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## PERSPECTIVE

Listen to the advice of older people. Not because they're right, but because they have the most experience being wrong.

## UPPL chief Pramod Boro elected to Rajya Sabha unopposed

KOKRAJHAR

President of the United People's Party Liberal, Pramod Boro, has been elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Assam, marking a significant political milestone for the Bodo community.

His election was confirmed after the scrutiny of nomination papers for the three Rajya Sabha seats from the state.

Boro's candidature received the backing of legislators from the UPPL and its allies, including the Asom Gana Parishad, while members of the All India United Democratic Front also signed as proposers. According to sources, his nomination secured more than the required number of supporting MLAs.

The development has been widely described as a historic moment for the Bodo community, which sees Boro's presence in Parliament as an opportunity to raise key regional issues.

One of the major priorities expected to be pursued in the Upper House is the proposed 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill of India. The bill seeks to increase the number of constituencies in the Bodoland Territorial Council from the existing 40 to 60.

Following the announcement of his election, Boro received a grand welcome in Kokrajhar. Supporters and party workers gathered in large numbers to celebrate the occasion with traditional dances, bursting of firecrackers and showering flower petals on the leader.

The festive reception reflected widespread enthusiasm among residents and supporters, many of whom described the victory as a proud moment for both the region and the Bodo community.

### WHO SAID WHAT



**CISF has been entrusted with the role of a nodal agency for drone security, and the MHA has decided to foster a separate vertical for this cause. ~ Amit Shah, Union Home Minister**

# Assam woman granted Indian citizenship under CAA after two years in detention

GUWAHATI

A 59-year-old woman from Assam's Cachar district has been granted Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) after spending nearly two years in a detention centre following her declaration as a foreigner.

Dipali Das, a resident of Hawaithang in the Dholai Assembly constituency of Cachar district, was earlier declared an illegal migrant by a Foreigners' Tribunal in February 2019.

Following the tribunal's decision, she was taken into custody on May 10, 2019, and lodged at the detention centre in Silchar. She remained there for nearly two years before being released on bail on May 17, 2021, after a directive from the Supreme Court of India, according to her lawyer Dharmananda Deb.

Deb said Dipali originally hailed from Dippur village under Dhirai po-



lice station in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. She married Abhimanyu Das of Parai village in Habiganj district in 1987. The couple entered India in 1988 and later settled in Cachar district, where they have been living since.

Her citizenship status came under scrutiny in 2013 after a police inquiry was initiated. According to Deb, a chargesheet prepared by police officer Ajmal Hussain Laskar on July 2, 2013, stated that Dipali was originally from Baniachong in Bangladesh and had entered India illegally after March 1971.

Under Assam's legal framework, individuals who entered India after March 25, 1971, without valid documentation are treated as illegal migrants.

Deb said the 2013 police chargesheet later became a crucial document in Dipali's application for citizenship under the CAA.

"To apply under the CAA, appli-

cants must provide proof that they migrated from Bangladesh, Pakistan or Afghanistan. Many applicants struggle to produce such evidence, but in Dipali's case the police chargesheet clearly confirmed her origin and was accepted as valid proof," he explained.

The Foreigners' Tribunal that declared her an illegal migrant on February 5, 2019, had ruled that she had no legal rights in India, including the right to vote.

After being released on bail in 2021, Dipali applied for citizenship under the CAA. Although the law was passed in 2019, its implementation rules were notified only in 2024, allowing applications to be processed formally.

Social activist Kamal Chakraborty said Dipali's first hearing took place on February 24 last year at the office of the Superintendent of Post Offices in Silchar, which processes such applications. Two more hearings

followed, after which her documents were uploaded to the Ministry of Home Affairs portal.

Officials appointed by the MHA later conducted field verification at Dipali's residence in Hawaithang on May 12. After completing the verification process, the report was submitted to the government.

Dipali attended a final session at the Superintendent of Post Offices office on May 25, and on March 6 she was formally issued her citizenship certificate.

According to Chakraborty, Dipali is believed to be the first person in Assam who had earlier been declared a foreigner and detained to receive Indian citizenship under the CAA after being released on bail.

The citizenship certificate also brings relief to her family. Her children - Aditya, Arpita, Nivedita and Joyshree - can now rely on the document to support their own citizenship claims if required.

## Manipur govt to extend full support for timely completion of Imphal-Jiribam railway project: CM

IMPHAL

The Manipur government will provide all necessary support to ensure the timely completion of the ambitious railway project linking Imphal with the national rail network, Chief Minister Yumkham Khemchand Singh said.

The chief minister was referring to the 111-km railway line connecting Imphal with Jiribam, a border town adjoining Assam's Cachar district. The project, estimated to cost over Rs 22,000 crore, is expected to be completed by 2028.

Singh made the remarks after holding a meeting with officials of the Northeast Frontier Railway, including General Manager (Construction) Ashish Bansal, at the Chief Minister's Secretariat on Friday night.

According to the chief minister, railway officials briefed him on the latest progress of the Imphal railway line and discussed various aspects related to the implementation of the project.



Describing the rail link as a landmark infrastructure initiative for the state, Singh said its completion would signifi-

cantly strengthen Manipur's transport network and enhance connectivity with the rest of the country.

"The government remains fully committed to extending all necessary support to ensure the timely completion of this vital project for the progress and prosperity of Manipur," the chief minister said.

He noted that once operational, the railway line would help improve the efficiency and security of supply chains, while also boosting economic activity in the region.

Singh further said the project would contribute to improving the ease of living for residents of the state and aligns with the broader development vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Imphal-Jiribam railway project is considered one of the most significant infrastructure undertakings in the Northeast and is expected to provide a major boost to connectivity, trade and overall economic development in Manipur upon completion.

## Mizoram to mandate UGC NET qualification for new college teachers: Minister

AIZAWL

The Mizoram government will no longer recruit college teachers who have not cleared the UGC National Eligibility Test (NET), Higher Education Minister Vanlalhlana informed the Mizoram Legislative Assembly.

Responding to a query in the Assembly, the minister said clearing the NET prescribed by the University Grants Commission will now be mandatory for appointment as college teachers in the state.

Vanlalhlana said the decision was difficult but necessary to improve the quality of higher education. He added that the practice of appointing teachers who have not qualified the NET will officially end from the close of March.

However, the minister clarified that teachers already serving without the qualification would not be penalised. He said they should not be blamed for the situation as NET was not

mentioned as a requirement in the recruitment advertisements when they were appointed. The qualification was made compulsory only later.

The minister also addressed issues concerning teachers recruited through the Mizoram Public Service Commission under the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) in 2019.

He said that after completing two years of service, these teachers were no longer considered part of the centrally sponsored scheme, and the previous state government had taken full responsibility for paying their salaries.

Vanlalhlana informed the House that the process to regularise these teachers is currently underway and has already been discussed by the Council of Ministers. While some administrative details are yet to be finalised, he assured that a decision regarding their permanent status will be announced soon.

## 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 customs, 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.

## Domestic LPG up by Rs 60, commercial cylinders costlier by Rs 114.5 from today

NEW DELHI

Prices of both domestic and commercial liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders have been increased with effect from March 7, according to updated rates released by Indian Oil Corporation.

Under the latest revision, the price of a 14.2-kg non-subsidised domestic LPG cylinder has been raised by Rs 60. In Delhi, the revised price now stands at Rs 913, up from the earlier Rs 853. The category is widely used by most households across the country, except beneficiaries of the government's subsidised scheme.

Industry officials said the price hike follows a sharp rise in global energy prices triggered by ongoing tensions in West Asia. Despite the increase, officials maintained that cooking gas prices in India remain relatively lower compared with several neighbouring countries.

The latest revision marks the second increase in domestic LPG prices in the past 11 months. The previous hike was implemented in April last year, when cylinder prices were raised by Rs 50.

Prices have also risen in other major cities. In Mumbai, a domestic LPG cylinder now costs Rs 912.50, compared with the earlier Rs 852.50. In Kolkata, the price has increased from Rs 879 to Rs 930, while in Chennai it has climbed from Rs 868.50 to Rs 928.50. LPG prices vary across states due to differences in local taxes such as value-added tax (VAT).

Beneficiaries of the government's flagship scheme, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, will continue to receive a subsidy of Rs 300 per 14.2-kg cylinder for up to 12 refills annually. The programme, launched in 2016, has provided free LPG connections to more than 10 crore households across the country.

Meanwhile, the price of commercial LPG cylinders used by hotels, restaurants and other businesses has also been increased. The cost of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder has been raised by Rs 114.5.

## NECTAR Plans 250 Organic Farming Clusters to Promote Scientific Agriculture in Northeast

GUWAHATI

Scientific organic farming in Northeast India is set to receive a major boost with plans to establish 250 organic-certified clusters under a new initiative aimed at strengthening sustainable agriculture and rural livelihoods in the region.

The programme is being implemented by the North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous body under the Department of Science and Technology, as part of its project titled "Promoting Scientific Organic Agriculture in Northeast India." The initiative is being supported under the PM-DevINE scheme of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). According to NECTAR Director General Arun K. Sarma, the three-year project aims to integrate modern scientific tools with traditional farming practices to improve agricultural productivity while maintaining ecological sustainability.

"The project envisions creating 250 organic-certified clusters across the Northeast, focusing on capacity building in organic farming, establishment of demonstration farm laboratories, supply of certified organic seeds and planting materials, and awareness on soil fertility among farmers," Sarma said.

As part of the programme, NECTAR has developed rapid soil testing kits known as VASUNDHARA to help farmers assess soil health. The kits can measure soil organic carbon and pH levels within 10 minutes and provide recommendations on bio-in-pot dosage for improving soil fertility. These kits are being manufac-

tured at NECTAR's campus in Shillong with technological support from the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. So far, around 25,000 kits have been distributed to farmers under the scheme. Sarma said the farmer-friendly technology is designed to empower cultivators with scientific knowledge and encourage the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. "This initiative not only helps farmers become self-reliant but also creates a paradigm shift in the adoption of scientific agriculture," he said.

The project also incorporates drone-based data management and digital agriculture systems to connect farms directly with markets while improving livelihood opportunities in remote and disadvantaged communities. Under the initiative, NECTAR plans to build a network of 250 "master trainers" across six Northeastern states. These include 88 trainers in Assam, 57 in Meghalaya, 15 in Arunachal Pradesh, 20 each in Mizoram and Nagaland, and 50 in Tripura.

Each master trainer will work with about 100 farmers cultivating a minimum of 100 acres of land. In Assam alone, this network is expected to connect 88 master trainers with around 8,800 farmers covering at least 8,800 acres of farmland.

These trainers will lead demonstration farming activities in their clusters through demonstration farm laboratories and create local networks of trainee farmers.

Through this model, the project aims to train nearly 25,000 farmers across the region and convert at least 25,000 acres of land into certified organic farmland.



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## THE GULF IN THE CROSSFIRE

**W**hat began as a United States-Israeli strike on Iranian targets has rapidly evolved into a wider regional confrontation. Missile exchanges across the Gulf, disruptions to the Strait of Hormuz, and attacks on strategic infrastructure now threaten global energy security and regional stability.

The military confrontation involving the United States, Israel, and Iran is entering a dangerous and uncertain phase as missile exchanges, retaliatory strikes, and strategic disruptions continue across the Gulf region. What began as a targeted military offensive has now expanded into a wider conflict affecting multiple states across the Gulf Cooperation Council, with direct implications for global energy security, regional stability, and international diplomacy.

The conflict began on 28 February 2026 when the United States and Israel launched coordinated strikes against Iranian targets. The operation initially targeted military installations and strategic facilities across Iran. Soon after, the strikes resulted in the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The incident transformed what may have been intended as a limited military action into a conflict of far broader political and strategic consequence. Iran responded with a series of retaliatory operations directed not only at Israeli territory but also at installations across the Gulf region associated with United States military deployments. As on 4 March 2026, missile and drone strikes are still occurring against strategic facilities across several Gulf Cooperation Council states, including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman. Major attacks are targeting locations hosting United States military infrastructure, including installations connected to United States Central Command (CENTCOM). Energy infrastructure and logistics installations across the region remain under repeated threat.

What began as a targeted military strike has now evolved into a regional conflict with direct consequences for global energy security and maritime stability. Missile exchanges across the Gulf are placing one of the world's most concentrated clusters of energy infrastructure under sustained threat.

The widening scope of the conflict reflects the dense strategic geography of the Gulf. Military installations, shipping routes, and energy infrastructure are closely concentrated across the region. When retaliation expands beyond the immediate battlefield, the resulting impact spreads quickly across multiple states that host allied security infrastructure. The Strait of Hormuz has emerged as a central theatre in the confrontation. Iranian authorities have announced restrictions on maritime traffic through the strait, one of the world's most important oil transit corridors. Approximately one-fifth of globally traded oil normally moves through this narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to international shipping routes. Any disruption to shipping through this corridor carries immediate implications for energy markets and global supply chains.

Shipping industry sources indicate that tanker traffic through the strait has declined significantly following the escalation. Insurance costs for vessels operating in the Gulf have increased sharply, reflecting the elevated risk environment. Several commercial shipping operators have temporarily suspended transit through the corridor while assessing operational safety. These developments have placed immediate pressure on global energy markets.

Regional airspace closures have compounded these disruptions. Several Gulf states have restricted or suspended civilian aviation routes due to missile and drone activity in the region. Airlines have diverted flights to alternative corridors, leading to longer routes, logistical complications, and delays across international travel networks. Airports across the region are experiencing operational strain as airlines adjust schedules and manage stranded passengers.

Energy infrastructure across the GCC has also faced heightened risk. Saudi oil refining facilities have experienced operational disruptions following reported missile strikes. Liquefied natural gas facilities in Qatar have been placed under enhanced security protocols as drone incursions and missile alerts continue across the region. Governments across the Gulf have activated defensive measures to protect export terminals, power stations, desalination plants, and industrial zones linked to national energy production.

Within Iran, casualty figures continue to rise as strikes target facilities associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and other security structures. The Iranian Red Crescent Society reports that hundreds of individuals have been killed in United States-Israeli strikes across Iranian territory during the initial phase of the conflict. Independent verification remains limited due to the operational environment, but reports from several international outlets indicate widespread damage to military and strategic installations.

International organizations have raised concern regarding the potential environmental consequences of attacks on nuclear-related infrastructure. The International Atomic Energy Agency has warned that strikes on nuclear facilities carry the risk of radiological contamination that could extend beyond Iran's borders. Gulf states located in close proximity to Iranian nuclear installations could face environmental and humanitarian consequences in the event of a major incident.

The political justification for the military campaign remains contested. United States officials state that the operations aim to neutralize threats associated with Iran's missile capabilities and its support for armed groups across the Middle East. Statements delivered by senior United States officials suggest that the duration of the military campaign may extend for several weeks depending on developments on the ground and Iran's military responses.

Inside the United States, the conflict has triggered renewed debate over presidential war powers. Members of Congress have introduced legislation seeking to limit the executive branch's ability to conduct extended military operations without congressional authorization. Legal analysts note that the United States Constitution assigns the authority to declare war to Congress, although modern military operations are frequently conducted without formal declarations.

Diplomatic reactions across Europe and the wider international community reflect growing concern about the risk of escalation. European governments have called for restraint while urging diplomatic engagement to prevent further expansion of the conflict. British officials have stated that Iran's retaliatory actions pose a threat to allied interests and regional security.

# TRUMP'S IRAN STRIKES MARK HIS BIGGEST FOREIGN POLICY GAMBLE



**W**ith his large-scale attack on Iran, Donald Trump has seized a legacy-defining moment to demonstrate his readiness to exercise raw U.S. military power. But in doing so, he is also taking the biggest foreign policy gamble of his presidency, one fraught with risks and unknowns.

Trump joined with Israel to plunge into war against Iran, and after a day of air strikes announced on Saturday that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had been killed, which would mark a major achievement for the operation but also leave unanswered questions about the future of the Islamic Republic.

Even as the crisis unfolded on Saturday, Trump provided little explanation to the American public for what could become the biggest U.S. military campaign since Afghanistan and Iraq.

He has pivoted away from a preference for swift, limited operations like last month's lightning raid in Venezuela to what experts warn could be a more protracted conflict with Iran that risks escalating into a regional conflagration engulfing the oil-rich Middle East.

The president, who came to office last year promising to avoid "stupid wars," has also set out a daunting objective of regime change in Tehran, pushing the idea that air strikes can incite a popular uprising to oust Iran's rulers.

It is an outcome that outside air power has never directly achieved in other conflicts without the involvement of an armed force on the ground, and which most analysts doubt will succeed this time in Iran.

Though Khamenei's death, if confirmed by Iran, would deal a major blow to the country he has led since 1989, it would not necessarily spell the end of the Iran's entrenched clerical rule or the Revolutionary Guards' sway over the population.

"Most Americans will wake up Saturday morning and wonder why we are at war with Iran, what is the goal, and why U.S. bases in the Middle East are under attack," said Daniel Shapiro, a former senior Pentagon official and U.S. ambassador to Israel who is now at the Atlantic Council think-tank in Washington.

Trump's fixation on Iran has emerged as the starkest example yet of how foreign policy, including his expanded use of military might, has topped his agenda in the first 13 months of his second term, often overshadowing domestic issues like the cost of living that public opinion polls show are much higher priorities for most Americans.

His own aides have been privately urging him for weeks to focus more on voters' economic worries, highlighting the political dangers ahead of November's midterm elections in which Trump's Republican Party is at risk of losing one or both chambers of Congress.

The brief pre-dawn video that Trump posted on his Truth Social platform announcing what the Pentagon has dubbed "Operation Epic Fury" provided only broad reasons for going to war now with a country the U.S. has jousted with for decades while averting all-out hostilities.

He insisted he would end what he said was Tehran's ballistic missile threat - which most experts say does not pose a threat to the U.S. - and give Iranians a chance to topple their rulers.

Trump said that to accomplish his goals

U.S. forces would lay waste to much of Iran's military as well as deny it the ability to have a nuclear weapon. Iran denies that its nuclear program has military aims.

Trump's sudden resort to force, using huge U.S. military assets built up in the region in recent weeks, appeared certain to close the door for now on diplomacy with Iran. Nuclear talks in Geneva on Thursday failed to achieve a breakthrough.

Some Trump aides have previously suggested that he might be able to bomb Tehran back to the table to force deep concessions.

Instead, Iran responded by launching missiles at Israel and several Gulf Arab oil-producing states that host American bases.

Trump's focus in the video on the urgency of the threat posed by Iran's ballistic and nuclear programs had echoes of the case President George W. Bush made for war against Iraq in 2003, which later turned out to be based on faulty intelligence and false claims.

Trump's assertion in Tuesday's State of the Union address that Iran will soon have a missile that can hit the United States is not backed by U.S. intelligence reports, according to sources familiar with the assessments, and experts have also cast doubt on his aides' recent claims of Tehran's ability to quickly advance its nuclear capabilities.

With Saturday's strikes, Trump, who had originally threatened to strike Iran in January in support of street protesters facing a violent crackdown, also erased all doubt that part of what he seeks now is regime change in Tehran.

But analysts question whether Trump, who has ruled out deploying U.S. troops on the ground, has a strategy that could unseat Iran's longtime cleric-dominated government, which has proved resilient in the face of crippling sanctions and periodic mass protests.

The first wave of strikes mainly targeted Iranian leaders, including Khamenei, a staunch foe of the West who had ruled with

an iron grip.

As reports of the supreme leader's death spread, Trump posted that "Khamenei, one of the most evil people in History, is dead." He credited intelligence and tracking systems for leading to the killing of Khamenei and other leaders who were with him, and urged other officials to accept immunity or face death.

There was no immediate confirmation from Tehran, where Iranian news agencies reported earlier that Khamenei was "steadfast and firm in commanding the field."

The Israeli military listed at least seven senior officials and commanders it said had been killed.

Analysts warned that eliminating top leaders could have the unintended consequences of sowing chaos across a sprawling nation of 93 million or lead to a hardline military-run government that might be even more intransigent with the West and oppressive to its people, analysts said.

"He wants to change the government," said Jon Alterman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a think-tank in Washington. "But it's hard to change the government from the air. It's hard to change the minds of Iranians through the air."

Tyson Barker, a former senior U.S. official who is now with the Atlantic Council, said Trump's call for the Iranian people to rise up was also not likely to work.

"They're really exposing these poor Iranian people by saying, 'Stand up and overthrow your government. We got your back,'" Barker said.

Trump's appetite for foreign military operations has grown since the start of his second term.

He appears to have been emboldened by the U.S. bombing of Iran's main nuclear facilities in June and the in-and-out raid that captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in January and has given the U.S. considerable sway over the OPEC country's vast oil reserves.

Trump may have forced his own hand with Iran with his frequent threats of mil-

itary action while building up a huge naval force that he could not sustain indefinitely in the region.

Analysts see Iran as a much tougher, better-armed foe than Venezuela, even though its air defenses and missile capabilities were severely degraded in joint U.S.-Israeli strikes in June.

But Mark Dubowitz, CEO of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, a nonprofit research institute considered pro-Israel and hawkish on Iran, said Tehran is in such a weakened state that it is worth Trump taking the risks to curb Tehran's nuclear capabilities.

Whether or not the Iranian government falls, he said severely degrading Iran's nuclear and missile programs could be a victory for Trump.

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**We have to be united if we have to be heard in a democracy! Why can't we unite as people from Northeast**

**Let's not allow ourselves to be divided-religion, caste aside we have to be better humans ~ Pradyot Bikram Manikya Deb Barma, Leader of Tipra Motha**



### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." - Aristotle**



# Opposition alliance in Assam announces joint statewide campaign ahead of 2026 polls

GUWAHATI

A broad opposition alliance in Assam on Friday announced plans to launch a joint campaign across the state in the coming weeks, as political parties seek to consolidate efforts against the ruling BJP ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

Leaders of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP), All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) made the announcement during a joint press conference in Guwahati, signalling the start of coordinated political activity across the state.

Addressing the media, APCC president Gaurav Gogoi said the alliance partners would soon begin holding

joint campaign meetings at various locations across Assam, stressing that the time remaining before the elections is limited.

"From next month, before Bihu, we expect the Assembly elections to be announced. That is why time is very limited. We have only about 30 days in hand and these 30 days are extremely important," Gogoi said.

He added that the parties have already decided on specific dates and locations for the joint meetings, which will be held across both Upper and Lower Assam.

According to Gogoi, the alliance aims to strengthen grassroots coordination and ensure that political discussions among opposition leaders translate into direct engagement with voters.

"The discussions we hold together in front of cameras must now reach the people. From today onwards, joint meetings will be held across Upper and Lower Assam and we will carry out the campaign jointly," he said.

The Congress leader also revealed that discussions are ongoing with other political groups, including the Rajgor Dal, Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, to expand the alliance ahead of the polls.

Echoing similar sentiments, AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi said the coming together of four parties was intended to send a strong political message against the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"Four political parties have come together to send a strong message that

we are beginning our journey to defeat the BJP in the 2026 Assembly elections. We are hopeful that more parties will join us in the coming days," he said.

Lurinjyoti Gogoi added that the alliance would reach out to people across the state to highlight what he described as the impact of the BJP government's policies on Assam's economy and cultural life over the past decade.

"Our primary goal is to unite and remove the BJP from the soil of Assam," he said.

Representing the hill-based APHLC, party president Jones Ingti Kathar alleged that people living in Assam's hill districts have faced prolonged neglect.

"Our first aim is to defeat and eradicate the BJP. It works under the direction of the RSS. People in the plains cannot imagine what is happening in

the three hill districts," Kathar said.

He further claimed that tribal communities in the hill areas continue to face deprivation in employment opportunities, government services and access to education.

Meanwhile, CPI(M) leader Suprakash Talukdar said the growing unity among opposition parties had unsettled the BJP leadership in the state. "Despite their double-engine government, the Chief Minister now knows what the common people are thinking about the BJP. Today is a good beginning for a united alliance," Talukdar said.

He also criticised Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging that some of his political remarks have embarrassed many people from Assam living outside the state.

During the interaction with reporters, Gogoi also took a swipe at Sarma over the BJP's alleged political dealings with the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) in the recent Rajya Sabha elections.

"There is no bigger example of opportunistic politics than how the Chief Minister has taken support from the AIUDF in the Rajya Sabha polls. The same party that he criticised earlier has now become acceptable to him," Gogoi said.

Responding to queries, he reiterated that the opposition alliance hopes to widen its base by bringing more parties under its fold.

"Whether it is CPI(ML), CPI or Rajgor Dal, we want to expand the alliance. Talks with various parties are ongoing and will continue," he added.

## Dry Spell to Continue in Assam, Light Rain Likely from Weekend: IMD

GUWAHATI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast largely dry weather across Assam over the next few days, with rainfall activity expected to gradually increase later in the week. According to the IMD's Regional Meteorological Centre, Guwahati, most parts of the state are likely to experience dry conditions on Friday, with no significant change expected in maximum temperatures.

On March 7, a few isolated areas may receive light rainfall, though dry weather is expected to continue in most regions.

Weather activity is likely to increase slightly from March 8 onward, with light rain predicted at isolated places across the state. The department has also indicated the possibility of thunderstorms and lightning in some areas during the latter part of the week. From March 9, rainfall may become more widespread, with light showers expected at several places in the state. During this period, maximum temperatures are likely to drop by about 3-5°C.

By March 10, a few locations in Assam may experience light to moderate rainfall, accompanied by cloudy skies in certain areas. For Guwahati and surrounding areas, the IMD has forecast partly cloudy skies with haze in the coming days. The maximum temperature is expected to remain around 32°C, while the minimum temperature may hover near 17°C.

Other parts of the North-eastern region are also likely to receive light rainfall in the coming days.

Earlier, the IMD had stated on February 28 that temperatures during March are expected to remain normal to below normal across many parts of the country, except in the North-east, eastern India and some areas of the Western Himalayan region as well as parts of central and peninsular India.

## BJP has no plans to field Pabitra Margherita in Assam Assembly polls: Himanta

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday ruled out the possibility of Pabitra Margherita contesting the upcoming 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly election, stating that the Bharatiya Janata Party currently has no plan to bring the Union minister into state politics.

Speaking to reporters before flagging off the fifth day of the BJP's Jan Ashirwad Yatra from Naharkatia, the Chief Minister said the party prefers Margherita to continue serving in the Union government led by Narendra Modi. Margherita presently serves as the Minister of State for External Affairs in the Central government. "It is a matter of pride for Assam that one of our leaders holds the position of Union Minister of State for External Affairs. The state does not want to lose this opportunity," Sarma said.

He added that there was no necessity for Margherita to enter the state legislative assembly at this

stage. "We want him to remain in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Cabinet and enhance the pride and name of Assam," the Chief Minister said. Sarma indicated that Margherita may be considered for the 2029 Indian general election, but clarified that no proposal has been made to field him in the 2026 Assembly elections.

"When it comes to the 2026 Assembly elections, the BJP has taken no proposal or provision to field him as a candidate," he said. On the likely BJP candidate from Jorhat, Sarma said the party has several strong local contenders who are popular among the electorate. "We have several good candidates in Jorhat, people from humble families and backgrounds. We will nominate one candidate from among the local names," he said.

Addressing the situation in Sivasagar, the Chief Minister said discussions are still underway within the ruling alliance regarding seat sharing.

## Akhil Gogoi's cryptic post sparks buzz amid Assam opposition alliance talks

GUWAHATI

A cryptic social media message by Akhil Gogoi has triggered fresh speculation over the status of opposition alliance negotiations in Assam ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

The Rajgor Dal chief posted a brief message in Assamese on March 6 that read which roughly translates to "the final attempt also failed." The remark has fuelled political chatter about possible difficulties in talks surrounding a broader opposition alliance.

The post came at a time when the Indian National Congress and several regional parties announced plans to begin joint campaign meetings across the state as part of efforts to consolidate anti-government forces.

Speaking at a press conference, Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi said the party is currently coordinating with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Assam Jatiya Parishad, and the All Party Hill



Leaders' Conference to build a broader opposition front.

Gogoi added that discussions were also ongoing with other parties, including the Rajgor Dal led by Akhil Gogoi, expressing hope that the grouping could expand in the coming days.

"From now on, we will undertake joint campaign meetings across the state. Discussions on some probable locations in Upper Assam have already taken place, and we will discuss other parts as well," he said.

While the opposition grouping has begun coordinating campaign activities, a final seat-sharing

arrangement has yet to be announced. Friendly contests between alliance partners in a few constituencies are considered possible. The Congress has already declared candidates for 42 Assembly seats.

According to Gaurav Gogoi, the Assembly elections are expected to be held before the festival of Bohag Bihu in mid-April, making the coming weeks crucial for political negotiations and campaigning.

He said discussions on a joint contest had taken place earlier but several parties had been occupied with organisational work and the special revision of electoral rolls.

"We felt that it was time we took our views together to the public. Hence, we will launch the joint campaign from now on," Gogoi said, adding that the alliance remains open to additional partners.

"We are sending a clear message that from today we are coming together. But our doors are open, and we are in talks with oth-

ers also," he added.

Meanwhile, AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi said the four parties joining hands was meant to send a message of unity in their effort to challenge the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

State secretary of CPI(M) Suprakash Talukdar described the emerging alliance as a "good beginning" that should be strengthened further. APHLC chief Jones Ingti Kathar said the initiative was aimed at addressing issues faced by people, particularly in the hill districts.

In the 126-member Assam Legislative Assembly, the BJP currently holds 64 seats. Its allies - Asom Gana Parishad, United People's Party Liberal and Bodoland People's Front - have nine, seven and three legislators respectively.

The Congress has 26 MLAs, while the All India United Democratic Front holds 15 seats. CPI(M) has one legislator in the Assembly, along with one Independent member.

## Tripura Congress seeks answers from CM Manik Saha on jobs, recruitment delays and law and order

AGARTALA:

The Tripura Pradesh Congress has sought clarifications from Chief Minister Manik Saha on a range of issues including employment generation, alleged corruption, recruitment irregularities and the prevailing law and order situation in the state.

In a detailed letter to the chief minister, party spokesperson Prabir Chakraborty raised questions about the state government's employment record over the past eight years since the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in Tripura.

Referring to a recent statement by the chief minister, Chakraborty said the government had acknowledged providing slightly over 20,000 government jobs during this period.

Seeking further clarification, he asked the government to disclose the number of vacant posts across departments, the number of positions that



have been abolished, and how many people have been engaged through outsourcing, contractual appointments, fixed pay and contingent arrangements.

The Congress leader also questioned the cancellation or delay of several recruitment processes. He cited the recent scrapping of the recruitment process for 6,067 executive police posts after four years and alleged that many candidates who had cleared written, oral or physical tests were still awaiting

appointment letters.

Chakraborty further alleged that applicants had paid substantial application fees for recruitment examinations conducted by both the state government and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council. However, he claimed that in several instances the recruitment processes were later cancelled without refunding the application fees.

The letter also highlighted delays in

the appointment of candidates who had already received offer letters for posts such as physical education teachers and graduate teachers. According to Chakraborty, several months have passed but formal appointments have yet to be issued.

In addition, he questioned the government's decision to challenge certain High Court orders related to service conditions and the regularisation of employees in the Supreme Court of India, asking whether the move was prompted by financial constraints or administrative considerations.

Chakraborty also criticised the law and order situation in the state, citing incidents of crime and alleged drug-related activities in the Bishalgarh bypass area.

He urged the chief minister to provide clear explanations on these issues and take appropriate steps to address the concerns of job seekers and the general public.

## BDF Writes Open Letter to PM Ahead of Barak Valley Visit, Raises Key Issues

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**SILCHAR:** The Barak Democratic Front (BDF) has written an open letter to the Prime Minister ahead of his proposed visit to Barak Valley on March 14, welcoming the visit while placing several long-standing demands and concerns of the region before the central government.

In the letter, the organisation extended an advance welcome to the Prime Minister for visiting Barak Valley, describing the region as the southernmost and historically significant part of Assam with a unique demographic and cultural identity. The group also pointed out that despite its importance, the valley has long suffered from neglect and biased policies, resulting in slower socio-economic development compared to other parts of the country.

The BDF expressed hope that the Prime Minister's visit would address the issue of underdevelopment and lead to the announcement of new projects and policies for the region.

The letter highlighted unemployment as one of the most pressing con-

cerns in the valley. According to the organisation, nearly four lakh people are registered as unemployed, while the actual number may be even higher. It said many educated youths with graduate and postgraduate degrees are forced to leave the valley in search of low-paid private jobs or even drive e-rickshaws to support their families.

The organisation also raised the issue of job reservation for local youth in third and fourth grade state government posts in the valley. It noted that although the state government had earlier committed to reserving these jobs for local candidates and a legislative provision was approved by the Assembly, the decision has not yet been implemented. The closure of major public sector enterprises in the region was another concern mentioned in the letter. The Front pointed out that industries such as the Hindustan Paper Mill at Panchgram were shut down due to negligence and policy failures. It also said that a previously announced plan to set up an industrial hub on the abandoned land of the Panchgram paper mill has not seen any progress so far.

The letter further stated that Barak Valley has abundant natural and human resources, and proper planning and investment could create employment opportunities and contribute significantly to the state's

economy.

Transport and communication problems were identified as the second major hurdle to development. The organisation said road and rail connectivity with the rest of the country is frequently disrupted during the rainy season because of landslides and floods. While welcoming the proposed fast express highway connecting the valley with Barapani, the Front urged the government to expedite work on the alternative railway line between Chandranathpur and Lanka.

The group also referred to the long-pending East-West Corridor project connecting Silchar with Saurashtra, a dream project of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It said that although the state government had earlier announced that the remaining 30-kilometre stretch in Dima Hasao district would be completed by January this year, no concrete progress has been reported.

Flooding was described as another major challenge faced by the valley almost every year. The organisation suggested that dredging of the Barak River could offer a permanent solution. It also noted that after the devastating floods of 2022, the state government had promised to improve the drainage systems in Silchar and Karimganj towns and repair embankments along the Barak

River. However, the letter claimed that only around 30 percent of the work has been completed so far.

Among other demands, the Front reiterated the long-standing demand for a bench of the Guwahati High Court in Barak Valley to reduce the difficulties faced by people who currently have to travel to Guwahati for legal matters.

The letter also raised the demand to rename Silchar Railway Station as "Bhasha Shahid Station" in memory of the eleven language martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the language movement. The organisation stated that the proposal has already received approval from the Union Home Ministry and the Railway Ministry, and only a formal communication from the state government regarding the script of the name in three languages is required to finalise the process.

Expressing hope for positive steps, the Barak Democratic Front urged the Prime Minister to consider these long-pending issues and announce measures that would help the region move towards progress and prosperity.

The letter was signed by BDF Chief Convener Pradipt Dutta Roy, along with conveners Hrishikesh Dey, Joydeep Bhattacharjee (Media Cell), Ainul Hoque Majumder, Debayan Deb, Haradhan Dutta, and Khaidem Kanta Singh.

## Assam Rifles DG reviews operational preparedness during Kohima visit



KOHIMA

Director General of Assam Rifles, Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, visited the headquarters of Inspector General Assam Rifles (North) in Kohima on March 6 to review operational preparedness and troop welfare measures in the region.

During the visit, the Director General was briefed on the prevailing security situation, operational readiness and various initiatives undertaken to support the welfare of personnel deployed across the area.

Lakhera also interacted with officers and troops of all ranks, commending their dedication and professionalism in maintaining peace and stability in Nagaland.

Highlighting the importance of strong ties between security forces and residents, he emphasised that cooperation and trust between the armed forces and local communities are essential for ensuring long-term peace and development in the region. He also praised ongoing civic action programmes aimed at strengthening goodwill with local populations.

As part of welfare initiatives during the visit, the DG inaugurated a sports complex at the Kohima Garrison for use by personnel of all ranks. He said sports activities help promote camarade-

rie, discipline, sportsmanship and a healthy lifestyle among soldiers, providing a constructive outlet for their energy.

Lakhera also inaugurated a newly constructed Sainik Institute and a modern cook house at the Dimapur sector of the Assam Rifles. The Sainik Institute has been established to provide soldiers with a comfortable recreational space during off-duty hours, offering facilities for meals and social interaction.

The modern cook house, equipped with upgraded kitchen infrastructure and improved storage and cooking arrangements, has been designed to enhance hygiene, efficiency and working conditions for personnel responsible for preparing meals for troops.

On the occasion, the Director General praised the formation for maintaining high standards of discipline, administration and welfare. He noted that robust infrastructure and efficient logistical support play a crucial role in sustaining operational readiness and boosting the morale of troops serving in challenging environments. The visit reaffirmed the commitment of the Assam Rifles—often referred to as the "Sentinels of the North East"—to ensuring security, stability and development across the region.

Quest!

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## Cong says India's strategic autonomy under threat after US grants temporary waiver for Russian oil purchases

NEW DELHI

The Congress said that India's strategic autonomy and national sovereignty were under "dire threat" after the United States announced a temporary waiver allowing Indian refiners to continue purchasing Russian oil for 30 days.

The party targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi, accusing him of yielding diplomatic space to Washington and allowing the US to dictate India's energy decisions.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said India's foreign policy should reflect the collective will of its people and be rooted in the country's history, geography and moral traditions.

"India's foreign policy emerges from the collective will of our people. It should be rooted in our history, our geography, and our spiritual ethos based on Satya and Ahimsa. What we are witnessing today is not policy. It is the result of the exploitation of a compromised individual," Gandhi wrote in a post on X.

He also shared a clip from his February 11 speech in the Lok Sabha during the Budget discussion, where he raised concerns about India's energy security.

"The US will tell us who we can or cannot buy oil from, if it is Russia or Iran, the US will decide. But our prime minister will not decide," Gandhi had said in the speech.

The criticism came after the US administration under President Donald Trump announced a tem-

porary waiver amid escalating tensions with Iran. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the measure was aimed at ensuring global oil supply.

"President (Donald) Trump's energy agenda has resulted in oil and gas production reaching the highest levels ever recorded. To enable oil to keep flowing into the global market, the Treasury Department is issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil," he said.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also slammed the government, alleging that the waiver showed India's diminishing diplomatic autonomy.

"The US proclamation to 'allow' and grant us 'permission' to buy Russian oil, as a 'waiver for 30-days' clearly demonstrates the Modi government is continuously ceding diplomatic space. This is the kind of language which is used for sanctioned states, and not India, who has been a responsible and an equal partner in global order," Kharge wrote on X.

"Now, the US grants India a 'temporary 30-day waiver' and 'allows' Indian refiners to buy Russian oil. From trade to oil, from data to India's long-term relationships with friendly countries, Modi ji SURRENDERED it all," he alleged. Kharge added that India had historically maintained independent foreign policy positions under previous prime ministers.

"From Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi to even Atal Bihari Vajpayee -- No Prime Minister has

buckled under pressure of any country and made India a virtual vassal state, except Modi ji," he said.

"Main Desh Nahi Jhukne Doonga' was a mere slogan-cry to win elections. 140 crore Indians stand betrayed. Modi ji SURRENDERED it all," Kharge alleged.

Addressing a press conference in New Delhi, Congress media and publicity department head Pawan Khara said the waiver confirmed Gandhi's earlier warning that Washington would eventually decide India's oil purchases.

Referring to the one-month waiver, he asked, "Will the US grant us a licence for importing oil?"

Khara also noted that an Indo-US trade deal was still pending even as restrictions were being imposed on New Delhi.

He said Gandhi had earlier urged the government to hold off on the agreement after the US Supreme Court set aside tariffs imposed by the Trump administration.

"Prime Minister Modi does not have the courage to back out of the trade deal," Khara said.

He added that India's global standing had diminished under the current government. "The prime minister has completely capitulated before the Americans today. What are you scared of? Maybe the Epstein files make you do whatever America wants you to do," he alleged.

"The people of India cannot expect justice from a compromised cabinet with a compromised prime minister, who are compromising the country's interests," Khara said.

NEW DELHI

The government will use all policy tools and support measures to help domestic exporters deal with the ongoing West Asia crisis, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.

He said that the government has set up an inter-ministerial group to look into the issues on a daily basis.

"And the government will use every policy tool and the export promotion mission to support our exporters... We will be formalising some ways to give comfort to our exporters," Goyal told reporters here on the sidelines of IIFT's vice chancellors' conclave.

He was responding to the demands of exporters seeking government intervention to help them tide over the problems following the disruptions in the movements of goods on account of the ongoing war between the US and Israel with Iran.

Exporters are facing issues with regard to the movement of consignments to West Asia as certain shipping lines are demanding high war-risk surcharges of up to USD 4,000 per 40 ft container, and some ships are stranded in international waters.

These developments have significantly pushed freight rates and insurance premiums.

West Asia is a key trading partner of India. In 2025, India imported USD 98.7 billion worth of goods from West Asia, making the region a crucial supplier for energy, fertilisers and industrial raw materials. Exports to the West Asian economies stood at USD 58.8 billion in 2024-25.

The commerce ministry, Goyal said, is in dialogue with the ministry of shipping and with shipping companies on the issues of exporters. "And I do hope we will find a resolution to this issue also," he said.

When asked about the issue of rising freight costs, he said the ministry is working with them to

## Govt will use every policy tool to help exporters deal with the West Asia crisis: Piyush Goyal



see how the burden on exporters can be mitigated.

"Every day the inter-ministerial group talks to the exporters... They take feedback, and we will not be found wanting in supporting our exporters in any way," he said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

He added that India would continue to meet all the commitments that the country's industries have made to foreign buyers in goods and services.

"But I can assure you, this government stands with our industry and will continue to ensure that all our international commitments are met. Because that is what defines India," he said, adding that even during Covid, India met all its international commitments, "which earned us the acronym of a trusted partner".

Exporters are seeking higher RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) rates, urging the Export Credit Guarantee Corporation of India (ECGC) not to raise insurance premiums, ad hoc working-capital limits and credit extensions similar to measures provided during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Exporters are facing shortage of containers, suspension or cancellation of vessel calls to the Middle East, and sharply higher logistics costs.

They have also sought urgent government support to mitigate the impact of shipping disruptions triggered by the Iran crisis and instability across key maritime routes.

International freight rates have risen by an estimated 15-20 per cent, while war-risk surcharges and insurance premiums for Gulf-bound

shipments have increased significantly. Bunker fuel costs have also climbed, with marine fuel oil prices rising to around USD 580 per tonne from about USD 520, IREF has said.

They are urging the government to waive port-related charges, including storage and demurrage, in cases where cargo is rolled due to vessel cancellations or steep freight increases beyond exporters' control. Further, they have requested facilitation for cargo in transit to be returned, redirected or diverted, with support from customs authorities and the Reserve Bank of India for documentation and payment adjustments.

Rice exporters have sought an official advisory from the government recognising the disruption as a force majeure-type event, which they say would help prevent contractual penalties.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Israel bombs Tehran, Beirut as US vows 'surge' in Iran strikes; Pezeshkian says 'mediation efforts' ongoing

DUBAI

Israeli warplanes pounded Beirut and Tehran on Friday as Iran launched another wave of retaliatory strikes against Israel and Gulf countries. There was no sign of the war letting up on its seventh day, as US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned the American air campaign against Iran would "surge dramatically."

The strikes in Lebanon were the heaviest since a 2024 ceasefire ended the last war between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah, who fired rockets at Israel in the opening days of the latest conflict. Tens of thousands have fled Beirut's suburbs and southern Lebanon after sweeping Israeli evacuation warnings.

The war has escalated to affect more than a dozen countries across the Middle East and beyond. The US said it had struck an Iranian drone carrier at sea as it waged an unrelenting campaign against the country's navy that earlier included torpedoing of a warship in the Indian Ocean.

The US and Israel have battered Iran with strikes, targeting their military capabilities, leadership and nuclear program.

The stated goals and timelines for the war have repeatedly shifted, as the US has at times suggested it seeks to topple Iran's government or elevate new leadership from within.

The war has already caused a spike in oil prices, and Qatar's energy minister warned that it could "bring down the economies of the world," predicting a widespread shutdown of Gulf energy exports that could send oil to \$150 a barrel.

Saad al-Kaabi told the Financial Times that even if the war ended immediately it could take "weeks to months" to resume normal exports after an Iranian drone strike on Qatar's largest liquefied natural gas plant.

Smoke rises following an Israeli



airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, in Beirut, Lebanon, Friday, March 6, 2026.

Israel's military said on Friday morning it had begun "a broad-scale wave of strikes" on Tehran, Iran's capital.

Witnesses described Israeli airstrikes as particularly intense, shaking homes in the area. Others reported explosions around the Iranian city of Kermanshah in an area that is home to multiple missile bases.

Iran meanwhile launched missile and drone attacks at Israel, as well as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, all countries that host U.S. forces. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 120 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six US troops have been killed.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said Friday that "some countries" had begun mediation efforts in the conflict, without elaborating.

The United Nations high commissioner for human rights, Volker Türk, urged all countries involved to de-escalate, saying "the world urgently needs to see steps to contain and extinguish

this blaze."

The US military said early on Friday that it struck an Iranian drone carrier, setting it ablaze. The US military's Central Command released black-and-white footage of the burning carrier. The Iranian military did not immediately acknowledge the attack.

The drone carrier, the IRIS Shahid Bagheri, is a converted container ship with a 180-meter-long (yard) runway for drones. The vessel can travel up to 22,000 nautical miles without needing to refuel in ports, reports said at the time of its 2025 inauguration.

Adm. Brad Cooper, head of US Central Command, described the carrier as "roughly the size of a World War II aircraft carrier."

"As we speak, it's on fire," Cooper told reporters.

Earlier in the week, an American submarine sank an Iranian frigate off the coast of Sri Lanka as it was returning from an exercise hosted by the Indian navy that the US also joined. Sri Lanka's navy rescued 32 crew members and recovered 87 bodies.

Under cover of darkness on Friday morning, B-2 stealth bombers dropped dozens of 2,000-pound "penetrator" bombs on deeply buried ballistic missile launchers inside Iran, Cooper said.

Qatar said early Friday it intercepted a drone attack targeting Al Udeid Air Base, which hosts the forward headquarters of the US Central Command.

Saudi Arabia intercepted and destroyed three ballistic missiles fired early Friday toward Prince Sultan Air Base south of Riyadh, which also hosts US forces, said a spokesperson for Saudi Arabia's Defense Ministry.

Air raid sirens sounded in Bahrain, where the Interior Ministry said Iranian strikes targeted two hotels and a residential building. It said there were no casualties. In Kuwait, where the six US soldiers were killed Sunday, the army said air defenses were activated when missile and drone attacks breached its airspace. The United Arab Emirates said three drones had struck its territory, without elaborating.

The British ambassador to Bahrain said Friday that the United Kingdom would help defend the country with its fighter jets. Ambassador Alastair Long's announcement came the day after British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he was sending four more Royal Air Force Typhoon fighters to Qatar following requests from allies for further help.

In Israel, the sound of explosions could be heard in Tel Aviv early Friday morning after a warning about missiles incoming from Iran, as air defense systems worked to intercept the barrage.

Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, in Beirut, Lebanon, Friday, March 6, 2026.

In brief remarks at the White House, US President Donald Trump again urged the Iranian people to "help take back your country." This time he promised the US would grant them "immunity" amid the war and ongoing dangers under the current Iranian regime.

"So you'll be perfectly safe with total immunity," Trump said, without giving any details about what that meant.

"Or you'll face absolutely guaranteed death."

## US likely responsible for airstrike on elementary school in Iran: New York Times



WASHINGTON

The United States is most likely responsible for a strike that reportedly killed scores of people at an elementary school in southern Iran, according to a New York Times investigation.

The February 28 strike hit an elementary school in the Iranian town of Minab and killed at least 160 people, according to Iranian officials.

Neither Israel nor the United States has claimed responsibility for the attack, which was in close proximity to sites controlled by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

The US Department of Defense has said it is investigating the incident.

The New York Times reported on Thursday that US military statements indicating forces were attacking naval targets near the Strait of Hormuz, where an IRGC base is located, "suggest they were most likely to have carried out the strike."

An analysis of social

media posts from the time of the attack, as well as photos and videos from witnesses, indicated that the Shajareh Tayyebeh elementary school was struck at the same time as a Revolutionary Guards' naval base site, the Times said.

Two unidentified US officials told Reuters that military investigators "believe it is likely" that US forces were responsible for the strike.

AFP has been unable to reach the location to independently verify the toll or the circumstances of the attack. General Dan Caine, the top US military officer, said on Wednesday that the United States was carrying out strikes along southern Iran at the time.

A map he presented, the Times reported, indicated an area including Minab had been targeted by strikes in the first 100 hours of the operation.

Caine noted that Israel had mainly been operating further north in Iran. The school was at one point part of the IRGC's naval base, according to

satellite images from 2013 reviewed by the Times.

However, the paper said publicly available historical satellite imagery "shows the structure bears the hallmarks of a school, including a sports field and other recreational areas that were added over time."

"Given the US's intelligence capabilities, they should have known that a school was in the vicinity," Beth Van Schaack, a former State Department official who teaches at Stanford University's Center for Human Rights and International Justice, told the Times.

The Norway-based rights group Hengaw said the school was holding its morning session at the time of the attack and reportedly had about 170 students present.

Asked Wednesday whether the US was involved in the strike, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt replied: "Not that we know of."

## Performances during Madhya Dakshini Festival mesmerise CGPS-AS Campus



A major highlight of the festival was the choreographic cultural presentation titled “Kala Sangini: A Confluence of Dance Traditions of South-Central India with Live Music,” curated by Astha M. Karlekar, Director of South Central Zone Cultural Centre, Nagpur, assisted by Maitreyee Bapat and Harsh Nilesh Gada.

The presentation featured vi-

also showcased Khasi folk dance and music performed by a local farmers’ group from Meghalaya, reflecting the rich cultural traditions of the region. Dance performances were presented by students of Christ College and the host institution, The College of Post Graduate Studies in Agricultural Sciences.

Certificates of Participation were handed over to participants by dignitar-

### UMIAM

The Madhy Dakshini Festival culminated successfully at Umiam in Meghalaya after their performances in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, here at the College of Post Graduate Studies in Agricultural Sciences (CPGS-AS). Students, faculty and family members enjoyed a mesmerising performance by eighty-six artists from Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh.

The North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur in collaboration with the South Central Zone Cultural Centre (SCZCC), Nagpur, under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, successfully organized the Bharat Ko Jano & Border Area Programme – Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026 on 6 March 2026 at the The College of Post Graduate Studies in Agricultural Sciences (CPGS-AS), Barapani (Umiam), Meghalaya a constituent college of Central Agricultural University, Imphal.

The festival aimed to promote cultural exchange, national integration, and awareness of India’s rich traditional heritage, particularly by connecting the cultural traditions of South-Central India with those of the North-Eastern region.

The programme began with the arrival of the Chief



Guest and dignitaries, followed by the lighting of the ceremonial lamp marking the festival’s formal inauguration.

The gathering was warmly welcomed by Biswadeep Gupta, Managing Trustee of KRC Foundation and Chief Coordinator of the Festival.

The dignitaries present at the programme included Chief Guest Dr. Puranjan Das, Former Deputy Director General (Extension), ICAR, New Delhi, and Guesushi Honour Dr. Manash Mahan Adhikary, Former Vice-Chancellor of Bidhanchandra Krishi Viswavidyalay, West

Bengal.

The festival was hosted by Dr. Prashana Gogoi, Director of North East Zone Cultural Centre, with co-hosts Oliver T. Porgen, Deputy Director, NEZCC, and Dipak R. Patil, Admin-cum-Accounts Officer of South Central Zone Cultural Centre, Nagpur.

A brief introduction to the initiatives and activities of NEZCC and SCZCC was presented to highlight the role of the Zonal Cultural Centres in preserving and promoting India’s diverse cultural heritage.

brant traditional art forms from various South-Central Indian states, including Bonalu and Battukamma of Telangana, Bessu Kamsale and Devi Nritya of Karnataka, Gondhal and Jogwa of Maharashtra, Badhai and Norta of Madhya Pradesh, Panthi Nritya of Chhattisgarh, and a folk instrumental musical band from Chhattisgarh.

The performance concluded with a powerful collective rendition titled “Vande Mantram” by all participating artistes.

The programme

ies, along with the Director NEZCC and Dwipendra Thakuria, Dean of CGPS-AS.

The Vice Chancellor of Uttar Banga Krish Viswa Vidyalaya, Prof D. Basu, was also felicitated by NEZCC, who also graced the function.

The Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026 served as a meaningful platform for cultural dialogue, artistic collaboration, and strengthening the spirit of “Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat”, celebrating the unity in diversity of India’s cultural landscape.

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### NE INDIA WRITING STAR CONTEST

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Most people try to stay the same while wanting their life to change. It doesn't work that way.