. The recent episode in which Pakistan outmanoeuvred India in the global battle of perceptions makes this truth painfully, even humiliatingly, clear. Well-spoken and well-turned-out diplomats turned semi-politicians like S Jaishankar may have delivered intellectually superior speeches that win applause in think-tank halls, yet they have failed to secure for India its due status in the global order.

Jaishankar may dazzle seminar rooms with erudite eloquence, but on the world stage he is not taken seriously precisely because he lacks the domestic political mandate that only an elected leader can command. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi has personally engaged with over a dozen world leaders in a frantic push for de-escalation, Islamabad, long dismissed in New Delhi as a "failed state" harbouring terrorists, has stolen the global spotlight.

The opposition has seized the moment, launching a blistering assault on the government's foreign policy, accusing career diplomats of playing safe, visibly aligned with the West, and forever angling for a better posting and squandering India's hard-won stature as the voice of the Global South. The charge is stark: insulated from domestic political realities and wedded to a rigid, pro-West tilt, these career diplomats have left India sidelined, while Pakistan's Field Marshall Asim Munir brokers talks from Islamabad.

An unintended depoliticisation of foreign policy under a career diplomat-turned-minister has led to major erosion in India's decision-making role in international affairs. Never before has an Indian Foreign Service officer been inducted straight into the Union Cabinet as external affairs minister without previous experience in domestic politics. Jaishankar, the first such IFS officer, is also the longest-serving external affairs minister after Jawaharlal Nehru. Given full freedom to manage diplomacy since 2019, he has largely chosen his trusted IFS cadre to navigate the most complex international conflicts. He remains India's most-travelled external affairs minister. He has undertaken 150 international trips across 87 countries.

In addition, his being envoy to both the US and China could not compensate for the deficiency in connecting domestic preferences with diplomacy. Unlike the long line of political heavyweights who shaped foreign policy with electoral mandates and domestic instinct like Swaran Singh, P V Narasimha Rao, Pranab Mukherjee, Jaswant Singh, Yashwant Sinha and Sushma Swaraj, unfortunately, Jaishankar operates without that political grounding. Historically, external affairs ministers brought coalition realism, party networks and public accountability to the table. On the contrary, Jaishankar's bureaucratic precision, while articulate, has created an insulated echo chamber disconnected from raw power dynamics.

Despite Prime Minister Modi's direct calls with Trump, Masoud Pezeshkian, Benjamin Netanyahu and the Gulf leaders, and India's BRICS presidency, Tehran chose not to entrust New Delhi with mediation, citing India's overt tilt towards Israel and the US. What explains this stunning reversal? Diplomats failed to convert Modi's powerful outreach into a diplomatic dividend. And hardcore BJP members dealing with foreign affairs see Jaishankar as emblematic of the problem. He is brilliant on protocol and multilateral forums, yet politically enucleated, lacking the electoral legitimacy and raw political instinct required to fuel Prime Minister Modi's signature 'huglomatic' style of diplomacy.

Jaishankar marathon travels to dozens of countries may have earned air-miles, but have failed to forge the close, personal relationships with global leaders that Mo-diplomacy demands. He has handpicked Indian ambassadors and high commissioners to key nations who mirror his own cautious, protocol-driven style rather than the aggressive, outcome-oriented approach displayed by Pakistani diplomats.

Despite India holding the BRICS presidency at present, other member nations are clearly not in line with its restrained approach. Iran has pressed for stronger condemnation; China and Russia have taken overtly pro-Tehran positions; and Gulf members are hedging. Jaishankar's diplomats openly feel that he and his carefully-chosen vague stance have pushed India deep into the pro-America camp. This tilt has eroded the very reputation as a neutral and powerful nation that Modi had painstakingly built over a decade. Jaishankar always accompanies the Prime Minister on foreign trips. Along with the privileged cadre surrounding him, Jaishankar has effectively insulated the Prime Minister from reaching out directly to other stakeholders like opposition leaders, business voices, military strategists and regional influencers who could have injected the domestic political realism Modi's global connectivity requires.

As a fatal consequence, it has alienated traditional partners in the Global South and even within BRICS, leaving India isolated precisely when its leadership was most needed. Pakistan's mediation coup has 're-hyphenated' India with its neighbour in global perceptions, something New Delhi has fought for years to avoid.

The hour of reckoning has arrived. Pakistan's improbable rise as mediator in a conflict touching India's closest partners is not a fleeting embarrassment. It's the brutal verdict on a decade of depoliticised diplomacy that has hollowed out India's global leverage. What was meant to be Modi's crowning achievement positioning India as vishwaguru, a civilisational bridge-builder for a fractured world, now risks becoming a cautionary tale of untapped potential. The time for introspection is over; the time for surgery has arrived. Modi, who still commands the trust of the Indian voter and his party, must now reconstruct the foreign policy establishment with the same ruthlessness he once applied to domestic politics. The system needs an infusion of strategic thinkers who combine diplomatic expertise with deep roots in domestic politics, economic realism and hard-nosed geopolitics. Political interlocutors with business acumen, battle-tested military strategists, and public intellectuals unafraid of challenging conventional wisdom should be moved to key capitals and policymaking posts. India's diplomats must be judged not by the elegance of their cables or the polish of their panel appearances, but by hard metrics: narrative wins, investment flows and strategic leverage secured in crisis.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"Work out your own salvation. Do not depend on others." - Buddha**

# WHY MIDDLE-EAST PEACE MATTERS TO ENTIRE WORLD



PROF D MUKHERJEE

For over a hundred years, the Middle-East has remained one of the most strategically important and politically unstable regions in the world. Its significance is not determined by location alone, but also by its long history, religious importance, vast energy resources, and the involvement of major global powers. Positioned between Europe, Asia, and Africa, the region holds some of the largest oil and gas reserves in the world, making it vital for global energy supply. Since modern economies depend heavily on oil and energy transportation, political instability in this region quickly becomes an international issue rather than a purely regional one. Conflicts in the region have involved not only regional powers such as Iran and Israel, but also external powers such as the United States and several European countries. Many local disputes gradually developed into proxy conflicts involving global powers, making peaceful resolution more difficult. Religious differences, territorial disagreements, political ideologies, and competition for regional influence have all contributed to repeated instability. The region is also globally important because of oil transportation routes, especially the Strait of Hormuz, through which a large share of the world's oil trade passes. Any disruption in this route affects oil prices, shipping costs, and inflation worldwide. Therefore, the Middle-East conflict must be understood as a global economic and security issue rather than merely a regional conflict.

The countries directly involved in war suffer the most severe and lasting consequences. Armed conflict destroys not only military assets but also civilian infrastructure, economic institutions, and social stability. Roads, bridges, ports, airports, power stations, oil facilities, hospitals, and schools are frequently damaged or completely destroyed, and rebuilding such infrastructure requires enormous financial resources and many years of sustained effort. The economic impact of war is equally damaging. Industrial production declines, trade routes are disrupted, foreign investment declines, and governments are forced to spend heavily on defence rather than on education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. Inflation often increases, unemployment rises, and national currencies weaken due to economic uncertainty and declining exports. Economic sanctions imposed during conflicts can further worsen the situation by restricting access to global markets and financial systems. This reduces export earnings, particularly from oil, leading to budget deficits, reduced public services, and falling living standards. Human losses are the most tragic of all. Wars lead to deaths, injuries, displacement, refugee crises, and long-term psychological trauma. Many young people lose education and employment opportunities, slowing national development for decades. War therefore leaves deep economic, social, and developmental damage rather than real victory.

In an increasingly interconnected global economy, the consequences of war are seldom limited to the countries directly involved in the conflict. Even nations far removed from Middle-East battlefields experience economic and financial repercussions. The most immediate effect is usually visible in global oil markets. When conflict threatens oil production facilities or transport routes, oil prices rise due to uncertainty and fears of supply disruption. Rising oil prices increase transportation, manufacturing, electricity, and agricultural costs, which eventually leads to inflation across many countries. Oil-importing nations such as India, Japan, and several European economies are particularly affected because higher import bills widen trade deficits and weaken national currencies.

Maritime trade is also affected when conflicts occur near major sea routes. Shipping insurance, security costs, and freight charges increase, and these higher costs are passed on to consumers through increased prices of goods and services worldwide. Conflicts also create refugee movements into neigh-

bouring countries, placing pressure on housing, employment, healthcare, and education systems. Thus, even countries not directly involved in war experience inflation, trade disruption, economic uncertainty, and social pressures as indirect consequences of Middle-East conflicts.

At the global level, conflict in the Middle-East influences economic growth, financial stability, energy security, and international trade. Oil remains a critical resource for modern economies, and sudden increases in oil prices can slow economic growth across many countries. When oil prices rise, transportation and production costs increase, which leads to higher prices and inflation in multiple sectors of the economy. Global financial markets are highly sensitive to geopolitical tensions. During periods of conflict, stock markets often decline as investors shift their investments towards safer assets such as gold and government bonds. Currency markets also experience fluctuations, particularly in oil-importing developing countries where rising import bills put pressure on national currencies. Global supply chains are also vulnerable because major shipping routes pass near Middle-Eastern waters. Disruptions in maritime trade can delay shipments, increase freight costs, and create shortages of goods worldwide. Furthermore, geopolitical tensions often lead to higher defence spending, reducing funds available for development sectors such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and environmental protection.

The Middle-East occupies a central position in global oil geopolitics due to its vast energy reserves and its control over major maritime oil transport routes. Oil has long been one of the world's most strategic resources, shaping international relations, military planning, and economic policy. Organisations such as OPEC influence global oil production and prices, which in turn affect inflation and economic growth across the world. The region's importance is further strengthened by

key maritime routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal, through which a large share of global oil shipments and international trade passes. Because of this strategic importance, major powers maintain political alliances and military presence in the region. As a result, the Middle-East remains not only a political conflict zone but also a centre of global energy and strategic geopolitics.

An enduring solution to conflict in the Middle-East cannot be achieved through military action alone. Military victories rarely result in lasting peace and often create new tensions and instability. Long-term peace can emerge only through diplomacy, economic cooperation, security arrangements, and mutual recognition of strategic interests among the countries involved. One possible approach would be the creation of a regional security framework in which major regional powers commit to resolving disputes through negotiation rather than armed confrontation. Confidence-building measures such as arms control agreements, nuclear monitoring mechanisms, and cooperation in maritime security could gradually reduce mistrust and prevent escalation of conflicts. Economic cooperation could also contribute significantly to peace. Increased trade, infrastructure development, energy partnerships, and regional investment could create economic interdependence, making conflict economically harmful for all parties involved. Countries that are economically connected are generally less likely to engage in prolonged conflict. A balanced diplomatic arrangement could address the concerns of key stakeholders, including Iran and Israel, while global powers would benefit from stable energy prices, secure trade routes, and reduced military expenditure in the region. Such an approach would promote shared stability and mutual economic benefit rather than political victory for any single country.

A long-term solution to instability in the Middle-East must include the protection and neutral management of ma-

for maritime trade routes, particularly the Strait of Hormuz. Since a significant portion of global oil supply passes through this route, any conflict in this area immediately affects global energy prices and economic stability. One possible long-term approach would be an internationally supervised maritime security arrangement to ensure that shipping routes remain open and neutral despite political tensions. Multinational naval cooperation could focus on protecting commercial shipping rather than promoting national strategic interests. Diversification of energy transport through pipelines and alternative routes could also reduce dependence on a single chokepoint. Over time, the

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Visited the Udaan Yatri café at Mumbai Airport and had chai for just ₹10. Was flying to Delhi and wanted chai before the flight. Spoke to several travellers while I was there. All of them happy, all of them saying the same thing: Easy on the pocket, good service, value for money. Affordable airport food is possible. And this is proof!**

~ Raghav Chadha, MP (RS), Spokesperson AAP



global shift towards renewable energy may further reduce dependence on Middle-Eastern oil. Ultimately, long-term peace in the region will depend on economic development, regional cooperation, political stability, and integration into the global economy.

For countries such as India and other major economies, stability in the Middle-East is crucial for energy security, stable trade, and sustained economic growth. Many countries rely heavily on oil imports from the region, and any disruption in supply directly affects inflation, currency stability, and overall economic performance. India and other global powers should therefore pursue balanced foreign policies that maintain diplomatic relations with all major Middle-Eastern countries while supporting peaceful conflict resolution through international institutions. Building strategic petroleum reserves, investing in renewable energy, and diversifying energy import sources are important policy measures to reduce vulnerability to geopolitical shocks. Global leaders must recognise that conflict in the Middle-East is not merely a regional issue but a global economic and security challenge. Long-term peace would benefit all countries through stable energy prices, secure trade routes, and economic stability. Sustainable peace will depend on diplomacy, economic cooperation, maritime security, and mutual security guarantees among nations.

(The author is a Bangalore based educationist, management scientist and an independent researcher)

### 2026 IRAN WAR



## 'Give us 5 more years, we will end infiltration': Amit Shah

**GUWAHATI**

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday intensified the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s campaign in Assam, asserting that the issue of illegal infiltration would be fully addressed if the party is returned to power.

Addressing an election rally in Sonitpur, Shah urged voters to back BJP candidate Ashok Singhal in the upcoming Assembly polls.

Apologising for his delayed arrival due to inclement weather, Shah said he had to travel by road after helicopter services were disrupted, thanking the gathering for their patience.

Making a strong electoral pitch, he appealed to voters to strengthen the BJP-led NDA government in the state. "Ensure his victory and reinforce the BJP-led government in Assam," he said.

Drawing a contrast with the



tenure of the Indian National Congress, Shah claimed that insurgency had once dominated the state but had since declined under BJP rule.

"There was a time when Assam was plagued by insurgency. The BJP government has worked decisively to bring peace and stability," he said.

Focusing on illegal infiltration, Shah said significant progress had been made but more time was needed to fully resolve the issue.

"Ten years have passed, and we have worked relentlessly to curb infiltration. Give us five more years, and we will put a complete stop to it," he said, adding that around 1.25 lakh acres of land had been freed from encroachment.

The Home Minister also targeted Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Gaurav Gogoi, accusing them of opposing measures aimed at tackling infiltra-

tion.

Highlighting the BJP government's development initiatives, Shah pointed to infrastructure growth and welfare schemes in Assam. He cited programmes such as the Orunodoi Scheme, which provides financial assistance to women, and the Chief Minister's Jibon Prerona Scheme aimed at supporting young people.

He also mentioned efforts to expand healthcare and education infrastructure, including new medical colleges and model schools, as well as initiatives to grant land rights to tea garden communities.

Reiterating his message, Shah said the state's development trajectory was driven by BJP governance. "With your support, we will take Assam's progress even further," he added.

Polling for the Assam Assembly elections is scheduled for April 9.

### Manipur to develop 143 border villages under Vibrant Villages Programme-II

**IMPHAL**

The Manipur government has announced plans to accelerate development across 143 border villages under the Centre's Vibrant Villages Programme-II, with a focus on strengthening infrastructure, connectivity and essential services.

Addressing a state-level workshop in Imphal, the Chief Minister said the initiative is aimed at improving living standards and expanding livelihood opportunities in remote settlements along international borders.

Emphasising the strategic importance of the programme, Singh noted that Manipur shares a sensitive international boundary with Myanmar, making focused development in frontier areas a priority.

He also expressed gratitude to Amit Shah for bringing five districts—Tengnoupal district, Kamjong district, Ukhrul district, Chandel district and Churachandpur district—under the ambit of the scheme.

Officials said the identified villages will benefit from improved road networks, upgraded infrastructure and enhanced delivery of public services, alongside measures to strengthen local livelihoods.

Calling for coordinated execution, the Chief Minister stressed the need for close collaboration among the Planning Department, district administrations and security forces to ensure timely implementation.

He added that the programme must remain inclusive and reach all sections of society, expressing hope that the workshop would enhance inter-departmental coordination and expedite development efforts in border regions.

### 173 candidates in fray as TTAADC polls in Tripura set for multi-corner contest



**AGARTALA**

Elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) are poised for a multi-cornered contest, with 173 candidates in the fray for 28 seats ahead of polling on April 12.

In Agartala, officials said all major political parties have fielded candidates across constituencies, intensifying the electoral battle in the tribal council.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Tipra Motha Party (TMP) are contesting all 28 seats independently after seat-sharing talks failed. The Communist

Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) has fielded candidates in 27 seats, while the Indian National Congress is contesting 25.

Adding to the crowded field, the BJP's ally, the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), has put up candidates in 24 constituencies.

State Election Commission secretary Anurag Sen said 181 nominations were initially filed, with eight candidates withdrawing by the March 28 deadline, bringing the final number of contestants to 173.

The TTAADC electorate stands at 9,62,798 voters, making the polls a key political test in Tripura's tribal regions.

In the 2021 elections, the Tipra Motha Party won 18 seats to form the council, while the BJP-then allied with the IPFT-secured nine seats.

Polling for the 28-member council will be held on April 12, with counting scheduled for April 17.

### BJP eyes third term in Assam as Nitin Nabin attacks Congress 'black chapter'

**GUWAHATI**

With the Assam Assembly elections approaching, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has intensified its campaign in Upper Assam, projecting confidence of securing a third consecutive term in power.

Addressing a rally at Ledo Bazaar High School ground in Margherita on March 29, BJP national president Nitin Nabin launched a sharp attack on the Indian National Congress, describing its past rule in the state as a "black chapter".

Speaking in support of sitting MLA and party candidate Bhaskar Sharma, Nabin accused the Congress of engaging in "vote bank politics" and failing to deliver development during its tenure.

"We need to remember the black chapter. There was no talk of development then—only violence and agitation," he said, recalling his visits to the state over the past decade.



Contrasting past governance with the present, Nabin asserted that Assam has witnessed significant transformation since the BJP came to power in

2016. He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for bringing "peace, stability and

development" to the state.

Projecting confidence ahead of the polls, Nabin said the party is poised for a hat-trick victory. "We formed the first government under Sarbananda Sonowal, followed by Himanta Biswa Sarma. This time, we will form our third government under his leadership," he said.

Making a strong pitch for Sharma's re-election, Nabin urged voters to ensure a decisive mandate, stressing that continuity in leadership is essential for sustained development in Margherita. The BJP leader also raised issues of national security and illegal infiltration, reiterating the party's focus on safeguarding the interests of the state and the country.

Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao also joined the campaign, adding momentum to the party's outreach in the constituency. Polling for the 126-member Assam Assembly is scheduled for April 9, with counting of votes set for May 4.

### Manipur trans groups protest 'regressive' Bill, allege exclusion of indigenous identities

**IMPHAL**

Protests broke out in Imphal on Sunday as transgender rights groups opposed the proposed Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill, 2026, calling it "regressive" and exclusionary.

Members of the All Manipur Nupi Maanbi Association (AMANA), along with Empowering Trans Ability (ETA) and the All Transmen Association (ATMA), staged demonstrations across the city, raising slogans and holding placards against the Bill.

The protest began with a flash mob at Mao Market before shifting to a sit-in at Keishampat Leimajam Leikai, where demonstrators continued their agitation.

In a joint statement, the groups alleged that the amendment undermines the identity, autonomy and



constitutional protections of transgender persons, particularly those belonging to indigenous communities in the Northeast. They warned that the proposed provisions could restrict access to healthcare, legal recognition and social safeguards.

A key concern raised by the protesters was what they described as the exclusion of region-specific identities. While the Bill recognises communities such as Hijra, Jogta,

Kinner and Aravani, it does not acknowledge local identities like Nupi Maanbi and Nupa Maanba, which activists termed a "systematic erasure" of Manipur's socio-cultural realities. AMANA Secretary Shanta Khurai said the proposed law contradicts the landmark NALSA v. Union of India ruling, which affirmed the right to self-identification of gender.

"The Bill narrows down trans-

gender identities and recognises only a few socio-cultural groups. Our lived experiences in Manipur are different, and indigenous identities must be acknowledged," Khurai said. She further criticised the legislation for "pathologising" gender identity, arguing that identity is deeply personal and cannot be restricted through rigid legal or medical frameworks.

Despite the strong opposition, the protest remained peaceful. Organisers said the movement would intensify in the coming days, with plans to file a legal challenge and expand outreach efforts through student groups and civil society.

The demonstrations come amid a broader national debate over the implications of the proposed amendment, with activists across regions raising concerns about inclusivity and constitutional safeguards.

### PM Modi hails Nagaland's Morung system, links tradition with modern learning



**GUWAHATI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday praised the traditional Morung system of Nagaland, describing it as a model that blends cultural heritage with modern education and can help spark interest in subjects like mathematics and science among children.

Speaking during his monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat, Modi said the Naga community continues to preserve its traditions while adapting to contemporary educational needs.

He highlighted the Morung system—a traditional community-based learning model where elders pass on knowledge, history and life skills to younger generations through storytelling, folk songs and experiential learning.

"Over time, this system has evolved into a concept of education that can also generate interest in subjects like mathematics and science," the Prime Minister said.

Often described as a form of communal dormitory, the Mo-

run has historically functioned as a centre for cultural transmission, social learning and skill-building among Naga youth.

Modi also cited an example from Chizami, where women have collectively preserved over 150 varieties of traditional seeds through a community-run seed bank.

The preserved seeds include rice, millet, maize, pulses, vegetables and medicinal herbs, reflecting a grassroots effort to safeguard biodiversity and traditional agricultural knowledge.

Calling the initiative a model of sustainability and climate resilience, the Prime Minister said such community-driven efforts demonstrate how traditional knowledge systems can offer solutions to modern challenges like climate change.

"Sometimes, the answers to global challenges lie within our own traditions and collective practices," he said, urging citizens to share similar local initiatives that combine heritage with innovation.

### Assam polls: Congress rolls out 'five guarantees', promises justice in Zubeen case within 100 days

**GUWAHATI**

The Indian National Congress on Sunday unveiled its manifesto for the Assam Assembly elections, outlining five key guarantees centred on welfare, social security and indigenous rights, as party chief Mallikarjun Kharge led a major campaign rally in Nowboicha.

Addressing the gathering, Kharge said the manifesto had been prepared through public consultation and presented it as a roadmap for inclusive governance. "This manifesto has something for everyone," he said, urging voters to back the party in the upcoming polls.

At the core of the Congress pitch are five headline guarantees. The party promised an unconditional monthly financial assistance of Rs 50,000 to women for entrepreneurship, positioning it as a contrast to what it described as conditional welfare transfers under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"Congress will not ask questions before extending support. Financial assistance will be unconditional, and we will do even more if possible," Kharge said.

The manifesto also proposes a cashless health insurance cover of Rs 25 lakh per family, drawing parallels with similar schemes implemented in Congress-ruled



states. In a politically significant assurance, Kharge vowed that a Congress government would deliver justice in the case related to Zubeen Garg within 100 days. "We will ensure the perpetrators are brought to book. Justice will be delivered within 100 days," he asserted.

The party further pledged to grant permanent land rights to 10 lakh indigenous people, replacing the cur-

rent system of annual land allotments. Kharge said the move would end bureaucratic hurdles and provide long-term security to beneficiaries.

Additionally, the Congress announced a monthly allowance of Rs 1,250 for senior citizens, aiming to strengthen social protection measures.

Sharpening his attack on the ruling dispensation, Kharge accused Chief

Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of fostering a climate of fear and centralising power. "People are being intimidated. Those not aligned with the government face difficulties. Do not be afraid of such politics," he said.

The manifesto launch marks a crucial phase in the Congress campaign, with its "five guarantees" forming the backbone of its electoral outreach in Assam ahead of polling.

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## “PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana impact being seen across every corner”: PM Modi



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday highlighted the impact of the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, sharing success stories of the initiative, which was launched two years ago.

Addressing the countrymen in the 132nd episode of the Mann Ki Baat programme, the PM emphasised that the transformation due to the scheme can be witnessed in every city in the country, no matter the size.

“You will see a large number of houses with solar panels installed on their rooftops. A few years ago, this was visible only on a handful of homes, but today the impact of PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana is being seen across every corner of the country,” he stated.

Prime Minister Modi shared the success story of Payal Munjpara from Gujarat's Surendranagar District, who, through the “Surya Pahal” initiative, completed a four-month solar PV technician course. “She is establishing

her identity as a solar entrepreneur. She works on solar rooftop installations in nearby districts,” he said, highlighting that she can earn thousands each month.

Similarly, PM mentioned Arun Kumar, who is from Meerut and has turned into an “energy provider,” selling surplus electricity to boost his income. “Recently, Arun Kumar participated in an event held in Delhi and shared his experiences. He mentioned that he is not only saving on electricity bills but is also selling his surplus electricity,” he said.

PM Modi cited the case of Murlidhar ji from Jaipur, who swapped his diesel pump for a solar-powered one to decrease the cost of farming. “When he adopted a solar pump, his entire method of farming changed. Now he no longer worries about fuel, irrigation is done on time, and his annual income has also increased,” he added.

Moreover, Prime Minister Modi highlighted that the benefits of the scheme are effective-

ly reaching the North East, particularly the Reang tribe in Tripura.

Highlighting that they previously grappled with electricity issues, he noted that the scheme has brought forth an illuminating impact, stating, “Children there are now able to study even after evening. People can charge their mobiles, and the social life of the village has also changed.”

PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana was launched on February 13, 2024. The scheme offers a subsidy of up to 40% to households, making renewable energy more affordable and accessible.

It aims to provide relief to middle and poor-families from expensive electricity bills by installing PM Surya Ghar solar panels in 1 crore homes across the country. The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana campaign will help maintain environmental balance by promoting the Green Energy Mission and will also create new employment opportunities.

PURULIA

A day after Union Home Minister Amit Shah released a political ‘chargesheet’ against the TMC government, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said he should be chargesheeted “for his past deeds”, albeit without directly naming him, and alleged the BJP would stop the ‘Lakshmir Bhandar’ scheme if it comes to power.

She also took umbrage over Shah’s apparent remarks about the injury she suffered during the 2021 Assembly polls and asked him to check the medical report, which detailed the extent of the damage to her leg.

While releasing a political “chargesheet” against the TMC government a day ago, Shah had accused the ruling party’s supremo of having “always played the politics of the victim card.”

“Sometimes she talks about her injury; sometimes she abuses the Election Commission. But the people of West Bengal now understand her victim card politics very well,” he had said.

On Sunday, Banerjee, while canvassing for Sandhya Rani Tudu, her party’s candidate in Purulia district’s Manbazar, said, “They are saying that I roam around with a bandage during the polls. I have repeatedly returned from the brink of death. Go and check the report of the doctor.”

“Did you deliberately injure my leg during the 2021 elections? I campaigned in a wheelchair. Are you planning to kill me?” she said, sharpening her attack against the BJP.

Banerjee, however, did not name Shah while making the allegation.

About Shah’s ‘chargesheet’ against her government, Banerjee said, “A big leader came from Delhi yesterday and filed a chargesheet against the TMC.”

“Who are you to file a chargesheet? You should be chargesheet-



ed,” she said while listing several past allegations against Shah.

Referring to the deportation of Indians from the US last year by the Donald Trump administration as part of its crackdown on illegal immigrants, the chief minister targeted the Union home minister, saying, “Where were you when Gujaratis were being pushed back from America with ropes around their waists?”

Notably, many deportees had claimed that their hands and legs were cuffed while they were pushed back from the US and were unshackled only after they landed in India.

Meanwhile, Banerjee asserted that she is effectively the candidate for all seats and urged the electorate to place their trust in her leadership.

“You don’t have to look at who the candidate is. I am the candidate. Place your trust in me and cast your vote. Trinamool will form the government no matter how many conspiracies they hatch,” she said.

“Let there be no return of violence in Jangalmahal. If money

is offered before elections, don’t take it and don’t vote. We do not want bloodshed, we want peace,” Banerjee told the gathering. She also rejected the BJP’s claims of demographic changes in Bengal as lies.

Banerjee accused Shah and the BJP of attempting to destroy the democratic setup of the country, as she alleged that a conspiracy was being hatched to conduct repolls in booths under areas considered the TMC’s bastion. “I will frustrate Delhi’s conspiracy. I do not want any power. I just want the people to be with me.”

“Daydreaming in broad daylight”: TMC reacts to Amit Shah’s claim on West Bengal elections Addressing a rally in Purulia district’s Manbazar, she listed her government’s welfare initiatives and warned the gathering that the BJP would discontinue the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme for women and put restrictions on people’s dietary preferences if it comes to power following the polls.

“Fish is not eaten in BJP-ruled states. If the BJP comes to power,

people will not be able to eat fish, meat and eggs. They will stop the ‘Lakshmir Bhandar’ scheme,” she said.

The TMC supremo alleged that the BJP “doesn’t believe in any religion.”

She also claimed that Bengali-speaking people are attacked in other states and that the ruling party at the Centre grabs power by “inciting riots.”

“These people incite riots. They come to power by inciting riots, they come to power by killing people... Adivasis (tribals) are attacked mostly in BJP-ruled states. Bengali-speaking people are attacked/tortured in BJP-ruled states. But here in Bengal, we do not oppress anyone,” she said.

Banerjee further alleged that 1.3 crore names of voters have been deleted through the SIR ahead of the assembly polls.

Later, at a rally in Bankura district’s Raipur, she highlighted the state government’s development initiatives and launched a broadside against the Central government.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Iran warns US against ground attack; says ‘our men are waiting’ to set American soldiers ‘on fire’



TEHRAN

The speaker of Iran’s parliament accused the United States on Sunday of plotting a ground attack despite publicly pushing for a negotiated deal, after a US warship with around 3,500 military personnel arrived in the Middle East.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf’s comments came after more than a month of aerial bombardments of Iran by US and Israeli forces, and as key regional players held talks in Pakistan.

The war has escalated into a regional conflagration as Iran has retaliated with attacks on Gulf states and the Strait of Hormuz shipping lane, sending energy markets into a tailspin and threatening the world economy.

“The enemy publicly sends messages of negotiation and dialogue while secretly planning a ground attack,” Ghalibaf said in a statement carried by the official IRNA news agency.

“Our men are waiting for the arrival of the American soldiers on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional allies once and for all,” he

added.

Ghalibaf called for unity among Iranians, saying the war was “at its most critical stage.”

Weeks of unrelenting strikes have taken a heavy toll on ordinary people in the country.

“I miss a peaceful night’s sleep,” an artist in Tehran told AFP, saying night-time strikes were “so intense it felt like all of Tehran was shaking.” Farzaneh, a 62-year-old woman in Iran’s western city of Ahvaz contacted by AFP from Paris, said: “People wake up each day worried about an uncertain future.”

A university in Iran’s central city of Isfahan said it was hit by US-Israeli airstrikes on Sunday for the second time since the war erupted.

With Houthis joining West Asia war, Red Sea risks spike even as Iran disrupts Hormuz shipping

In Tehran, the Qatari news channel Al Araby said an Israeli missile hit the building housing its office.

Footage from inside the office showed broken windows and shat-

tered glass.

Outside, people could be seen clearing large piles of rubble.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly spoken of diplomatic contacts with Iran, although these claims have been denied by Tehran.

Pakistan, acting as a go-between for Washington and Tehran, hosted foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt in Islamabad for talks on the crisis.

The four-way meeting would include discussions on “a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region”, Pakistan’s foreign ministry has said.

Despite making diplomatic overtures including proposing a 15-point plan to end the war, the US has also been sending more military assets into the region.

The USS Tripoli, an amphibious assault ship carrying around 3,500 Marines and sailors, arrived in the Middle East on Friday.

The Washington Post reported the Pentagon was preparing plans

for weeks of ground operations -- potentially including raids on sites near the Strait of Hormuz -- though US President Donald Trump has yet to approve any deployment.

Iran says it has closed the Strait of Hormuz, a vital shipping lane which previously accounted for a quarter of the world’s seaborne oil trade and a fifth of liquefied natural gas shipments, to vessels from hostile nations.

Iranian forces said they had fired a volley of missiles and drones at plants belonging to two of the world’s largest aluminium producers in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, targeting what they described as industries linked to the US military.

Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA) said an Iranian attack wounded six and caused significant damage to its plant, while Bahraini state media said two Aluminium Bahrain (ALBA) employees were injured in a second attack.

In Israel, thick black smoke could be seen rising from an industrial complex in the Negev desert in images released by the Israel Fire and Rescue Authority.

The military said the impact may have been caused by missile shrapnel, shortly after it detected a new barrage fired from Iran.

As the spectre of a widening conflict loomed, Yemen’s Houthis on Saturday claimed their first attack of the war, firing what they described as “a barrage of cruise missiles and drones” at strategic sites in Israel.

The attacks raised concern about the war spreading to the Red Sea, with Saudi Arabia rerouting much of its oil exports there to avoid Hormuz.

During Israel’s genocidal war on Gaza, the Houthis, proclaiming solidarity with the Palestinians, attacked shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, forcing companies to take costly detours.

WASHINGTON

Pakistan continues to shelter terrorist organisations on its soil, including groups targeting India, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, according to a report titled “Terrorist and Other Militant Groups in Pakistan” tabled in the US Congress.

According to the report of Congressional Research Service published on March 25, the report states that 12 of the 15 listed groups are designated as Foreign Terrorist Organisations under US law are driven by Islamist extremist ideology.

The report classifies these groups into five categories: India and Kashmir-oriented, globally oriented, Afghanistan-oriented, domestically oriented and sectarian anti-Shia. It identifies groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Harakat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, Harakat-ul-Mujahideen and Hizbul Mujahideen as operating from Pakistani territory.

“Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) was formed in 1989—reportedly as the militant wing of Pakistan’s largest Islamist political party—and designated as an FTO in 2017. It is one of the largest and oldest militant groups operating in Indian administered Kashmir. HM’s cadre of up to 1,500 is composed primarily of ethnic Kashmiris who seek independence for Kashmir or annexation of Indian administered Kashmir into Pakistan,” the report added.

November 26, 2008 (Mumbai terror attacks, 166 killed): A group of 10 Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists targeted civilians at multiple sites in Mumbai, including the Chhatrapati Shivaji railway station, Leopold Café, two hospitals, and a theatre. While most of the attacks ended within a few hours, the terror continued

to unfold at three locations where hostages were taken—the Nariman House, Oberoi Trident and Taj hotel.

The report further stated that Harakat-ul-Mujahideen, despite being designated as an FTO in 1997, it operates mainly from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and some Pakistani cities, and was responsible for the 1999 hijacking of IC 814.

“Led by now incarcerated Hafiz Saeed and based in Pakistan’s Punjab province and in Pakistan-administered (Azad) Kashmir, it has changed its name to Jamaat-ud-Dawa to circumvent sanctions. With several thousand fighters, LET was responsible for the mass-scale 2008 terrorist assault on Mumbai, India, as well as several other high-profile attacks,” the report said.

The report also states that Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM) was founded in 2000 by Kashmiri militant leader Masood Azhar and designated as an FTO in 2001. Along with LET, it was responsible for a 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, among numerous others. Based in both Punjab and in Azad Kashmir, JEM’s roughly 500 armed supporters operate in India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan while seeking annexation of Indian-administered Kashmir into Pakistan. JEM has openly declared war on the United States. Among globally oriented groups, the report names Al-Qaeda, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent and Islamic State Khorasan Province. Afghanistan-focused groups include the Taliban and the Haqqani Network.

November 26, 2008 (Mumbai terror attacks, 166 killed): A group of 10 Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists targeted civilians at multiple sites in Mumbai, including the Chhatrapati Shivaji

railway station, Leopold Café, two hospitals, and a theatre. While most of the attacks ended within a few hours, the terror continued to unfold at three locations where hostages were taken—the Nariman House, Oberoi Trident and Taj hotel.

The report says Pakistan has been identified as a base of operations or target for several militant groups since the 1980s. It notes that a 2014 National Action Plan aimed to prevent armed militias, but operations have failed to eliminate them.

Citing the US State Department’s Country Reports on Terrorism 2023, it states, “Pakistan took some steps to curtail the activities of terrorist groups” in 2023.

“Pakistan took some steps to curtail the activities of terrorist groups” in 2023. It also reported that some madrassas (religious schools) taught doctrines that could lead to greater acceptance of violent extremist ideology. Although major cities such as Islamabad and Lahore have been targeted, the great majority of terrorism-related fatalities in 2025 were concentrated in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP, 68 per cent) and Balochistan provinces (28 per cent), especially near the border with Afghanistan.”

In 2018, the Financial Action Task Force placed Pakistan on its grey list for deficiencies in countering money laundering and terror financing. It was removed in late 2022 after completing required action items.

The report states that Pakistan has seen a rise in terrorism in recent years, with deaths increasing from 365 in 2019 to 4,001 in 2025, the highest in 11 years.

The Congressional Research Service is an independent research arm of the US Congress, and its reports are not official positions of the Congress.

## ASSAM'S WELFARE POLITICS: CONTINUITY, CREDIT, AND THE BATTLE OVER NARRATIVE

Assam's welfare debate has become one of the most contested spaces in its contemporary political discourse-but also one of the most selectively remembered. As electoral stakes rise and competing narratives harden, welfare is increasingly framed as either a hallmark innovation of the present or a reckless slide into populism. Both claims, however, obscure a deeper truth: welfare in Assam is not a recent invention, nor is it an ideological aberration. It is a long-evolving governance framework-one that successive governments have shaped, expanded, and rebranded to suit changing political and administrative contexts.

What is unfolding today is less a transformation of intent and more a contest over ownership.

For decades, welfare has been central to how the state has navigated its structural vulnerabilities-economic fragility, recurring floods, agrarian distress, and uneven development. Governments led by the Indian National Congress before 2016 relied heavily on social safety nets to stabilise rural livelihoods. Schemes like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act ensured wage employment during lean agricultural cycles, while the Public Distribution System provided subsidised food grains to vulnerable households. These programmes were not merely policy instruments-they were embedded in the survival strategies of large sections of Assam's population.

In that sense, welfare was never optional. It was structural.

Yet, the current debate often treats welfare expansion under the National Democratic Alliance as either a sharp departure or an excessive escalation. This framing misses the more significant shift: the transformation in how welfare is delivered, communicated, and politically leveraged.

The post-2016 period, under the NDA, has seen a deliberate move towards targeted and technology-driven welfare delivery. The Orunodoi Scheme, which now reaches over 25 lakh women, exemplifies this approach. By transferring financial assistance directly into bank accounts, the scheme bypasses layers of administrative leakage that historically plagued welfare distribution. It also personalises the benefit-linking it directly to identifiable beneficiaries rather than abstract categories.

This shift aligns with broader national trends, where Direct Benefit Transfers (DBT), financial inclusion drives, and digital governance platforms have reshaped welfare architecture. The emphasis is no longer just on allocation, but on delivery precision and visibility.

But visibility comes with consequences.

Unlike earlier regimes, where welfare programmes often operated with limited public projection, contemporary schemes are deeply embedded in political messaging. They are branded, advertised, and associated with leadership in ways that make them both more recognisable and more contestable. Welfare is no longer just administered-it is narrated.

This narrative shift has intensified scrutiny. Critics argue that highly visible schemes risk blurring the line between governance and electoral strategy, turning welfare into a tool of political consolidation. Supporters counter that improved delivery and transparency justify the prominence given to such programmes.

Both arguments hold some weight. But neither fully captures the continuity that underpins



Assam's welfare trajectory.

The reality is that welfare has always functioned in a dual role: as an economic buffer and as a source of political legitimacy. Governments invest in welfare not only because it addresses immediate needs, but also because it reinforces their connection with voters. This was true under Congress-led administrations; it remains true under the NDA.

What has changed is the scale and sophistication of political communication.

In an era of social media amplification, targeted outreach, and real-time feedback, welfare schemes are no longer quiet administrative interventions. They are central to how governments construct their public image. The result is a sharper, more polarised discourse-where welfare is either celebrated as transformative or dismissed as populist excess.

This binary framing, however, limits meaningful evaluation.

A more useful question is not whether welfare should exist-it must, given Assam's socio-economic realities-but how effectively it is designed and implemented. The state continues to allocate a substantial share of its budget-often over one-third to social and welfare sectors. This raises critical concerns about fiscal sustainability, prioritisation, and long-term outcomes.

Are current schemes enabling upward mobility, or are they merely alleviating immediate distress?

Do they complement investments in infrastructure, education, and employment, or risk crowding them out?

Are targeting mechanisms inclusive and accurate, or do they create new forms of exclusion?

These are complex questions that require data-driven answers. Yet, they are often overshadowed by the politics of attribution-who gets credit, who bears blame.

This politics of attribution is where memory becomes contested.

Acknowledging that welfare pre-dates the current regime complicates political messaging. It disrupts claims of novelty and forces a recognition of continuity. Conversely, ignoring recent improvements in delivery overlooks genuine administrative advancements. Both tendencies reflect a broader discomfort with nuanced analysis in a highly

competitive political environment.

The consequence is a debate that prioritises narrative over substance. It is also important to recognise that welfare alone does not determine electoral outcomes in Assam. Voter behaviour in the state has historically been shaped by a combination of factors-identity politics, regional aspirations, infrastructure development, leadership credibility, and governance performance. Welfare is a significant component, but it operates within a larger matrix of considerations.

To attribute electoral success or failure solely to welfare schemes is to underestimate the complexity of voter decision-making.

Assam's electorate is neither passive nor easily swayed by single-issue politics. Welfare benefits may influence perceptions, but they do not override broader assessments of governance. Roads, connectivity, law and order, and economic opportunities remain equally critical.

This layered reality makes the current polarisation around welfare even more puzzling.

Rather than engaging with the full spectrum of governance, the debate often narrows down to a single dimension-either celebrating or critiquing welfare in isolation. This not only oversimplifies policy evaluation but also limits the scope of public discourse.

A more productive approach would be to situate welfare within the broader development framework. How do welfare schemes interact with economic growth strategies? Do they support or hinder long-term structural transformation? Are they adaptive to changing socio-economic conditions?

Such questions move the conversation beyond political binaries and towards policy effectiveness.

There is also a need to examine the administrative capacity behind welfare delivery. Targeting, verification, grievance redressal, and monitoring mechanisms determine whether schemes achieve their intended outcomes. Digital tools have improved efficiency, but they also introduce new challenges-data accuracy, technological access, and exclusion errors.

These operational dimensions rarely receive the attention they deserve.

Instead, the focus remains on headline numbers-beneficiaries covered,

funds disbursed, schemes launched. While these metrics are important, they do not capture the full picture. Impact assessment requires deeper analysis-household-level changes, income stability, health outcomes, and educational attainment.

Without such evaluation, welfare debates risk becoming performative.

Assam's experience also highlights the importance of adaptability. Welfare needs in the state are not static. Climate change, migration patterns, and economic shifts continuously reshape vulnerabilities. Policies must evolve accordingly, balancing immediate relief with long-term resilience.

This requires moving beyond short-term political cycles.

In the end, the central issue is not whether welfare should be expanded or curtailed. It is how to design a system that is both responsive and sustainable-one that addresses immediate needs without compromising future growth.

For that, the debate must move past selective memory.

Recognising continuity does not diminish current achievements; it contextualises them. Acknowledging past efforts does not weaken present critiques; it strengthens them by grounding them in historical perspective. Assam's welfare trajectory is not a series of disconnected episodes-it is a continuum shaped by multiple governments, each building on what came before.

Understanding that continuum is essential for informed policy discussion.

As Assam approaches another electoral cycle, welfare will undoubtedly remain at the centre of political messaging. Schemes will be highlighted, promises will be made, and narratives will be contested. This is both inevitable and legitimate in a democratic system.

But beyond the rhetoric, there is a need for a more grounded conversation-one that evaluates welfare not as a political tool alone, but as a critical component of governance.

Because ultimately, the measure of welfare is not in its visibility or its political resonance. It is in its outcomes-whether it reduces vulnerability, enhances opportunity, and contributes to a more stable and equitable society.

That is a standard that transcends political cycles-and one that Assam's welfare debate must strive to meet.

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