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## PERSPECTIVE

Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted. - Randy Pausch

## AIUDF Suspends Two MLAs for Six Years Over Alleged Anti-Party Activities

GUWAHATI

The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) has suspended two of its legislators for six years on charges of anti-party activities, amid intensifying political manoeuvring in Assam ahead of the upcoming elections.

According to an official order issued by the party's central committee, AIUDF MLA from Badarpur constituency Abdul Aziz and party vice-president and MLA Karim Uddin Barbhuiya have been removed from the organisation for a period of six years.

The party said the activities of both leaders had been under observation for some time and were found to be controversial and detrimental to the interests of the organisation. The order stated that their actions were considered anti-party activities that had damaged the party's reputation.

The suspension notice further alleged that the two MLAs were extending support to an opposition political party and were preparing to join it.

The disciplinary action was issued under provisions of the party constitution and signed by AIUDF General Secretary (Administration) Hafiz Bashir Ahmed, who described the actions of the leaders as misconduct and a serious violation of party discipline.

Meanwhile, Barbhuiya announced through a post on social media that he had decided to resign from the AIUDF after consulting people from various sections of society. His statement comes amid speculation over possible political realignments in the state ahead of the next electoral cycle.

### WHO SAID WHAT



**Fact check and ask questions about any post just by tapping the Grok logo in the upper left ~ Elon Musk, American Entrepreneur**

# Assam NDA Finalises Seat-Sharing Formula; BJP Central Board Nod Awaited

## Three suspended Congress MLAs join BJP as alliance prepares for Assembly poll announcement

GUWAHATI

Seat-sharing negotiations among partners of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Assam have been completed, with the formal announcement expected within the next few days after approval from the central leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said discussions with key regional allies including the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), and the Rabha Hasong Joutha Sangram Committee have concluded, paving the way for the alliance to finalise its electoral strategy ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections. Addressing reporters on Wednesday night, Sarma stated that all negotiations among NDA partners regarding the allocation of constituencies had been settled. "We have completed our discussions with the AGP, BPF and the Rabha Hasong Joutha Sangram Committee. As far as



the NDA is concerned, our discussions and negotiations regarding seat sharing are now complete," he said.

However, the Chief Minister clarified that the agreement must still be placed before the BJP's Central Parliamentary Board for formal approval before it can be publicly announced.

"The understanding reached among the alliance partners now has to be placed before our Central Parliamentary Board for approval. Once that process is completed, the formal announcement of the seat-sharing ar-

angement will be made. It may take around two to four days," Sarma added. The announcement comes amid fresh political developments in the state, as three suspended legislators of the Indian National Congress formally joined the BJP, giving the ruling party additional momentum ahead of the polls. The MLAs Kamalkhya De Purkayastha, Basanta Das and Sashikant Das were welcomed into the party by Chief Minister Sarma at a function attended by senior BJP leaders.

Describing the development as a

major boost for the party, Sarma said the decision of the three legislators reflected the growing support for the BJP in Assam. "Today is a big day for the BJP. Three Congress MLAs have joined our party, and their decision reflects the growing popularity of the BJP across Assam," he said. Sarma further linked the move to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the policies pursued by the BJP-led governments at the Centre and in the state. "This development also shows the respect and confidence people have in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership and the work being done by the BJP-led government," he added.

Among the new entrants, Purkayastha represents the Karimganj (North) Assembly constituency. Sashikant Das is the sitting MLA from Raha, while Basanta Das represents the Mangaldoi (SC) constituency. In addition to the three legislators, two other political figures also joined the

BJP. They include former Congress joint secretary Parsha Bob Kalita and former general secretary of the All India Trinamool Congress, Kangkan Nath.

Political observers note that the three MLAs had maintained close ties with Chief Minister Sarma and had publicly expressed support for the BJP's policies in recent years. Sashikant Das had earlier declared his backing for the ruling party's policies as early as 2021. The developments come at a time when political activity in Assam is intensifying ahead of the Assembly elections. Both the ruling NDA and opposition parties have begun organisational mobilisation and candidate selection in preparation for the contest. With the NDA's internal negotiations now completed and awaiting central approval, the alliance is expected to unveil its seat-sharing formula shortly, setting the stage for the formal rollout of its electoral campaign across the state.

## Gaurav Gogoi to Contest Jorhat Assembly Seat, Setting Stage for Key BJP-Congress Battle

JORHAT

The decision by the Indian National Congress to field Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi from the Jorhat Legislative Assembly Constituency (LAC) has heightened political activity in Upper Assam, setting the stage for what is expected to be a closely watched contest in the upcoming state elections.

The announcement, made on Tuesday night, positions the sitting Jorhat Member of Parliament as the Congress candidate for the Assembly seat, signalling the party's intent to mount a strong challenge to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the region.

Political observers believe the move could trigger a high-profile contest reminiscent of the intense campaign seen during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in the Jorhat parliamentary

The Jorhat Assembly seat has been held by the BJP since 2016. Incumbent MLA Hitendra Nath Goswami secured a second consecutive victory in the 2021 Assembly elections as a BJP candidate.

Before joining the BJP, Goswami had a long political career with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), winning the Jorhat seat three consecutive times starting in 1991. He also served as a minister in the government led by former Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Goswami later faced two electoral defeats before switching to the BJP.

Gogoi's candidature is expected to compel the BJP to reassess its campaign strategy in the constituency, particularly regarding candidate selection.

Following the party's strong performance in last year's panchayat elections in the district, local BJP leaders had reportedly urged Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to contest from the Jorhat Assembly seat. However, Sarma has repeatedly stated in public that he is

not inclined to enter the fray from the constituency.

Despite this, the Chief Minister has maintained a strong political presence in the district. He initiated several developmental projects in Jorhat and chaired a state Cabinet meeting in the town in December 2022. In recent months, Sarma has also been visiting the district frequently and is expected to actively campaign there, similar to his role during the 2024 parliamentary elections.

Within the Congress camp, Gogoi's candidature has reportedly generated enthusiasm among party workers and supporters. According to party sources, as many as seven aspirants, including two women candidates, had sought the ticket for the Jorhat seat and had been engaging with voters over the past few months in anticipation of the party's decision.

Observers note, however, that Gogoi's decision to contest the Assembly election could also have wider implications for the Congress campaign. As the state party chief and a sitting MP, he has been actively involved in coordinating the party's campaign across Assam. Concentrating on the Jorhat constituency may limit the time he can devote to statewide campaigning.

Attention has now shifted to the BJP's candidate selection and campaign approach for the seat. Political watchers have also noted the growing presence of Pabitra Margherita, Union Minister of State for Textiles and External Affairs, in the region.

Over the past year, Margherita has been regularly visiting areas within the Jorhat parliamentary constituency, particularly the Jorhat Assembly segment, attending government events and public programmes. Many see these visits as part of a broader effort by the ruling party to consolidate its support base in Upper Assam.

## Karbi Anglong ginger in London market

SUSHANTA ROY  
DIPHU

The first delivery of Assam's GI-tagged ginger grown in the hills of Karbi Anglong district to London was officially dispatched by Agriculture Minister Atul Bora on Monday.

The export of 1.2 tons of ginger was facilitated by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) in association with the agricultural department of Assam.

During the ceremony Bora mentioned that this was a "historic leap" for Assam's farmers and agricultural pride, as it shows growing global recognition of the state's high-quality agricultural produce.

"The export of ginger indicates Assam government's attention on escalating farmers' earnings, promoting value addition and strengthening global market linkages," Bora said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's initiatives have helped expand the state's presence in international agricultural markets, the minister said. "Now people in London will find Assam's finest ginger at their doorsteps! Under the dynamic leadership of Hon'ble CM Dr. @himantabiswa, the first-ever GI-tagged Karbi Anglong Ginger consignment has been exported from Assam to London," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a post on X.

"This milestone, facilitated by APEDA, highlights Assam's growing global agricultural footprint and ensures better returns for our hardworking farmers. From the fertile farms of Assam to international markets, the world is embracing Assamese products with great enthusiasm and appreciation," it added.

## Manipur Cabinet Portfolios Allocated: CM Yumnam Khemchand Singh Retains 8 Departments, Deputy CMs Get Two Each



IMPHAL

The Manipur government on Wednesday formally distributed portfolios among members of its newly constituted Council of Ministers, with Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh retaining charge of eight key departments, in addition to those not specifically allocated to other ministers.

The allocation completes the formal structuring of the new government following Singh's swearing-in on February 4.

Deputy Chief Minister Nemcha Kipgen has been entrusted with Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, along with Tribal Affairs and Hills - portfolios considered crucial for governance in the state's hill districts and rural areas.

Fellow Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho has been assigned Public Health Engineering and Forests, Environment and Climate Change, sectors central to infrastructure delivery and ecological management in the state. Senior minister Konthoujam

Govindas Singh has been allocated the influential Home department, along with Youth Affairs and Sports. The Home portfolio carries particular significance given Manipur's internal security challenges and ongoing efforts to restore stability and law and order.

Meanwhile, Khuraijam Loken Singh has been given charge of Arts and Culture and Tourism, departments seen as vital for preserving Manipur's rich cultural heritage and promoting economic growth through tourism.

The portfolio allocation was approved by the Governor under Rule 6(1) of the Rules of Business of the Government of Manipur, acting on the advice of the Chief Minister, according to an official notification issued by Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel.

The size of the ministry remains within the constitutional cap prescribed by the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003, which limits the Council of Ministers to 15 per cent of the strength of the Legislative Assembly.

In the 60-member Manipur Assembly - currently functioning with 58 MLAs following the demise of N Kayisii of the National People's Party and Vungzang Valte of the Bharatiya Janata Party - the present Council of Ministers adheres to the mandated ceiling.

With portfolios now distributed, the new government is set to begin full-fledged administrative functioning across departments as it seeks to address governance, development and security priorities in the state.

# Madhya Dakshini Festival is an opportunity to know more about our country: Dr. Prashanna Gogoi



BISWADEEP GUPTA

NONGPOH: Bharat Ko Jano & Border Area Programme - Madhya Dakshini

Festival 2026 was successfully organised on 5th March 2026 at Ri-Bhoi College, Meghalaya.

The programme was organised by

the North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Dimapur and South Central Zone Cultural Centre (SCZCC), Nagpur, under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, in collaboration with North East Integration Rally 2026, KRC Foundation and Ri-Bhoi College, Meghalaya. The event aimed to strengthen cultural understanding and national integration by showcasing the rich and diverse traditions of India.

The programme was graced by Esther N. Marak, MCS, Assistant Commissioner, as the Chief Guest. Other distinguished dignitaries present on the occasion included Dr. Prashanna Gogoi, Director, NEZCC, Oliver T. Pongen, Deputy Director, NEZCC, Dipak P. Patil, Admin-cum-Accounts Officer, SCZCC, Nagpur, Madam W. K. Biah, Secretary, Ri-Bhoi College; Dr Elizabeth Kharkongor, Principal of Ri-Bhoi College; and Biswadeep Gupta, Managing Trustee, KRC Foundation, who was the Chief Coordinator of the Programme.

The programme began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp and

a welcome address by Dr. Elizabeth Kharkongor, Principal of Ri-Bhoi College. This was followed by brief addresses from the dignitaries highlighting the importance of cultural exchange and the role of such initiatives in promoting the spirit of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat."

A major highlight of the programme was the choreographic cultural presentation titled "Kala Sangini", a vibrant confluence of dance traditions from

South-Central India accompanied by live music. The performance featured traditional art forms such as Bonalu & Battukamma (Telangana), Bessu Kamsale and Devi Nritya (Karnataka), Gondhal & Jogwa (Maharashtra), Badhai & Norta (Madhya Pradesh), and Panthi Nritya, along with Folk Instrumental Music (Chhattisgarh), presented by talented artistes under the guidance of Astha M. Karlekar, Director, SCZCC, Nagpur, assisted by Maitreyee

Bapat and Harsh Nilesh Gada.

The programme also included beautiful performances by the local cultural groups of Ri-Bhoi College, presenting Ka Shad Mastieh and traditional Khasi folk songs, which added a vibrant local cultural flavour to the event.

The event concluded with the Vote of Thanks, followed by the National Anthem, leaving the audience with a memorable experience celebrating India's rich cultural diversity and unity.

**Bharat Ko Jano & Border Area Programme**  
&  
**Madhya Dakshini Festival 2026**  
6<sup>th</sup> March, 2026

Venue: The College of Post-Graduate Studies in Agricultural Sciences Barapani (Unimil), Meghalaya  
Time: 11.30 AM onwards



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 718

## INDIA'S MISSION SEMI CONDUCTOR



**T**he inauguration of the semiconductor Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging plant by PM Modi in partnership with Micron Technology at Sanand marks a defining moment in India's industrial evolution. For decades, India has been celebrated for its prowess in software and services; yet, it has remained heavily dependent on imports for critical hardware components, especially semiconductors. With this plant, India signals not merely the arrival of a new factory but the beginning of a structural transformation—an entry into the global semiconductor value chain that will shape the country's technological and economic destiny for decades to come.

Foreseeing upcoming trends is the hallmark of visionary leadership. The Industrial Revolution rewarded countries that mastered machinery and mass production. The next phase of global transformation is being driven by artificial intelligence, automation, advanced electronics and digital infrastructure. At the heart of this revolution lie semiconductors—the tiny chips that power everything from smartphones and automobiles to defence systems and AI servers. Recognising this, the Prime Minister has placed semiconductor manufacturing at the centre of India's long-term development strategy.

It is true that India is far behind global leaders in semiconductor fabrication, such as Taiwan, South Korea, and the United States. However, every journey begins with a first step. The Micron facility represents precisely that step—an opening into an ecosystem that will expose Indian engineers, entrepreneurs and policymakers to global best practices in chip assembly, packaging and testing. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, once reliant on foreign designs, today produces the indigenous Tejas LCA. Tata Motors benefited immensely from acquiring Jaguar Land Rover, absorbing advanced automotive technology and design capabilities. Understanding technology deeply—and where possible, adapting and improving upon it—is the foundation of industrial maturity.

China's rise provides another instructive example. Beginning as a manufacturing hub dependent on Western and Japanese technologies, it gradually mastered processes, scaled production and eventually created its own global technology giants. Taiwan's semiconductor success also evolved through strategic state support and international collaboration. India now stands at a similar inflexion point. The Micron plant may focus initially on assembly and packaging rather than advanced fabrication, but it embeds India within a critical segment of the global supply chain. Once part of the chain, scaling up becomes more feasible.

An important reality often overlooked in public debate is that nearly 90 per cent of semiconductors used globally are not cutting-edge chips but mature-node, medium-category components. These are widely used in consumer electronics, automobiles, industrial equipment and communication devices. India, with its rapidly expanding electronics manufacturing base, can realistically produce a large share of such chips. Domestic production will reduce dependence on imports and strengthen supply chain resilience. For a country aspiring to become a global manufacturing hub, secure access to semiconductors is indispensable. Moreover, the semiconductor ecosystem has powerful multiplier effects. When one major plant is established, ancillary industries follow, including suppliers of chemicals, gases, precision tools, logistics, packaging materials, and testing equipment. Employment generation extends beyond engineers to technicians, skilled workers and service providers. Universities and technical institutes will adapt curricula to meet new industry demands, nurturing a generation of chip designers and manufacturing specialists.

Policy alignment is crucial. Under the Semicon India programme, the government has offered fiscal incentives, faster approvals and infrastructure support to attract global players. Tax benefits and policy reforms aimed at promoting AI, data centres and server infrastructure further complement the semiconductor push. Challenges will undoubtedly arise.

The Micron plant is not the destination; it is the doorway. With more facilities planned in other states, India's semiconductor footprint is expanding geographically and strategically. The world is seeking diversified supply chains, and India—stable, democratic and demographically dynamic—offers an attractive alternative.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**“No man is free who is not master of himself.” – Epictetus**

# INDIA'S GROWING OBESITY CRISIS



DR ARUN SHARMA

India is facing a silent but rapidly growing epidemic – obesity and lifestyle-related diseases. Once considered a problem of the West, excess weight is now affecting millions across Indian cities and even smaller towns. Alongside it comes a sharp rise in type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA), fatty liver disease and heart disease – conditions that Indians are genetically more vulnerable to, even at lower body weights.

Until recently, patients with severe obesity had limited options beyond lifestyle changes and bariatric surgery. Today, a new class of injectable medications – such as Semaglutide (sold internationally as Ozempic and Wegovy) and Tirzepatide (sold as Mounjaro and Zepbound) – is changing the conversation around weight loss. With these drugs producing dramatic results, many Indians are asking: Do we still need bariatric surgery, or can injections replace it?

Indians develop diabetes and heart disease at lower body mass index (BMI) levels compared to Western populations. A BMI of 27 or 28 in an Indian patient may carry metabolic risks similar to a BMI of 32 or 33 in Western populations. This means weight-related health problems often appear earlier and progress faster. As a result, effective and timely intervention becomes even more important.

#### The Rise of Weight-Loss Injections

The new medications belong to a group known as incretin-based therapies. They mimic gut hormones that regulate appetite and blood sugar. Patients using these weekly injections often report: Reduced hunger, Early fullness, Smaller portion sizes & Better blood sugar control.

Clinical studies have shown average weight loss of about 15 percent with semaglutide and up to 20 percent with tirzepatide in some cases.

For an Indian weighing 100 kg, this could mean losing 15 to 20 kgs over several months under medical supervision. For many people who fear surgery or want a non-invasive option, this feels like a breakthrough. However, there are practical considerations in India. These injections can be expensive and are not universally covered by insurance.

#### Long-term affordability becomes an important factor.

Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery: Still the Gold Standard for Severe Obesity

Bariatric surgery has been performed in India for over two decades, with highly experienced centres in major cities. Procedures such as sleeve gastrectomy and gastric bypass reduce the size of the stomach and alter gut hormones that control hunger and metabolism.

Typical weight loss ranges from 25 to 35 percent of total body weight. In addition, surgery has shown remarkable benefits in Indian patients with type 2 diabetes – often leading to significant improvement or even remission. Given India's high diabetes burden, this benefit cannot be overstated. Modern bariatric surgery

is considered safe when performed by trained experts, with complication rates comparable to other common abdominal surgeries such as Laparoscopic Gall bladder removal. However, it does require a short 2-3 days hospitalisation, recovery time and lifelong nutritional monitoring. One additional factor in favour of Bariatric Surgery is that it is covered under insurance at a BMI cut-off point of 40 or more or a BMI of > 35, if associated with Diabetes, OSA or Heart disease.

#### The Key Question: What Happens Long Term?

One major difference between medications and surgery is durability. Weight-loss injections work very well – but generally only while they are being taken. Studies show that stopping the drug often leads to weight regain, as the body's natural hunger mechanisms return. Surgery produces permanent anatomical changes. While some weight regain can occur over the years, the results are typically more sustained without the need for ongoing injections. For Indian patients concerned about lifelong medication costs, this becomes an important discussion.

#### Safety and Side Effects

GLP-1 and GIP injections commonly cause nausea, vomiting or digestive discomfort in the initial weeks. These symptoms usually settle with time and dose adjustments.

Other rare but serious side effects include Pancreatitis, Gall stones, Stomach Paralysis, Kidney damage, Thyroid cancer, Suicidal thoughts and a potential risk of Eye-stroke or blindness in patients with Diabetes.

Surgery carries the usual risks associated with any operation, including infection, bleeding and anastomotic leak, though serious complications are uncommon in experienced hands. Patients must also commit to lifelong protein & vitamin supplementation to prevent deficiencies.

Both treatments require medical supervision. Neither is a

Patients with mild to moderate obesity; Those who prefer to avoid surgery; Individuals with early diabetes; Patients unfit for surgery

Metabolic & Bariatric surgery may be more appropriate for:

Patients with severe obesity; Individuals with long-standing diabetes; Those needing substantial and sustained weight loss; Patients who have not responded adequately to medications

It is important to remember that obesity is a chronic disease influenced by genetics, hormones and environment – not simply lack of discipline.

#### Competition or Complement?

At first glance, the rise of these medications seems to challenge the role of surgery. Some patients who would previously have opted for bariatric surgery are now choosing injections first. However, many Indian metabolic specialists see them as complementary tools. Some patients may use medications before surgery to reduce weight and improve blood sugar, making surgery safer. Others may undergo surgery and later use medications if weight regain occurs. In some cases, patients may start with injections and proceed to surgery if their health goals are not fully achieved. Rather than replacing surgery, these medications are expanding the treatment spectrum.

#### Cost and Accessibility in India

Affordability remains a significant factor. Long-term injection therapy can be costly. Surgery, while involving upfront expense, may prove more economical over years if it reduces medication dependency and hospital visits related to diabetes or heart disease.

#### The Bigger Picture

The emergence of effective weight-loss medications has brought renewed attention to obesity as a medical condition. It has also reduced stigma by reinforcing the understanding that weight regulation is largely biological.

Whether through injections,



“quick fix.”  
Who Should Consider What?  
In the Indian context, patient selection is critical. Weight-loss injections may be suitable for:

surgery, or a combination of both, treatment should aim at preventing long-term complications such as heart disease, kidney failure and stroke – con-

ditions that place heavy burdens on Indian households.

The Bottom Line  
Weight-loss injections have transformed obesity care and offer hope to millions who previously struggled without effective options. Bariatric surgery remains the most powerful and durable intervention for severe obesity and diabetes – especially relevant in a country like India, where metabolic diseases develop early and aggressively. The real question is not which treatment is superior, but which is most suitable for each individual patient.

In India's battle against obesity and diabetes, the future likely lies not in choosing between

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

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~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam



medicines and surgery – but in using both wisely, based on medical need, affordability and long-term health goals.

## Congress Unveils First 42 Candidates in Assam; Six Dynastic Faces, Including Three Sons of Former CMs, Feature Prominently

**GUWAHATI**

The Indian National Congress on Tuesday released its first list of 42 candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, setting the tone for what promises to be a closely watched political contest in the 126-member House.

The list, covering roughly one-third of the total constituencies, signals both continuity and churn within the party's ranks. It is headlined by Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi, who will contest from the Jorhat Assembly constituency - a seat he currently represents in the Lok Sabha.

Gogoi, 43, currently serves as Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha and has led the party's Assam unit since May 2025. His decision to shift from Parliament to the state Assembly is widely seen as a strategic move to anchor the party's revival efforts in Assam.

The Jorhat contest marks a significant political gamble for Gogoi, whose family name carries substantial influence in the state. He is the son of former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, who governed Assam for three consecutive terms between 2001 and 2016.

By contesting a state seat, Gogoi appears to be positioning himself at the centre of the Congress campaign, signalling an intent to lead the party's fight against the ruling BJP-led alliance on the ground rather than from Delhi.

However, the list also underscores the Congress's continued reliance on political legacies. Six candidates in the first tranche are drawn from established political families, including three sons of former chief ministers.

Apart from Gaurav Gogoi, the other two sons of former CMs are: "Dehabrata Saikia, contesting from Nazira, son of former Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia.

"Diganta Barman, fielded from

Barkhetri, son of former Chief Minister Bhumidhar Barman. Both Saikia and Barman are sitting MLAs seeking re-election, while Gogoi is making the transition from national to state politics.

The dynastic thread extends beyond former chief ministers' families. Tanzil Hussain, contesting from Samaguri, is the son of Dhubri MP Rakibul Hussain. Hussain senior had earlier represented the Samaguri Assembly seat before winning the 2024 Lok Sabha election, in which he defeated AIUDD chief Badrudin Ajmal by a margin exceeding one million votes. Pranjal Ghatowar, nominated from the newly delimited Chabua-Lahowal constituency, is the son of former Union Minister Paban Singh Ghatowar. Meanwhile, Pallabi Saikia Gogoi, contesting from Teok, is the daughter-in-law of former MLA Member Gogoi, who was also related to the late Hiteswar Saikia.

The prominence of political heirs in the list has once again brought the Congress's reliance on legacy politics into focus, even as the party seeks to project organisational renewal.

The list reflects substantial reshuffling across constituencies. Of the 42 seats announced, the Congress had sitting MLAs in 10 constituencies (11 MLAs in total). In seven of these 10 seats, the party has changed its candidate.

The 2023 delimitation exercise has significantly altered the political map. The constituencies of Boko and Chaygaon were merged, while Hajo was clubbed with Sualkuchi, which was previously part of the Jalukbari segment. Additionally, four entirely new constituencies - Tihu, Demow, Rongkhang (ST), and Ram Krishna Nagar (SC) - have emerged following delimitation.

Former Boko MLA Nandita Das has been shifted to the newly formed Hajo-Sualkuchi constituency after her seat was merged. In contrast, Chaygaon MLA Rekbuddin Ahmed has not found a place

in the first list. In Samaguri, a generational shift is visible, with Tanzil Hussain replacing his father Rakibul Hussain as the party's candidate. The Congress's candidate changes are also shaped by defections. Karimganj North MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha and Raha MLA Sashi Kanta Das have joined the Bharatiya Janata Party, while Goalpara West MLA Abdur Rashid Mandal has moved to the Rajgor Dal.

In these constituencies, the Congress has been compelled to field new candidates. Among the 42 seats where Congress candidates lost in 2021, the party has retained eight of its previous nominees. However, in constituencies like Chabua and Lahowal - now merged - neither of the earlier candidates has been renominated.

In Sonai, where the party did not contest in 2021, it is mounting a fresh challenge this time. The list also features several recruits from rival parties. Satyabrata Kalita, who switched from the Asom

Gana Parishad (AGP), has been fielded from Kamalpur. Ashok Kumar Sarma and Binanda Saikia, both former BJP leaders, have been nominated from Nalbari and Sipajhar respectively.

Former state Congress president Ripun Bora, who had briefly joined the Trinamool Congress, has returned to the party fold and been given the Barchalla ticket, replacing Ram Prasad Sarma - himself a former BJP leader who had joined Congress in 2020.

None of the newly inducted candidates from rival parties had secured victories in the 2021 Assembly elections.

Conversely, some former Congress candidates have crossed over to the BJP, including Rana Goswami (Jorhat), Rajiv Lochan Pegu (Majuli), and Bhupen Kumar Borah (Bihpuria). The party has fielded new faces in these constituencies, including Gaurav Gogoi in Jorhat. Former Dispur candidate Manjit Mahanta passed away after the last election.

### Assam CM to Hand Over Appointment Letters to 289 Candidates; Total Government Recruitment Nears 1.59 Lakh

**GUWAHATI**

Continuing its push for what it describes as transparent and merit-based recruitment, the Government of Assam will ceremonially distribute appointment letters to 289 newly recruited candidates at a function in Guwahati on Wednesday afternoon. The programme will be held at the Sri Sri Damodaradeva International Auditorium at Sri-manta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Panjabari, at 3:30 PM. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will personally hand over appointment letters to 284 candidates selected through the Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) 2024 for various state services. In addition, five Scientific Officers appointed to the Directorate of Forensic Science, Assam, will also receive their appointment letters at the event.

According to official details, the newly recruited officers include:

"45 in the Assam Civil Service (ACS)

"20 in the Assam Police Service (APS)

"52 in the Assam Finance Service (AFS)

"51 Inspectors of Taxes

Appointments have also been made in departments such as Labour, Transport, Industries and Commerce, Cooperative Societies, Audit Service, Excise, Employment, and Urban Administrative Services, indicating a broad-based expansion of the state's administrative framework. The induction of Scientific Officers into the Directorate of Forensic Science is expected to bolster technical capacity in criminal investigation and forensic analysis. The event will also witness the issuance of joint mutual transfer orders under the Swagata Satirtha Portal 2.0. So far, 2,238 mutual transfer applications have been approved, benefiting 4,476 government employees. Officials said the online portal mechanism is aimed at streamlining transfer processes and ensuring greater transparency and convenience for employees seeking mutual adjustments.

### Congress Announces Candidates for Seven Seats in Barak Valley



**OUR CORRESPONDENT**

**SILCHAR:** The Indian National Congress on Tuesday released its list of candidates for seven Assembly constituencies in the Barak Valley for the upcoming Assam Assembly Election 2026. From Silchar, the party has nominated Abhijit Paul. Ajit Singh will contest from Udharpur, while Aminul Haque Laskar has been named the candidate from Sonai. In Borkhola, the party has fielded Dr. Amit Kumar Kalwar. For Lakhipur constituency, M. Shanti Kumar Singha has been

selected as the party nominee. Jakaria Ahmed will contest from North Karimganj, and Kartik Sena Sinha has been named the candidate from Patharkandi. Party sources said the selection was made after internal discussions and feedback from local leaders and workers. With this announcement, the Congress has kickstarted its election campaign in the Barak Valley region.

The Assam Assembly Election 2026 is expected to witness a multi-cornered contest across the state, with major political parties gearing up for an intense battle.

### Assam BJP Claims Congress May Fail to Elect Any Hindu MLA in 2026 Assembly Polls

**GUWAHATI**

The Assam unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday asserted that the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly elections could mark an "unprecedented political shift", claiming that the Congress may not return a single Hindu MLA to the 126-member House.

Addressing a press conference at the party's state headquarters, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan in Guwahati, state BJP spokesperson Pranjal Kalita said the principal opposition party was facing a deepening political crisis and demographic realignment that could dramatically reduce its legislative footprint in the next Assembly.

Kalita alleged that for the first time in Assam's legislative history, the Congress might be left without a single Hindu representative in the Assembly following the 2026 polls. He further claimed that opposition parties combined may struggle to secure the minimum one-sixth strength - 21 seats in a 126-member House - required

for formal recognition of the Leader of the Opposition.

"If the trend continues, Assam may witness an Assembly without a recognised Leader of the Opposition," he said, asserting that such an outcome would reflect a significant restructuring of the state's political landscape. Projecting confidence ahead of the high-stakes election, Kalita claimed that the BJP and its allies were poised to cross the 100-seat mark in 2026. He said the ruling coalition remained firmly aligned with what he termed the "indigenous aspirations" of Assam and argued that this alignment would translate into an overwhelming electoral mandate.

According to him, as many as 104 constituencies have consolidated behind the BJP-led alliance's political vision, while opposition parties, particularly the Congress, would largely be confined to around 22 minority-dominated constituencies.

Kalita accused the Congress

of failing to present a coherent political agenda and instead being consumed by internal rivalries. He alleged that factional divisions within the party had weakened its organisational base across several districts. Drawing parallels with post-independence leadership in Assam, Kalita referred to former Congress stalwarts such as Gopinath Bordoloi, Bishnuram Medhi and Bimala Prasad Chaliha. He said these leaders had taken what he described as firm positions on issues relating to infiltration and demographic change. In contrast, he alleged that current Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi was pursuing a different political course that, according to the BJP, diverged from earlier positions taken by the party in Assam. Kalita also claimed that while the state government under Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma was prioritising the protection of indigenous land rights and addressing concerns related to encroachment, the Congress was focused

on rehabilitating evicted settlers and attempting to restore disputed landholdings. He argued that such positions were "out of sync" with the sentiments of large sections of the indigenous population. On the occasion of Doul Utsav and Holi, Kalita extended greetings to the people of Assam on behalf of the state BJP unit. He noted that the five-day Doul Utsav celebrations at Batabrava Than, following its recent reconstruction, had added renewed spiritual and cultural significance to the festival this year. He also highlighted the celebrations at Barpeta Satra, one of the prominent centres of the neo-Vaishnavite movement propagated by saint-reformers Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva.

The BJP's remarks come as political activity intensifies across Assam in the run-up to the 2026 Assembly elections, with both ruling and opposition parties sharpening their narratives around identity, governance and demographic concerns.

### Railways Clear 52 New Train Halts in Assam on Trial Basis, Boosting Regional Connectivity

**GUWAHATI**

In a major push to rail connectivity across Assam, the Ministry of Railways has approved stoppages for 52 trains at multiple stations under the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) on an experimental basis.

The decision follows a formal request from Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who had sought additional halts citing persistent public demands from various districts. The newly sanctioned stoppages will be introduced from an early convenient date and will remain under review. Their continuation will depend on passenger response and operational feasibility.

Railway authorities have been instructed to closely monitor ticket sales at the designated stations and to ensure wide publicity for

the new halts. The official communication was marked "most urgent," signalling the priority accorded to the initiative.

The Chief Minister's Office described the development as a major relief for commuters, stating that the additional stoppages would enhance connectivity and benefit thousands of daily passengers across the state.

Several prominent long-distance and premium services are among the trains receiving new halts.

The Kanyakumari-Dibrugarh Vivek Express will now stop at Abhayapuri, while the New Jalpaiguri-Guwahati Vande Bharat Express has been granted a halt at Barpeta Road.

The Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express will stop at Diphu and Tatibahar, and the New Delhi-Guwahati Rajdhani

Express has been allotted a halt at Furkating.

Among other key services, the Naharlagun-Guwahati Shatabdi Express will now halt at Gohpur, and the SMVT Bengaluru-Agartala Humsafar Express has been granted stoppages at Chandranathpur and Patharkandi.

Additional trains receiving new halts include:

"Sealdah-Sabroom Kanchenjunga Express

"Delhi-Kamakhya Brahmaputra Mail

"Howrah-Dibrugarh Kamrup Express

"Dibrugarh-Lalgarh Awadh Assam Express

"Agartala-Anand Vihar Tejas Express

These trains will now halt at stations including Bijni, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Hojai, Jagi Road,

Dhekiajuli Road, Chapar, Majbat, Naharkatiya, Sarupathar, Seleng Hat and Goalpara Town.

The inclusion of premium categories such as Rajdhani, Vande Bharat, Shatabdi, Tejas and Humsafar trains is being viewed as a significant development for semi-urban and rural pockets that previously had limited boarding access to high-speed or long-distance services.

Officials said that if passenger turnout remains robust and operational performance is unaffected, the Railway Board may consider making the experimental halts permanent.

For now, the move is expected to ease travel for students, traders, patients and daily commuters who rely heavily on rail connectivity to Guwahati and other major destinations within and beyond Assam.

### Three suspended Congress MLAs join BJP ahead of Assembly elections

**GUWAHATI**

Three suspended Assam Congress MLAs Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, Basanta Das, and Sashi Kanta Das joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the State BJP headquarters in Guwahati on Saturday in the presence of state party president Dilip Saikia, ahead of the Assembly elections.

Congress leaders switching to the BJP ahead of the polls is likely to mount trouble for the party, especially after last month, former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah joined the ruling party.

Union Minister of State (MoS) Pabitra Margherita told, "Leaders and functionaries from other parties, especially Congress, are joining the BJP today. They are showing their support for our ideology."

Further, Margherita said that Congress' list of 42 candidates for the upcoming elections lacks "freshness."

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Tuesday announced its list of 42 candidates for the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly elections.

"The list of candidates released by Congress doesn't have any freshness. Almost 20 of the 42 candidates were already rejected by the people on many occasions in the previous elections. We do not have any concerns,"

Pabitra Margherita said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma slammed the Congress' list of candidates, calling it a "dynastic list," while highlighting the BJP's emphasis on grassroots workers.

Speaking to reporters, CM Sarma said, "One may call it a list, but I would call it a dynastic list. In contrast, the BJP's list would include grassroots workers. The party is fully prepared for the upcoming elections."

According to an official release, the list includes Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi (Jorhat), Bitupan Saikia (Golaghat), Abdus Sobhan Ali Sarkar from Gauripur, Markline Marak from Goalpara West (ST), Girish Baruah from Bongaigaon, Mahananda Sarkar from Barpeta (SC), and Ramen Singh Rabha from Boko-Chaygaon (ST).

Other prominent names are Satyabrata Kalita (Kamalpur), Ripun Bora (Barchalla), Mira Borthakur Goswami (Dispur), Diganta Barman (Barkhetri), Uptal Gogoi (Sonari), Ajoy Kumar Gogoi (Demow), Dehabrata Saikia (Nazira), and Ashok Kumar Sarma (Nalbari).

Several women leaders have also been fielded, including Nandita Das (Hajo-Sualkuchi SC), Pallabi Saikia Gogoi (Teok), and Suruchi Roy (Ram Krishana Nagar SC).

### Rajgor Dal Announces First 11 Candidates for Assam Assembly Polls 2026, Sivasagar Seat Left Open

**GUWAHATI**

A day after the Indian National Congress unveiled its first list of candidates, the regional outfit Rajgor Dal on Wednesday released its maiden list of 11 nominees for the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly elections.

The list was issued from the party's head office at Mathgharia in Guwahati and formally signed by party president Akhil Gogoi. However, in a notable development, the announcement does not include Sivasagar - the constituency currently represented by Gogoi himself - leaving political observers speculating about the party's strategy in that seat.

According to the official notification (Ref No: RD/ADMIN/AE/L/1, dated March 4, 2026), the party's election committee has cleared the following candidates:

"East Goalpara (14): Abdur Rashid Mandal

"Jalukbari (37): Romen Chandra Borthakur

"Manas (41): Anjan Talukdar

"Dalgaon (51): Ajitpur Rahman

"Dhing (55): Mehboob Mukhtar

"Tezpur (67): Alok Nath

"Sisiborgaon (79): Dulal Chandra Barua

"Margherita (83): Rahul Chetry

"Digboi (84): Lakhyajyoti Gogoi



"Mariani (101): Dr Gyanashree Bora

"Bokakhat (105): Ratan Dao

The selection spans constituencies across Upper, Central and Lower Assam, indicating that the party is preparing for a broad-based contest in the 126-member Assembly.

The announcement comes amid visible strains within the opposition camp, particularly over seat-sharing negotiations between Rajgor Dal and the Congress.

Political observers note that several con-

stituencies included in the Rajgor Dal's first list - such as East Goalpara, Dhing, Margherita and Mariani - are considered crucial in the ongoing alliance discussions. By naming candidates in these segments, the party appears to be signalling its readiness to move forward with its electoral preparations irrespective of whether a formal seat-sharing agreement is finalised.

The omission of Sivasagar from the first list has further fuelled speculation about possible tactical manoeuvring, either to

leave room for negotiations or to time the announcement of Gogoi's candidature for maximum political impact.

On March 3, the Congress released its first list of 42 candidates, covering roughly one-third of the Assembly seats. Among the prominent names is Assam PCC president and Deputy Leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, who has been fielded from Jorhat.

The Congress has also nominated former state party chief Ripun Bora from Barchalla and senior leader Dehabrata Saikia from Nazira. In addition, the party has named candidates in several reserved constituencies, including Majuli (ST), Bokajan (ST), Rongkhang (ST), Boko-Chaygaon (ST), Jonai (ST), and Scheduled Caste segments such as Barpeta (SC), Hajo-Sualkuchi (SC), Jagiroad (SC), Raha (SC), and Ramkrishna Nagar (SC), signalling an attempt to consolidate support among diverse social groups.

With both the Congress and Rajgor Dal beginning to roll out their candidate lists, the contours of the opposition strategy are gradually becoming clearer. While Congress has opted for a larger initial slate, Rajgor Dal's calibrated list of 11 candidates suggests a targeted approach, potentially aimed at strengthening its bargaining position in alliance talks.

As the countdown to the 2026 Assembly elections gathers pace, further announcements from both parties are expected in the coming days, which will likely determine whether the opposition presents a united front or heads into the contest fragmented across key constituencies.



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## India backs 'Myanmar-led, Myanmar-owned' peace process: EAM Jaishankar



NEW DELHI:

India supports a Myanmar-led and Myanmar-owned peace process that can deliver lasting peace and development for all in the Southeast Asian country, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday.

The external affairs minister also highlighted the importance India attaches to its ties with Myanmar saying the country lies at the confluence of New Delhi's three key foreign policy priorities: 'Neighbourhood First', 'Act East', and MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions). Myanmar is one of India's strategic neighbours and it shares a 1,640-kilometre-long border with a number of northeastern states including militancy-hit Nagaland and Manipur.

The country has been witnessing widespread violent protests after the military

seized power in a coup on February 1, 2021.

The military-backed party secured a victory in Myanmar's recent general election.

Jaishankar was speaking virtually at the inauguration of the Sarsobeikman Literary Centre building in the heart of Yangon.

The building has been constructed with New Delhi's assistance.

"As the world's largest democracy with 1.4 billion people living together in peace and harmony, India has regularly shared its experiences in federalism and constitutionalism with stakeholders in Myanmar," he said.

"We support an inclusive, Myanmar-led and Myanmar-owned peace process that can deliver lasting peace and development for all in Myanmar," he added.

Jaishankar said the Sarsobeikman Centre will support the conservation and study of classical and folk literatures of Myanmar, as well

as translation, archival work, creative writing, and scholarly exchanges.

"Myanmar lies at the confluence of our three key foreign policy priorities - Neighbourhood First, Act East, and MAHASAGAR including the Indo-Pacific," he said.

"Our multifaceted engagement, includes political, trade, security and cultural cooperation. When it comes to development cooperation, our engagement with Myanmar has been people-centric and demand-driven, aimed towards strengthening local economies and improving lives," the minister said.

Jaishankar said India and Myanmar have been bound together for centuries by spirituality, kinship and geography, as well as by language and literature.

"As Buddhism and Pali language and literature travelled across South Asia, they carried with them ideas, texts, and a shared intellectual heritage," he said.

## SIR hits TMC's core turf in Bengal; party banks on turnout surge, women and minority consolidation

KOLKATA

The SIR of West Bengal's voter list has struck the electoral nerve centre of the TMC, hitting Muslim-majority areas and the crucial two 24 Parganas districts ahead of the assembly polls, even as the ruling party bets on higher turnout, Bengali pride and women and minority consolidation to blunt the impact.

The electoral roll revision has had its deepest impact in North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Murshidabad, Malda, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur - six districts that together account for over 100 assembly seats, including 64 in the two 24 Parganas alone, widely regarded as the electoral backbone of any winning coalition in Bengal.

These districts have also been central to the TMC's dominance since 2011, with the party sweeping all six in the 2021 assembly polls.

Murshidabad alone has over 11 lakh voters under adjudication, the highest in the state, followed by Malda with around 8.3 lakh.

In the politically crucial North 24 Parganas, about 5.9 lakh voters remain under scrutiny, while South 24 Parganas has around 5.2 lakh such cases.

These districts also witnessed around 23 lakh deletions.

"Control over North and South 24 Parganas often determines who governs Bengal. If the party's tally in these five districts falls sharply, it could be a challenge for us. We know how to convert the challenge into victory," a TMC leader said.

The Special Intensive Revision exercise resulted in 63.66 lakh deletions, about 8.3 per cent of the electorate, reducing the voter base from 7.66 crore before the revision to about 7.04 crore now.

Another 60.06 lakh voters remain under adjudication, awaiting document verification.

The post-SIR rolls show that nearly 1.23 crore voters, roughly one in six electors, are either deleted or under adjudication.

Data compiled across West Bengal's 294 assembly constituen-



cies shows that the number of voters affected by the SIR, deletions and those under scrutiny, exceeds the 2024 Lok Sabha winning margins in more than 200 segments, suggesting the exercise could potentially reshape electoral equations in the state polls due in April.

In at least 120 assembly segments, the number of deleted voters alone is higher than the 2024 Lok Sabha winning margin in those constituencies.

The scale of deletions has also crossed the thin victory margins of the 2021 assembly polls in at least 40 seats, of which the majority were won by the BJP and the remaining by the TMC.

In the last assembly elections, the TMC won at least 45 seats with victory margins of less than 10,000 votes, while the BJP secured around 20 constituencies within a similar margin, highlighting how relatively small shifts in votes could influence outcomes in several closely contested segments.

According to TMC sources and researchers, in 41 constituencies where the minority population exceeds 50 per cent, deletions were lower at 5.

61 per cent, but the share of voters under adjudication soared to over 21 per cent of the electorate.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha segments, the TMC were ahead in 29 of these seats, the Congress-Left alliance in 11, and the BJP just one.

The BJP has projected the SIR exercise as a long-overdue effort to clean electoral rolls and identify illegal immigrants, particularly from Bangladesh. The TMC, however, argue that the process disproportionately affects districts where the party performed strongly in previous elections. TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee has alleged that the scale of deletions mirrors earlier claims by BJP leaders that over 1.

2 crore names would be removed, suggesting that the exercise was "politically motivated and pre-de-

termined".

Political analyst Suman Bhattacharya said the statistical implications of voter deletions are complex.

"If deletions occur proportionately, the party with a larger vote share in a constituency may actually lose more voters numerically. The TMC may attempt to convert the controversy into an emotional advantage," he added.

TMC's state vice-president Jaiprakash Majumdar said the goal will be to increase voter turnout and sector-wise voting.

"If turnout increases, and if women and Muslim electors vote in large numbers combined with a section of youths, the impact of deletions can be offset. Our goal is sector-wise voting, while the BJP wants voting on religious lines," he said.

The party is also seeking to frame the issue as one of identity and citizenship, arguing that many voters feel harassed by repeated document verification and hearings.

Some strategists believe this sentiment could produce "revenge voting" if a significant number of voters whose names were initially removed are eventually reinstated.

Researcher Sabir Ahmed said the controversy may also trigger stronger minority consolidation behind the TMC.

"When voters feel their citizenship is being questioned, the issue goes beyond party politics.

If that sentiment grows, the consolidation of minority voters behind the TMC could intensify, even if there is a resentment among a section, and they were initially looking for other options such as Humayun Kabir," he said. The TMC is also recalibrating its outreach in other segments where the SIR exercise has generated anger, including Matua-dominated belts in North 24 Parganas, where sections of voters have complained about large-scale deletions.

Senior leaders said the campaign will increasingly emphasise "Bengali pride" and regional identity, portraying the SIR as an attempt to undermine Bengal's electorate.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Israel targets Iran's security forces and leadership as Tehran presses attacks across the region

DUBAI

The United States and Israel hit Iran's capital and other cities in multiple airstrikes on Wednesday, the fifth day of the war with Iran.

Israel targeted the Iranian leadership and security forces as the Islamic Republic responded with missile barrages and drone attacks on Israel and across the region.

Tehran residents woke to dawn blasts, and Iranian state television showed the ruins of building in the center of the capital. The Shiite seminary city of Qom and multiple other cities were also targeted.

With fighter jets roaring overhead, those still in Tehran looked anxiously to the skies. One man, who ran a clothing shop, said he didn't know what to do. "If I leave the city, how am I supposed to earn money and survive?" he said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

The Israeli military said one of its F-35 stealth fighter jets shot down a piloted Iranian Air Force YAK-130 fighter over Tehran on Wednesday. It also said Israeli air defenses were activated to intercept Iranian missiles fired at targets around the country, and explosions were heard around Jerusalem.

The tempo of the strikes on Iran was so intense that authorities postponed the mourning ceremony for Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed in the conflict, according to Iranian state television.

US Embassies and oil in the cross-hairs

With Iran's stranglehold on tanker movement through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which about a fifth of the world's oil is shipped, Brent crude prices hit \$84 a barrel, up more than 15% since the start of the conflict

and at its highest price since July 2024.

Global stock markets have been hammered over worries that the spike in oil prices may grind down the world economy and sap corporate profits.

Iran has also attacked regional infrastructure. Saudi Arabia said Wednesday its Ras Tanura oil refinery, one of the world's largest, was again targeted after an unsuccessful drone attack on it earlier in the week. The kingdom's oil ministry said the latest attack did not cause any damage and supplies were not affected.

The American Embassy in Saudi Arabia and the US Consulate in the United Arab Emirates came under drone attacks Tuesday, and the US State Department said Wednesday it had authorized non-emergency government personnel to evacuate the kingdom.

US Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of US Central Command, said Iran has launched more than 500 ballistic missiles and 2,000 drones so far.

"We've already struck nearly 2,000 targets, with more than 2,000 munitions. We have severely degraded Iran's air defenses and destroyed hundreds of Iran's ballistic missiles, launchers and drones," Cooper said in a prerecorded message shared online Wednesday.

Five days into a war that US President Donald Trump suggested could last a month or longer, nearly 800 people have been killed in Iran, including some Trump said he had considered as possible future leaders of the country.

This satellite image provided by Vantor shows the Islamic Revolutionary Court after airstrikes in Tehran, Iran, Tuesday, March 3, 2026.

Air sirens sounded in the morning across the island kingdom of Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet, and Qatar's Ministry of Defense said Iran launched two ballistic missiles against

it. One hit Al-Udeid Qatari Base but didn't cause casualties.

Lebanon was hit in multiple strikes and Israel said it's retaliating against Hezbollah militants after the Iran-backed group fired on Israel. More than 50 people have been killed in Lebanon and more than 300 wounded, according to the Health Ministry.

Iranian-linked militant groups in Iraq have also been launching attacks. Israeli military spokesman Brig. Gen. Efi Efrin reported a decline in launches from Iran as the country's military capabilities are degraded. In airstrikes overnight, the Israeli military said it hit a missile storage and production plant in Isfahan.

The spiraling nature of the war raised questions about when and how it would end. Trump's administration has offered various objectives, including destroying Iran's missile capabilities, wiping out its navy, preventing it from obtaining a nuclear weapon and ensuring it cannot continue to support allied armed groups.

This satellite image provided by Vantor shows the Islamic Revolutionary Court after airstrikes in Tehran, Iran, Tuesday, March 3, 2026.

While the initial US-Israeli strikes killed Khamenei and Trump urged Iranians to overthrow their government, senior administration officials have since said regime change was not the goal.

Trump on Tuesday seemed to downplay the chances of the war ending Iran's theocratic rule, saying that "someone from within" the Iranian regime might be the best choice to take power once the US-Israel campaign is finished.

Israel's defense minister, Israel Katz, said Wednesday on X that whoever Iran picks as the country's next supreme leader, he will be "a target for elimination."

The Israeli military also said it hit buildings in Tehran associated with the Basij, the all-volunteer force of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard that conducted the bloody crackdown on protesters in January that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands detained in the country.

Iran's judiciary chief, Gholam Hosseini Mohseni Ejehei, threatened Wednesday anyone who supports the US-Israeli campaign, saying on Iranian state television that they are "on the enemy's side and must be dealt with on revolutionary, Islamic principles and in accordance with the time of war."

Iran's leaders are scrambling to replace Khamenei, who ruled the country for 37 years. It's only the second time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that a new supreme leader is being chosen. Among those considered as possible candidates is Mojtaba Khamenei, a son of the late ayatollah.

Efrin, the Israeli military spokesman, said the military struck a building in the Iranian city of Qom on Tuesday where clerics were expected to meet to discuss selecting a new supreme leader. He said the army was still assessing whether anyone was hit.

The semiofficial Fars and Tasnim news agencies, both believed to be close to the Guard, said Wednesday there was no meeting there at the time of the attack.

The US-Israeli strikes have killed at least 787 people in Iran, according to the Red Crescent Society. Eleven people in Iraq have been killed since the conflict began.

Kuwait, which had previously reported a single death, said Wednesday that an 11-year-old girl was killed by falling shrapnel as Kuwaiti forces were intercepting "hostile aerial targets." In addition, three people were killed in the United Arab Emirates and one in Bahrain.

## Travellers stranded in Dubai are paying huge sums for private flights out



DUBAI

Tens of thousands of airline passengers are stranded by the Iran war that has spread across the Gulf region, but some wealthy travelers are getting out — by paying large sums for luxury flights to Europe via airports that are safe from Iranian drone and missile attacks.

Demand for charter flights has skyrocketed, with some people paying up to 200,000 euros (\$232,000) as major airports in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha, Qatar, were closed after the start of the conflict last weekend.

Travelers from Dubai, usually known as a safe and luxurious destination, are seeking to evacuate by traveling overland either to Muscat, Oman, about a four-hour drive, or to Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, more than 10 hours away.

Then they board one of the few available commercial flights or take a charter flight, whose costs have soared since the start of the war.

"The demand is huge, and we can't deliver enough aircraft to respond to the demand," said Altay Kula, CEO of the France-based private jet broker JET-VIP.

Whereas normally a charter flight on a private jet that can accommodate up to 16 passengers from

Riyadh to Porto in Portugal may cost around 100,000 euros (\$115,800) these days, the cost has doubled, Kula said.

"This increase in cost reflects the aircraft's scarcity, the repositioning costs as well, and the operator risk assessments. So this is not speculative pricing," he added.

Prices can vary depending on the departure point, the type of aircraft and the route constraints, said Ameerh Naran, CEO of Vimana Private Jets. For flights from the Gulf region to Europe, prices are ranging from 150,000 euros (\$173,800) to 200,000 euros, he added.

In order to reach functional airports such as those in Riyadh and Muscat, some travelers hire private security companies that coordinate transportation in vehicles ranging from ordinary passenger cars to coach buses.

Due to the heavy traffic, wait times at border points with Oman can be up to four hours, while costs range in the thousands of dollars, said Ian McCaul, operations and planning director with Alma Risk, a U.K.-based risk management and security firm.

Those seeking to leave are predominantly stranded travelers, as opposed to

residents, McCaul added. He estimates his company has made transfer arrangements for more than 200 people and advised several others in recent days.

Vimana's clients include business executives, families and entrepreneurs, as well as remote workers who had been based in the region, Naran said.

Elie Hanna, CEO for the Middle East headquarters of Air Charter Service, based in Dubai, said most of the flights out of the region are leaving from Oman. The prices are so high, he said, because few charter planes are available since most of them are stuck at airports that are now closed.

The clients he is seeing range from people who regularly charter private, as well as people who generally fly commercial but are trying to pool resources with other travelers or families to share the expense.

"Everyone is stressed," Hanna said. "To be honest, everyone is trying to accommodate as much as they can. Muscat Airport is overloaded with flights and everybody is stressed."

Experts from the International SOS security and health services company expect the fighting to continue to affect transportation and energy infrastructure for weeks.

# DSEU Explores Canada Partnership After Meeting with Former Minister Rod Phillips

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**KRC TIMES NEWS DESK**

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi Skill and Entrepreneurship University held a key meeting that could open doors to global collaboration. The university's Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ashok K. Nagawat, met Honourable Rod Phillips, former minister in the Government of Canada, for talks on future partnerships.

The discussion focused on possible academic and institutional ties between DSEU and leading institutions in Canada. Both sides explored ways to work together in skill education, emerging technologies, and workforce training.

Phillips shared his views on the changing global skill landscape. He stressed the need to balance new technologies with strong foundations in traditional skill disciplines. His ideas found resonance with DSEU's focus on blending innovation with hands-on craftsmanship.

Phillips served as Member of Provincial Parliament for Ajax from 2018 to 2022. He handled major portfolios such as Environment, Finance, and Long-Term Care in Ontario. His experience in public policy and business brought a wider perspective to the discussion on global skill ecosystems and workforce transformation. DSEU officials said the meeting was constructive and forward-looking. As a next step, the university plans to submit a formal proposal within a month to build on the engagement.

The university expressed hope that the dialogue will grow into a long-term partnership.



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ship, strengthening skill development efforts and creating global opportunities for students.