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PERSPECTIVE

We are planning cities on Mars, building AI for everything, and smarter phones every year. Meanwhile people still want clean water, affordable healthcare, and birds singing in the morning. - Harsh Goenka, Chairman, RPG Enterprises

Gaurav Gogoi prefers development in England or Pakistan: Himanta Biswa Sarma

JORHAT
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, alleging that he has consistently opposed several major infrastructure projects in the state. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event at Swaraj Udyan in Jorhat, Sarma claimed that Gogoi had opposed the proposed elevated corridor in Kaziranga National Park, the planned flyover in Jorhat and the proposed underwater tunnel between Gohpur and Numaligarh.

The chief minister alleged that Gogoi does not want development in Assam or India.

"When the elevated corridor in Kaziranga was approved, Gaurav Gogoi opposed it. The same he did with the flyover in Jorhat and the underwater tunnel between Gohpur and Numaligarh," Sarma said.

He further claimed that since members of Gogoi's family live in the United Kingdom, he would prefer development there rather than in India.

"His family lives in England, so he would want development there. If not there, he would want development in Pakistan," Sarma alleged.

The chief minister also criticised sections of the media, saying journalists should question Gogoi about his stance on infrastructure projects in Upper Assam.

"I have seen journalists do not have the guts to question Gaurav Gogoi. I would request scribes to ask him questions," Sarma said, adding that the Congress leader had opposed development across Upper Assam.

WHO SAID WHAT

Our ideology is India First and for us, the well-being of Indians is above everything else! ~ Narendra Modi, PM India

Rs.9,000 aid before polls won't save BJP in Assam: Pawan Khera targets Himanta Biswa Sarma

NEW DELHI
Senior Pawan Khera said last-minute initiatives by the Bharatiya Janata Party government in Assam, including financial assistance to women, will not help the party retain power in the upcoming Assembly elections.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati, the chairman of the media and communications department of the Indian National Congress alleged that the government led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma works mainly in the interests of its ministers.

Responding to BJP allegations regarding the alleged Pakistan links of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, Khera claimed that Sarma had met a cleric in Dhaka before joining the BJP in 2015.

"I challenge him to deny it. He joined the BJP on the advice of that cleric," Khera said. There was no immediate response from the chief minister or the BJP to the allegation.



Khera said Sarma had left the Congress to join the BJP in 2015 and

Assam refineries meet only 30% of LPG demand; govt steps up monitoring, CM rules out shortage

GUWAHATI
Local refineries in Assam currently have the capacity to meet only about 30 per cent of the state's demand for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), Chief Secretary Ravi Kota said, adding that the government has stepped up monitoring to ensure uninterrupted supply.

In a post on X on Wednesday, Kota said the state's four refineries have been asked to ramp up production to avoid any disruption in the supply of cooking gas to consumers.

The issue was also reviewed during a video conference chaired by Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, which was attended by chief secretaries and directors general of police from states and Union territories to assess the availability of LPG and diesel across the country.

According to Kota, the local refineries are expected to meet



only around 30 per cent of Assam's LPG requirement. The refineries include three operated by Indian Oil Corporation at Digboi, Guwahati and Bongaigaon, and another run by Numaligarh Refinery Limited at Numaligarh.

To closely monitor the situation, the state government has constituted a high-powered committee headed by the chief secretary with representatives from relevant departments to regularly review the fuel supply position.

Kota also said a dedicated media monitoring committee has been set up to track rumours, misinformation and misleading reports that could create panic among consumers.

He added that enforcement agencies have been directed to take strict action against individuals or entities spreading false information regarding fuel availability.

Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said there is no crisis of LPG cylinders in the state and that the government is closely monitoring the situation.

Speaking to reporters, Sarma said the review was undertaken in the backdrop of the ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia. He noted that India procures gas from nearly 40 countries and that Russia has also begun supplying oil and gas to India.

Expressing confidence that there would be no shortage of

LPG, Sarma recalled how the central government had managed oxygen supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Earlier, Indian Oil Corporation, which supplies nearly 85 per cent of LPG cylinders in the Northeast, said it has sufficient stock to meet the region's demand despite concerns arising from the global situation.

A senior IOC official said all nine bottling plants in the Northeast are operating at maximum capacity and distributing cylinders as per government directives.

Officials said the Northeast requires around 1.91 lakh domestic LPG cylinders of 14.2 kg every day, of which about 1.34 lakh cylinders are consumed in Assam alone.

In the commercial segment of 19-kg cylinders, the region requires around 5,777 units daily, including about 4,112 units in Assam, they added.

Two abducted civilians found dead in Manipur; case to be handed over to NIA



IMPHAL
Two persons who were allegedly abducted were found dead in Manipur's Ukhrul district on Thursday, while 21 civilians who had been held captive in retaliation along the Ukhrul-Imphal route were released safely, the state Assembly was informed.

Responding to a calling attention motion during the ongoing session of the Manipur Legislative Assembly, state Home Minister K Govindas said the incident followed an exchange of gunfire between armed groups in the Mapithel hill range of Ukhrul district on Wednesday.

According to the minister, the gunfight reportedly took place between 6.30 am and 9 am after two villagers belonging to the Kuki community were allegedly abducted by armed groups.

During the exchange of fire, a civilian identified as Lalminthang Haokip, 40, sustained a minor bullet injury and was later taken to a health centre in Kangpokpi district for treatment, he said.

Govindas informed the House that in retaliation, 21 civilians belonging

to the Tangkhul Naga community who were travelling along the Ukhrul-Imphal road were abducted by some members of the Kuki community at Shankkai village in Ukhrul district.

He said the captives were released safely around 3 am on Thursday following efforts by the district administration and civil society groups from both communities.

Meanwhile, officials confirmed that two individuals who were earlier abducted were found dead in the Mapithel hill range on Thursday morning.

They were identified as Thengin Baite of Thawai Kuki village in Kamjong district and Thangboimang Khongsai of Shankkai village in Ukhrul district.

Govindas told the Assembly that violence cannot resolve demands and urged all communities to pursue dialogue to restore peace in the state.

Leader of the House Yumnam Khemchand said the incident would be handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for investigation and to bring those responsible to justice.

Earlier, Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh held a meeting with Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Raj Bhavan in Imphal and appealed for the immediate and unconditional release of the civilians.

The chief minister also warned that strict action would be taken against those involved in unlawful activities and urged people to refrain from violence, officials said.

Two suspected jihadis arrested by STF in Assam's Barpeta

GUWAHATI
Two persons were arrested in Assam's Barpeta district for their alleged links with fundamentalist groups, officials said on Thursday.

The arrests were made during a late-night operation conducted by the Special Task Force in the Sorbhog police station area following specific intelligence inputs.

A senior officer at the Assam Police headquarters said the suspects were apprehended on Tuesday night and are currently being interrogated.

"Two suspected jihadis have been arrested from Barpeta. Their interrogation is underway and further details will be shared later," the officer said.

Police sources said the accused were allegedly found in possession of Pakistani SIM cards, which are being examined as part of the ongoing investigation.

One of the arrested persons has been identified as Sahidul Islam. Both suspects have been taken to Guwahati for further questioning.

Officials said the operation was carried out in coordination with local police in the district.

The arrests come amid heightened security vigilance in the state following earlier crackdowns on suspected extremist networks.

In January this year, 11 alleged members of Imam Mahmud Kafil were arrested, with investigators pointing to a wider cross-border network with links to Bangladesh and West Bengal.

Security agencies believe the group to be an offshoot of the Bangladesh-based militant outfit Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh.

Investigators had earlier said that the network used encrypted social media platforms to circulate radical literature, spread extremist propaganda and recruit youths, particularly in districts such as Barpeta and Chirang district.

Further details regarding the latest arrests are awaited as interrogation of the suspects continues, officials added.

Assam's tea estate golf courses may be developed as niche tourism circuit

GUWAHATI
Assam's unique tea estate golf courses, popularly known as "tea-tees", may soon be developed as a niche tourism attraction under a proposal aimed at promoting the state's distinctive combination of tea heritage and sport.

Renowned golfer Arjun Atwal and Gaurav Ghosh of J Thomas & Co on Wednesday met Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota to discuss the potential of developing the state's tea estate golf courses into a tourism and sporting circuit. Officials said Assam is home to nearly 23 such golf courses, many of them natural nine-hole layouts located within scenic tea estates. Several estates also feature heritage bungalows, offering visitors the experience of staying amid tea gardens while enjoying golf and exploring the region.

During the meeting, officials highlighted that these courses represent a rare blend of tea heritage, natural landscapes and sporting tradition, making them attractive to golf enthusiasts and tourists from across India and abroad. "Assam's tea-tees represent a rare combination of tea heritage, picturesque landscapes and sporting tradition. Their historical legacy and unique setting have the potential to attract golf enthusiasts and tourists from across the country and overseas," Kota said after the interaction.

Atwal, India's only winner on the PGA Tour, said the state's golf courses hold significant tourism potential, although many of them are currently not maintained to their

full capacity.

"I will be getting back with my team in the US with a roadmap. To begin with, we may take up one golf course as a model and develop it into a modern-day facility. Eventually, all stakeholders should come on board," he said.

Calling Assam's tea estate golf courses a "gold mine" with exceptional natural designs, Atwal proposed creating an "Assam Golf Trail" - a cluster of golf courses similar to the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail - to place the state on the global golfing map.

"It will be great for tourism and also beneficial for investors, particularly those from abroad coming into the state, as many of them play golf," he added, noting that the revenue model could become self-sustaining once the concept gains traction.

Atwal also discussed the possibility of establishing a golf academy strategically located among the courses to nurture young talent and improve the standard of the sport in the region. As a next step, Kota said stakeholders will submit a detailed proposal outlining the concept and roadmap for developing the tea estate golf courses as a tourism and sporting initiative. The Government of Assam will then consult tea garden managements and other stakeholders to explore the proposal further. If implemented, the initiative could showcase Assam's distinctive tea landscape while opening new avenues for tourism and sports development in the state, officials said.



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RISING TOBACCO USE AMONG YOUTH

Tobacco addiction has increasingly become one of the most pressing social and public health concerns affecting young people in many parts of India. In the region of Jammu and Kashmir, this issue has begun to take on worrying proportions, particularly among school, college and university-going students. Health experts, teachers and social workers in the region warn that the rising number of young smokers reflects not only a health concern but also a broader social challenge that demands urgent attention from families, educational institutions and policymakers alike.

For many years, tobacco use has been recognised globally as one of the leading preventable causes of disease and death. According to the World Health Organization, millions of people die every year due to illnesses caused by tobacco consumption. These illnesses include heart disease, lung cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and several other life-threatening conditions. While global public health campaigns have worked tirelessly to reduce tobacco consumption, the habit continues to spread among younger populations in various regions, including parts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Across towns and cities in the Union Territory, it is not uncommon to see young students smoking cigarettes outside campuses, in markets or at social gathering spots. What is particularly concerning is that many of these students are still in their teenage years or early twenties. For them, smoking often begins as a casual experiment influenced by curiosity, peer pressure or the desire to appear socially confident among friends. However, this seemingly harmless experimentation can quickly turn into nicotine dependence.

Nicotine, the addictive substance found in tobacco, has a powerful effect on the human brain. When a person smokes, nicotine reaches the brain within seconds and creates temporary feelings of relaxation or alertness. Over time, the brain begins to depend on this chemical stimulation, leading to repeated cravings and withdrawal symptoms whenever a person attempts to stop. For young students whose bodies and brains are still developing, this addiction can have particularly harmful consequences.

Doctors in Jammu and Kashmir are increasingly reporting tobacco-related health issues among younger individuals. Persistent cough, breathing difficulties, reduced stamina and early signs of cardiovascular strain are being observed even in individuals in their twenties. Medical professionals warn that if tobacco use continues at such levels among the youth, the long-term health burden on the region could become severe.

Another major concern is the social normalisation of smoking among young people. In some college environments, smoking is often seen as a symbol of maturity or independence, which can encourage more students to try it. In reality, however, smoking creates long-term dependence that is difficult to overcome without support. Many young smokers eventually realise the dangers of tobacco but struggle to quit due to the strong grip of nicotine addiction.

Studies have shown that most smokers make several attempts to quit before they succeed. Unfortunately, many of these attempts fail because the withdrawal symptoms associated with nicotine addiction can be intense. These symptoms may include irritability, anxiety, restlessness and strong cravings for cigarettes. Without access to proper support systems, young smokers often return to their old habits even after trying to quit.

In recent years, health experts have emphasised the importance of nicotine replacement therapies as a practical method to support individuals who want to stop smoking. Products such as nicotine gums are designed to help smokers gradually reduce their dependence on nicotine. These gums provide controlled amounts of nicotine to the body without exposing users to the thousands of harmful chemicals found in cigarette smoke.

Research conducted by international organisations, including studies reviewed by Cochrane, has consistently shown that nicotine replacement therapy significantly increases the chances of successfully quitting smoking. Smokers who use such therapies are far more likely to overcome their addiction compared to those who attempt to quit without any medical assistance.

Nicotine gums, typically available in strengths of 2 mg and 4 mg, have been used globally for more than three decades as medically approved smoking cessation aids. They are recognised by the World Health Organization as effective tools for tobacco cessation and are included in its Essential Medicines List. Unlike cigarettes, nicotine gums do not produce tar, carbon monoxide or other toxic substances generated by burning tobacco.

In India, nicotine gums are regulated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and are categorised as therapeutic medicines intended to help smokers quit tobacco. Health experts emphasise that these products should not be confused with recreational nicotine products. Instead, they are medical tools designed to support individuals who genuinely want to overcome nicotine addiction.

For the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, increasing awareness about these cessation tools could make a significant difference. Many students who are addicted to tobacco remain unaware that medically approved methods exist to help them quit. Public health specialists believe that educating students about nicotine replacement therapy could encourage more young smokers to seek help rather than continuing their harmful habits.

Educational institutions across the region have a crucial role to play in addressing this growing social issue. Schools, colleges and universities can serve as platforms for spreading awareness about the dangers of tobacco use. Health education programmes, seminars and counselling sessions can help students understand the risks associated with smoking and the benefits of quitting early.

Teachers and parents must also play an active role in guiding young people toward healthier choices. Open communication about the dangers of tobacco and the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle can discourage experimentation with smoking. Encouraging students to participate in sports, cultural activities and academic pursuits can also reduce the likelihood of tobacco use by promoting positive outlets for stress and energy.

Another important step is the strict enforcement of smoke-free environments in educational institutions. Creating smoke-free campuses sends a strong message that tobacco use is not acceptable within spaces dedicated to learning and personal development. Such policies also protect non-smokers from exposure to second-hand smoke, which itself poses serious health risks.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Nothing is enough to the man for whom enough is too little.”

Epicurus

UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S POSITION ON IRAN AND ISRAEL



PROF VIRENDER KOUNDAL

In recent weeks, some opposition groups and a few activists in different parts of India, including in Kashmir, have demanded that the Government of India strongly condemn the killing of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei by the United States and Israel. Protests and demonstrations have been organized, and some voices are attempting to create a political narrative that India must openly support Iran in this matter. However, such demands raise important questions about India's national interests, diplomatic history, and strategic partnerships. A responsible and informed debate must consider the historical record of how different countries have treated India's core concerns, particularly the sensitive issue of Jammu and Kashmir.

India has always followed an independent foreign policy based on national interest, strategic balance, and peaceful coexistence. The country maintains relations with many nations across the world, even those that may have conflicts with each other. However, when evaluating international issues, it is important to examine the historical attitudes of these countries toward India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this context, the positions taken by Iran and Israel over the decades provide valuable insights. Historically, Iran has maintained a complex and sometimes contradictory position regarding Kashmir. Even before the Islamic Revolution of 1979 led by Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran often leaned toward Pakistan's position on the Kashmir dispute. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Iranian monarchy maintained close strategic relations with Pakistan and supported its position in international forums. Iran backed Pakistan diplomatically during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971. These wars were critical moments in South Asian history, and Iran's stance at the time clearly aligned more closely with Pakistan than with India. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran's foreign policy was influenced by ideological and religious considerations. The new leadership under Khomeini frequently referred to Kashmir as a Muslim issue. In earlier speeches, including one in Najaf in 1965, Khomeini called upon Muslims to unite in support of causes such as Palestine and Kashmir, framing these issues within a broader

Islamic political context. This approach often created discomfort in India because Kashmir is considered an internal matter and an integral part of the Indian Union.

Over the decades, Iranian leaders continued to raise the Kashmir issue in various international statements. For instance, Iranian authorities have occasionally criticized India's policies in Kashmir or called for international attention to the situation. In November 2010, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei urged Muslims around the world to support what he described as the “struggle” in Kashmir, placing it alongside conflicts in places such as Afghanistan and Palestine. Such statements were strongly objected to by the Indian government because they appeared to question India's sovereignty over the region. Even in recent years, Iran has occasionally supported statements with Pakistan that emphasize resolving the Kashmir issue according to the will of the people of the region. For example, during the visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Pakistan in April 2024, a joint statement between the two countries referred to Kashmir as an issue requiring peaceful resolution based on the wishes of the people. India immediately rejected this statement, reiterating that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India and that no external country has the right to comment on it. These historical examples illustrate that Iran's position on Kashmir has often been ambiguous and sometimes sympathetic to Pakistan's narrative. At times Iran attempted to maintain a balanced approach between India and Pakistan, but its public statements frequently created diplomatic tensions with India. This history is important when evaluating the present demands by some groups in India that the government should take a strong stand in favor of Iran.

In contrast, Israel has consistently maintained a supportive stance toward India's security concerns. Diplomatic relations between India and Israel were formally established in 1992, but cooperation between the two countries has grown significantly over the past three decades. Israel has emerged as one of India's most reliable strategic partners, particularly in the fields of defence technology, intelligence sharing, agriculture, and innovation. During several critical moments, Israel provided India with crucial defence and logistical assis-

stance. For instance, during the Kargil War of 1999, Israel reportedly supplied surveillance equipment, precision-guided munitions, and other military support that helped India in its operations against infiltrators backed by Pakistan. Israel has also been a major supplier of advanced defence technologies, including missile systems, drones, radar systems, and electronic warfare equipment. Such cooperation has strengthened India's national security and helped modernize its armed forces.

Importantly, Israel has consistently recognized India's sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir and has avoided making statements that challenge India's territorial integrity. On international platforms, Israel has generally respected India's position that Kashmir is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan. This approach reflects a strategic partnership built on mutual respect and shared security interests. From a strategic perspective, India's relationship with Israel is based on mutual interests, shared democratic values, and cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, defence technology, and economic development. This relationship contributes directly to India's national security and economic growth. In this context, it is important to understand that foreign policy decisions cannot be driven by emotional reactions or domestic political pressure. Every country must prioritize its own national interests. India has traditionally followed a balanced diplomatic approach that avoids taking sides in conflicts between other countries unless its own national interests are directly affected.

The protests and demands for condemning Israel and the United States therefore raise broader questions about the role of domestic politics in shaping foreign policy narratives. While democratic societies allow freedom of expression and peaceful protest, it is equally important that such debates remain informed by facts, historical context, and national priorities. India is a diverse and pluralistic society where people from different communities express their views on global events. However, creating law and order disturbances or attempting to politicize international conflicts can undermine social harmony and distract from the country's development goals. Responsible political leadership requires encouraging constructive dialogue rather than amplifying divisive narratives.

At the same time, India's foreign policy has traditionally emphasized strategic autonomy. This means that India maintains relations with multiple countries even if those countries have conflicts with each other. India has friendly relations with Iran as well, particularly in areas such as energy cooperation and connectivity projects like the development of the Chabahar port. Therefore, India's policy is not about choosing permanent friends or enemies but about safeguarding national interests while maintaining diplomatic balance.

In conclusion, the debate surrounding demands to condemn Israel and the United States

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

You must have grown up reading about how Bakhtiyar Khilji destroyed Nalanda. But did you know that he was defeated by a king of Assam? In 1206, Maharaja Prithu defeated him in the banks of Brahmaputra and ended his reign of terror for good. After being neglected for years, our government has given the king his due respect by dedicated Northeast's longest flyover in his name!
~ Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM



must be viewed within the broader framework of India's historical experiences and strategic interests. The record shows that Iran has often taken positions on Kashmir that were not aligned with India's perspective, while Israel has consistently supported India's security concerns and provided critical assistance during difficult times. Understanding these historical realities is essential for making informed judgments about international issues.

India's foreign policy must remain guided by national interest, strategic stability, and diplomatic prudence rather than short-term political pressures. A mature and confident nation like India should continue to pursue balanced relations with all countries while firmly protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Only such an approach can ensure long-term peace, security, and prosperity for the country.

Assam Police warn of strict action against rumours on LPG, fuel shortage

GUWAHATI

Assam Police on Thursday warned of strict legal action against individuals spreading rumours about shortages of LPG and other petroleum products in the state. In a post on X, the police said anyone circulating misleading information regarding shortages of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), petrol, diesel and other petroleum products would face legal consequences. It also urged citizens not to believe or forward such claims, stating that "inimical elements" might attempt to spread misinformation to create panic among the public. The warning came a day after Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota

said local refineries in the state currently have the capacity to meet only around 30 per cent of Assam's LPG demand, raising concerns about a possible shortage in the coming days. To prevent panic and misinformation, the state government has set up a dedicated media monitoring committee to track rumours, misleading reports and false claims that could create confusion among consumers. Kota said the government has already requested all four refineries operating in Assam to increase production to ensure uninterrupted supply of LPG to consumers. The chief secretary, along with Director General of Police



Harmeet Singh, officials from the Food and Civil Supplies Department and representatives of oil marketing companies, also participated in a video conference with Numaligarh Refinery Limited at Numaligarh.

ment and representatives of oil marketing companies, also participated in a video conference with Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan. The meeting, attended by chief secretaries and DGPs from various states and Union territories, reviewed the availability and supply of LPG and diesel across the country. During the meeting, the state-level coordinator of Indian Oil Corporation reviewed the LPG supply position in Assam and said the overall situation remains comfortable, with adequate stock of LPG currently available. Assam has four refineries - three operated by Indian Oil Corporation at Digboi, Guwahati and Bongaigaon, and another run by Numaligarh Refinery Limited at Numaligarh. According to official data, the Northeast requires around 1.91 lakh domestic LPG cylinders of 14.2 kg every day, of which Assam accounts for about 1.34 lakh cylinders. In the commercial segment of 19-kg cylinders, the Northeast market requires around 5,777 units per day, including about 4,112 units in Assam. Authorities reiterated that there is no immediate cause for concern and urged people to rely only on official information regarding fuel supply.

Congress pauses alliance talks with Rajjor Dal ahead of Assam Assembly polls: Gaurav Gogoi

GUWAHATI

Gaurav Gogoi on Wednesday said the Indian National Congress has temporarily paused discussions on a possible electoral alliance with Rajjor Dal ahead of the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly election. Gogoi said the Congress had made efforts to forge an alliance with Rajjor Dal with the aim of contesting the elections as part of a united opposition front, in line with what he described as the expectations of the people of Assam. However, he said the two parties were unable to create a conducive atmosphere for the alliance despite several attempts at discussions. "The Congress wanted to contest the elections as part of a united opposition front. But despite multiple attempts, we could not create a favourable and promising atmosphere for an alliance," Gogoi said. He said the primary objective of any electoral alliance is to realistically assess the winnability of seats, and the Congress had approached the talks with a flexible outlook, including the possibility of seat adjustments. According to Gogoi, the party was open to accommodating different proposals in order to move the alliance process forward. However, for various reasons the alliance could not materialise in the manner many people in the state had expected, he added. The Congress has therefore decided to take a temporary break from alliance discussions with Rajjor Dal, Gogoi said.

Curfew relaxed for three hours in Meghalaya's East Garo Hills after GHADC poll violence

SHILLONG

Authorities in East Garo Hills district on Thursday relaxed the curfew for three hours in the morning following violence linked to protests over the nomination process for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) elections, officials said. The curfew, imposed earlier under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita to maintain public order, was eased from 8 am to 11 am to allow residents to procure essential commodities. Deputy Commissioner R P Marak said the temporary relaxation was granted so that people could buy essential items while security forces maintained strict vigil in sensitive areas. Violence erupted in parts of the Garo Hills region during protests linked to the upcoming GHADC elections, with demonstrators opposing the participation of non-Garo communities in

filing nomination papers for the polls. The clashes turned deadly on Wednesday when two persons were killed and several others injured after police opened fire to disperse a mob during violent clashes in Chibinang area of South Garo Hills district. The unrest also led to incidents of arson and damage to property in parts of the region. Authorities deployed additional security forces, including five columns of the Army - three in Tura town and two in Chibinang - to restore order. Amid the escalating situation, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma announced that the GHADC elections scheduled for April 10 have been postponed. The state government has also suspended mobile internet services across five districts of the Garo Hills region as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of rumours and maintain law and order.

Nearly 13,000 youth receive second tranche under Assam's CMAAA scheme

GUWAHATI

The Government of Assam distributed the second instalment of financial assistance under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) 1.0 to 12,900 young entrepreneurs to help them expand their businesses. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the second tranche of assistance, ranging from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 5 lakh, has been given to beneficiaries who effectively utilised the initial financial support and demonstrated progress in establishing viable enterprises. The chief minister said the scheme was launched in September 2023 to promote entrepreneurship among the youth of the state. "When the scheme was launched in September 2023, financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh each was provided to 25,000 young men and women. Those who utilised the amount properly and showed progress in their ventures



are now receiving the second instalment," Sarma said. According to the chief minister, around 13,000 beneficiaries have qualified for the second instalment after successfully reaching the first milestone of establishing viable businesses. "Out of the 25,000 youths who received the initial grant, nearly 13,000 have been given the second instalment today. The remaining 12,000 beneficiaries have been given an additional 90 days to utilise

the first instalment properly and demonstrate progress. Once they meet the criteria, they too will receive the next tranche," he added. The second instalment is intended to help entrepreneurs scale up their ventures and strengthen their financial base. Sarma said the state government will also facilitate linkages between beneficiaries and banks to ensure easier access to credit. "We are connecting beneficiaries with banks so that they can

expand their businesses further. The state government will also bear a portion of the interest on their loans to reduce their financial burden," he said. The chief minister further announced that the government has expanded the programme this year by bringing an additional 75,000 youth under the scheme. "Our goal is to gradually bring nearly 10 lakh people under this scheme. However, the expansion will depend on the performance and commitment of the beneficiaries," he said. Sarma said the broader objective of the programme is to encourage young people to become job creators rather than job seekers by establishing their own enterprises. "These young entrepreneurs are driving the spirit of a self-reliant Assam. With the right skills and timely support from the government, they can build sustainable businesses and contribute to the state's economic growth," he added.

Tribal leader will become Tripura CM in 2028 if Tipra Motha wins: Pradyot Debbarma

AGARTALA

Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Wednesday said a leader from the indigenous tribal community would become the chief minister of Tripura if his party comes to power in the 2028 Assembly elections. Addressing an election rally at Killa in Gomati district, the founder of the Tipra Motha Party said the outcome of the upcoming elections to the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAAC) would influence the political direction of the state ahead of the 2028 Assembly polls. Debbarma said his party aims to form the government in Agartala in the next Assembly elections and that the chief minister's post would go to a tribal leader. "On one side there is Tipra Motha speaking for the future of our



indigenous people and on the other side is the BJP. It is up to the people to decide whom they will support," he told supporters at the rally. He also claimed that the response at the public meeting indicated growing support for the party ahead of the district council polls.

Debbarma criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party, alleging that policies of the ruling party have adversely affected tribal communities in the state. He accused the BJP of neglecting village councils and claimed that funds meant for them were not being utilised properly. The Tipra Motha leader said the upcoming district council elections would play an important role in determining the political future of the state and the leadership that could emerge ahead of the 2028 Assembly polls. He also urged members of indigenous communities to remain united and cautioned against attempts to divide them during the elections. "For me, the community comes first and the party comes later. We must stand together," Debbarma said.

Tripura releases Rs 6.24 crore under MYYY; over 12,000 students to receive smartphone grant



AGARTALA

The Government of Tripura on Wednesday released Rs 6.24 crore under the Mukhyamantri Yuba Yogayog Yojana (MYYY) for the academic year 2024-25 to support digital learning among college students, officials said. Under the scheme, 12,478 eligible final-year students from government colleges across the state will receive financial assistance of Rs 5,000 each to purchase smartphones, enabling better access to online educational resources. The funds were formally released at a programme held at the state secretariat in Agartala by Pranajit Singha Roy. Officials from the Directorate of Information Technology said the initiative aims to strengthen digital education in the state under the leadership of Chief Minister Manik Saha. The scheme is being implemented by the Directorate of Information Technology, Government of Tripura.

Applications for the current academic year were invited between November 1 and December 20, 2024, following the formal launch of the programme by the chief minister on October 28 last year. Officials said applications were received from 40 government colleges, institutes and universities, and all 12,478 applicants were found eligible for the assistance. The financial aid will be transferred directly to the beneficiaries through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism. The programme was attended by senior officials including Kiran Gitte, Secretary of the IT Department, and Jeya Ragul Geshan B, Director of Information Technology, along with officials of the department, IT nodal officers from colleges and student representatives. Officials said initiatives such as MYYY are aimed at improving access to digital tools and learning resources for students across the state.

More firearms recovered than looted during Manipur violence: Home minister

IMPHAL

Govindas Konthoujam on Wednesday said security forces have recovered more firearms than were originally looted during the outbreak of ethnic violence in Manipur. Responding to a query raised by Keisham Meghachandra in the state assembly, Konthoujam said a total of 6,020 firearms were looted at the onset of the unrest, while security agencies have so far recovered 7,437 weapons. "The number of firearms seized by security forces is higher than the number of firearms looted," the minister told the House. He said the higher recovery figures were partly due to the inflow of illegal weapons from across international borders, noting that the state's porous border areas have allowed the smuggling of firearms from neighbouring countries. Konthoujam said the international border is being fenced to prevent such illegal activities and added that the state government is working under the guidance of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs to recover all weapons looted from government armories. The minister said the government has been holding consultations with various



stakeholders while strengthening security measures to restore normalcy in the state. He added that disarming individuals possessing illegal weapons remains a key component of the peace process. According to Konthoujam, authorities are also monitoring extortion-related calls, including those originating from outside the state, to address security concerns and rebuild public confidence.

He said the government is working to remove the "fear psychosis" that continues to affect free movement in parts of the state. On the issue of illegal immigration, the minister said several committees had earlier been formed to identify undocumented migrants, but the exercise could not be completed after violence broke out. He said biometric registration of suspected illegal immigrants has now be-

gun with support from the central government. Security forces have also been deployed along border areas and are conducting joint mobile patrols, while permanent and mobile check posts have been set up to prevent infiltration, he added. Konthoujam said security agencies are carrying out cordon-and-search operations, area domination exercises and flag marches in vulnerable locations to curb the activities of armed groups, insurgents and drug traffickers. Describing Manipur as "among the drug hubs of the world", he said Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has directed officials to identify and take action against drug kingpins operating in the state. The minister also spoke about the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs), saying their welfare requires the involvement of all stakeholders and cannot be handled by the government alone. He said the state government is providing assistance from its own resources while additional financial support is also being extended by the Centre. Measures such as livelihood support, direct benefit transfers and assistance for house construction are being provided to displaced families, he added. Konthoujam also praised the state police for their role in maintaining law and order despite constraints. He said the government is working towards introducing a dedicated Manipur Police Manual and Police Code, noting that the state police currently operate under the Assam Police manual.

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PM asking people not to panic but is himself panicked for different reasons: Rahul Gandhi



NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi amid concerns over reported LPG shortage, saying the PM is asking the people not to panic but is himself panicked for "completely different reasons".

Gandhi alleged that the prime minister is panicked because of the Epstein files issue and the Adani Case in the US.

He made the remarks after several opposition MPs, including himself and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, staged a protest in the Parliament House complex over the shortage of commercial LPG cylinders to demand answers from the government over it.

Speaking with reporters after the protest, Gandhi said, "The PM is saying there is no need to panic, but the PM himself has panicked for completely different reasons."

He is panicked because of Epstein, he is panicked because of the Adani case,

he is not able to come inside the House."

"You saw yesterday that the prime minister's chair was empty. So, he is telling the country not to panic but has panicked himself," Gandhi added.

Several opposition MPs from the Congress, DMK, TMC and SP, among others, staged a protest near Parliament's Makar Dwar, raising slogans such as 'Naam Narendar, Kaam Surrender' and 'Modi ji, LPG'.

The women opposition MPs, including Priyanka Gandhi, sat down with a mock brick cooking stove and raised slogans against the government.

The opposition has been demanding a full-fledged discussion on the West Asia situation and its impact on India.

Congress MP Prashant Padole, and others, stage a protest in Parliament premises over 'LPG shortage' during the second part of Budget session, in New Delhi, Thursday, March 12, 2026.

Prime Minister Modi

on Wednesday appealed to people not to panic and assured them that public interest will be protected.

He expressed confidence in tackling the LPG crisis, where the short supply of commercial LPG has crippled the country's hotel sector.

From induction cooktops and microwaves to firewood and solar options, restaurants, street food vendors, and catering businesses across the country are scrambling for alternatives as a shortage of commercial LPG cylinders begins to disrupt kitchens amid the widening conflict in West Asia.

With the government prioritising domestic cooking gas supply to households as the war disrupts global fuel lifelines, businesses dependent on commercial LPG -- from small eateries to high-end restaurants -- are watching the situation anxiously, with some even staring at possible closure in the days to come.

In the national capital Delhi, irregular LPG supply has gripped kitchens across the city, and many restaurants are left with stock for a day or two, fearing temporary closure and concerns over staff wages.

Industry representatives say many eateries in the capital are trying to manage the situation through adjustments.

Amid the growing concerns, the government and oil companies have sought to reassure the people that domestic LPG cylinders remain secure.

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi sought to reassure Keralites amid the crisis in West Asia while unveiling the BJP's vision for a "Viksit Keralam", as he launched the NDA's campaign for the upcoming assembly elections at a massive rally at the Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium.

Referring to the large Malayali diaspora in the Gulf, Modi said the situation in West Asia had caused concern among families in Kerala but assured that the Union government would stand firmly with Indians abroad.

"Whenever our countrymen are in trouble overseas, we do not abandon them. Our missions and embassies are operating 24/7 help-lines, and we will provide all help for our people in the Gulf," he said.

Stressing the government's commitment to boost renewable energy sources, he said India was bringing down its reliance on fossil fuels. In this context, he pointed out the laying of the foundation stone for a 50 MW floating solar power project at West Kallada in Kollam district earlier in an official event in Kerala. The initiative would strengthen Kerala's renewable energy capacity and contribute to the country's clean energy transition, he said.

Expressing gratitude to friendly nations in the region for ensuring the safety of Indians, Modi said it was "unfortunate" that the Congress had chosen this moment to criticise the government. He also cited the rescue of priest Tom Uzhunnail from captivity in Yemen and the release of Jesuit priest Alexis Prem Kumar as examples of the Centre's efforts to protect Indians abroad.

Launching the BJP's "Viksit Keralam" campaign, the Prime Minister said the party aimed to transform Kerala into a hub of tourism, talent, and technology. Kerala, he said, could emerge as the country's first choice destination

PM Modi assures assistance to Indians stranded in Gulf; unveils 'Viksit Keralam' roadmap in Kochi



for wellness tourism, destination weddings, concerts, and global conferences.

Modi said the Centre had been supporting the modernisation of Kerala's infrastructure through several major projects and stressed that the BJP would work to develop the state into a hub for artificial intelligence and future technologies. "Our youngsters have immense talent. Many of them are building drones and innovative startups. We will ensure they get the right ecosystem to grow," he said.

Taking a swipe at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi without naming him, Modi said the "Congress yuva raja" was unaware that young Indians were building drones and emerging technologies. "If the BJP comes to power, we will end corruption, land mafia, hartal mafia, and red-tapism, and ensure justice for Kerala's youth," he said.

The Prime Minister also launched a sharp attack on both the Congress-led UDF and the CPI(M)-

led LDF, accusing the two fronts that have alternated in power since the formation of the state of failing the younger generation. "For decades, both UDF and LDF cheated the youngsters of Kerala," he said.

Alleging corruption under both regimes, Modi said the UDF government had been tainted by the solar scam, while the LDF government was facing allegations related to the CMRL controversy. He also accused the Left government of allowing the "looting of gold from Sabarimala Temple", claiming that the LDF presided over the theft while the Congress was selling the looted gold.

Modi further criticised political alliances in the state, alleging that the Congress was aligning with Jamaat elements while the Left was associating with extremist groups.

"Despite Kerala's immense potential, it hasn't developed at the pace it should have. The pattern of one LDF government, another UDF government, has caused significant damage to Kerala. These

two groups believe their turn will come in five to ten years. Therefore, they don't work hard for Kerala's development. This pattern is the reason for Kerala's corruption," he said.

He urged the people of Kerala to give the BJP-led NDA a chance to serve them for the next five years as it comes with "Modi's guarantees".

The PM said that people were ready to move away from the LDF-UDF politics and asserted that the BJP's wins in Thrissur Lok Sabha seat in 2024 and the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation recently will expand to entire Kerala. Pitching the BJP's "double-engine government" model, he said Kerala would grow at "double speed" if the party came to power in the state with support from the Centre.

The rally at the JLN Stadium, attended by thousands of supporters, marked the formal launch of the BJP-led NDA's campaign for the Kerala assembly elections expected to be announced soon.

INTERNATIONAL

Iran launches new wave of attacks on Israel, Gulf nations as G7 weighs oil reserve release

TEHRAN

Iran unleashed a wave of attacks against Israel and Gulf nations on Wednesday, including targeting a Saudi oilfield, as reports of a proposed record release of oil reserves helped calm markets and prices.

The war sparked by US-Israeli strikes on Iran has spread across the region and beyond, causing spiking energy costs, fuel rationing, and even school closures.

The Group of Seven (G7) leaders will meet by video conference later on Wednesday to discuss the war's economic consequences, particularly the "energy situation", the French presidency said, and the International Energy Agency will decide on a proposal for its largest-ever oil reserve release, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The United States on Tuesday said it was hitting Iranian ships capable of mining the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial passageway for oil that has been effectively closed by Iranian threats.

The US military posted video footage of Iranian boats blasted apart, saying it had destroyed 16 minelayers near the strait through which one-fifth of the world's oil passes.

"If for any reason mines were placed, and they are not removed forthwith, the Military consequences to Iran will be at a level never seen before," US President Donald Trump wrote on social media.

Trump faces mounting political risks over the surging cost of oil, months before US elections. Crude prices spiked five percent late Tuesday, before turning lower Wednesday after the reserve release report.

Trump has said the US military

could accompany tankers through the strait, but his administration acknowledged that a post by the energy secretary announcing a first such escort was untrue.

Early Wednesday, the UK maritime agency said a container ship off the coast of the United Arab Emirates had been hit by an "unknown projectile," illustrating the ongoing risks to transport through the region.

With an eye on jittery markets, Trump on Monday said the war would be short, although his defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, then said Tehran would be hit by unprecedented fire on Tuesday.

The Israeli-US attacks came weeks after Iranian authorities ruthlessly crushed mass protests, although the United States and Israel say they are not necessarily seeking to topple the Islamic republic.

Iranian authorities warned against dissent at home, with the country's police chief saying protesters will be viewed and dealt with as "enemies".

"All our forces are also ready, with their hands on the trigger, prepared to defend their revolution," said national police chief Ahmad-Reza Radan in comments aired by IRIB.

Tehran also intensified its assault on targets in the region, with the government announcing it carried out its own "most intense and heaviest" salvo, firing missiles for three hours at cities across Israel.

AFP journalists heard air raid sirens and explosions in Jerusalem. Emergency services reported no immediate injuries, although Channel 12 said several people were hurt in Tel Aviv. New salvos were reported early on Wednesday, with

no reports of injuries.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said they also fired on Bahrain and Iraqi Kurdistan, both of which have a heavy US presence, and also targeted a US air base in Kuwait, Iranian media said.

Kuwait said it had downed eight drones, without offering further details.

Drones and ballistic missiles were also intercepted elsewhere in the Gulf, including multiple drones heading to the Shaybah oil field in Saudi Arabia, its defence ministry said.

Earlier, Iranian parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, a former top commander in the elite Revolutionary Guards, said in an English-language post on X: "Certainly we aren't seeking a ceasefire."

"We believe the aggressor must be punished and taught a lesson that will deter them from attacking Iran again," he added.

Seven US military personnel have been killed and about 140 injured since the start of the war, according to the Pentagon.

The United States and Israel launched the war on February 28 with an attack that killed Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. His son Mojtaba Khamenei has been named his successor, though he has yet to appear in public.

In Tehran, one woman in her 40s said she found some reassurance in her impression that the bombings "don't target ordinary buildings".

But she said, "The noise of the bombings is extremely disturbing." Iran's health ministry said on March 8 that more than 1,200 people had been killed, and over 10,000 civilians injured.

The conflict has spread as far as Sri Lanka, where US forces torpedoed an Iranian ship, and Australia, which said Wednesday it granted asylum to two more members of the Iranian women football team.

Iraq and Lebanon, both home to Iran-backed fighters, have become proxy grounds in the war.

In Iraq, Iranian-linked groups said Tuesday that five of their fighters died in strikes they blamed on the United States.

In Lebanon, hundreds of people have been killed and hundreds of thousands have fled their homes following Israeli airstrikes and ground operations targeting Iran-backed Hezbollah.

New Israeli strikes were reported in Beirut's southern suburbs on Wednesday, with the health ministry saying another five people had been killed in the southern town of Qana.

An Israeli strike also hit a central Beirut neighbourhood on Wednesday morning, state media reported.

Iran complained to the United Nations that four of its diplomats died in a strike on a seafarers hotel in central Beirut on Sunday, which Israel said was aimed at "key commanders" from Iran's Revolutionary Guards.

The effects of the war are being felt globally, with the UN trade and development agency warning of rising costs for essentials like fuel and food hitting the world's most vulnerable people.

In Egypt, which increased the cost of fuels by up to 30 percent, mother-of-six Om Mohamed fretted about the future. "We were barely getting by as it is. I don't know how people will manage," she told AFP at a Cairo market.

NEW DELHI

The WHO has warned that the expansion of the conflict in West Asia is "putting health systems and lives at risk in the region and beyond."

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said almost 1,000 deaths have been reported in Iran, 50 in Lebanon, 13 in Israel and 11 in other Gulf countries.

In addition, WHO has verified 13 attacks on health care in Iran, and one in Lebanon.

Expressing its "serious concern" over attacks on health care in Iran, the WHO said "at all times and in all places, health workers, patients and health facilities must be protected - even in war."

The World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, "WHO is deeply concerned about the conflict in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Middle East, with 16 countries affected."

Under international humanitarian law, health care must be protected and not attacked.

The conflict is also causing significant displacement.

So far, an estimated 1,00,000 people have left Tehran, and in Lebanon, more than 60,000 people have been displaced, and at least one million people may be on the move following evacuation orders in the south.

The threat of nuclear facilities being impacted is also concerning: any compromise to nuclear safety could have serious public health consequences.

WHO said they are working closely with their offices in the affected countries to monitor

West Asia conflict putting health systems at risk, affecting medical supply chains: WHO

the impact on the delivery of health services, and provide support when needed and requested.

But the impact goes beyond the immediately affected countries. Operations at WHO's Logistics Hub for Global Health Emergencies in Dubai are currently on hold due to insecurity, it said.

Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, also highlighted the impact on the supply chain and mitigation efforts.

"The situation across the Eastern Mediterranean is escalating rapidly, with serious consequences for civilians and health systems."

Across the region, nearly 1,000 people have reportedly been killed and 7,000 injured.

"One of our most serious concerns is attacks on health care. In the past week, WHO has verified 13 attacks on health care in the Islamic Republic of Iran," it said.

In Lebanon, evacuation orders have forced the closure of 43 primary health care centres and two hospitals.

Violence has also affected first responders, with paramedics killed and injured.

The WHO said last year, WHO's Global Health Emergencies Logistics Hub in Dubai fulfilled more than 500 emergency orders for 75 countries across all six WHO regions.

However, humanitarian health supply chains are now being jeopardised, it said.

The Hub's operations are temporarily on hold due to insecurity, airspace closures and restrictions affecting access through the Strait of Hormuz.

This disruption is preventing access to US\$18 million in humanitarian health supplies, while another US\$8 million in shipments cannot reach the hub.

More than 50 emergency supply requests from 25 countries are currently affected. US\$6 million in medicines for Gaza and US\$1.6 million in polio laboratory supplies are also held up.

Half of global humanitarian needs are concentrated in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, it added.

"We are coordinating the health response across affected countries, supporting ministries of health and partners to sustain essential services, as well as strengthening disease surveillance and preparing for potential mass casualties and displacement," the WHO said.

WHO said they are also pre-positioning trauma supplies and essential medicines, supporting countries to maintain critical public health functions, as well as scaling readiness for chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear risks.

"Yet our emergency operations across the Region currently face a 70 per cent funding gap. Without urgent financial support, essential services will cease—and preventable suffering will deepen. WHO remains committed to doing all we can for the people of the Region."

"WHO continues to monitor the situation for mass casualty needs, disruptions to essential public health services, and the health needs for people who have been displaced, and work with countries and health partners to minimize these as quickly as possible, as lives depend on it," the WHO added.

Relief or Rhetoric? Manipur's ₹350-Crore Women's Aid Plan Faces the Orunodoi Test

When Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh announced a ₹350-crore financial assistance scheme for women on the occasion of International Women's Day on March 8, 2026, the declaration was framed as a gesture of solidarity with thousands of women who have endured nearly three years of displacement, economic disruption, and insecurity.

The scheme, incorporated into the state's 2026-27 budget, proposes to extend financial assistance to around 3.5 lakh women affected by the ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023. With roughly ₹10,000 earmarked for each beneficiary, the initiative is designed as an immediate relief measure for women who have struggled to maintain households, care for families, and rebuild livelihoods amid a prolonged humanitarian crisis.

Yet the announcement has quickly sparked a deeper debate across the Northeast: can a one-time financial grant in conflict-affected Manipur deliver the kind of social transformation achieved by Assam's flagship women-centric welfare programme, Orunodoi Scheme?

For many observers, the comparison with Assam's model is inevitable but also revealing. While both programmes aim to empower women and provide financial security, the contexts in which they operate could hardly be more different.

A Welfare Promise in a State Recovering From Conflict

Manipur remains deeply scarred by the ethnic violence that erupted in May 2023 between Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. Entire villages were destroyed, thousands of homes burned, and tens of thousands of people forced to flee their homes.

Nearly three years later, thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to live in relief camps or temporary prefabricated shelters across the state. For many families, women have become the backbone of survival—running small makeshift businesses, managing relief supplies, and caring for children and elderly relatives in cramped camp conditions.

Against this backdrop, the new assistance programme seeks to provide direct financial support to women who have borne the brunt of the crisis.

During the announcement, Chief Minister Singh praised the resilience of Manipuri women, highlighting their long history of participation in social movements and economic life. The state's women, he said, have traditionally stood at the forefront of political mobilization, community organization, and household management.

The new grant, according to the government, is intended to help them stabilize their families' finances and rebuild basic livelihoods disrupted by violence and displacement.

However, the policy's reception has been mixed. Supporters see it as a long-overdue recognition of women's struggles during the conflict. Critics argue that financial assistance alone cannot address the deeper structural issues that continue to plague the state.

The Benchmark: Assam's Orunodoi Model

To understand the skepticism surrounding Manipur's initiative, it is necessary to examine the benchmark frequently invoked in discussions: Assam's Orunodoi scheme.

Launched in 2020 under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the programme has become one of the most prominent welfare initiatives in Northeast India.

Unlike a one-time grant, Orunodoi provides recurring monthly financial assistance—currently ₹1,250—to eligible women in economically vulnerable households. The scheme prioritizes widows, single mothers, persons with disabilities, and women from marginalized communities, including tea garden workers and minority groups.

Over the years, the programme has expanded dramatically. Nearly 40 lakh families across



Assam now receive regular payments through a direct benefit transfer (DBT) system linked to bank accounts.

Earlier this month, the state government disbursed a combined amount of ₹3,600 crore in a single day, transferring ₹9,000 each to beneficiary families to cover four months of assistance along with an additional festive bonus ahead of the Assamese New Year.

The scheme's popularity stems not only from the financial assistance itself but also from the reliability of its delivery. Payments arrive regularly, beneficiaries are clearly categorized, and the programme operates through a well-established digital infrastructure.

Over six years, Orunodoi has gradually built a reputation as a predictable social safety net for women across Assam.

A One-Time Grant Versus Sustained Support

The most obvious difference between the two initiatives lies in their structure.

Assam's programme is designed as a recurring income support system, offering steady monthly assistance that households can incorporate into long-term budgeting.

Manipur's initiative, by contrast, is structured as a one-time financial grant of about ₹10,000 per beneficiary.

While such assistance can provide immediate relief—helping families purchase food, medicine, or basic household items—it does little to guarantee long-term financial stability.

For women living in relief camps, where employment opportunities remain scarce, a single payment may ease short-term hardship but cannot substitute for sustained livelihood support.

Many economists argue that recurring welfare payments tend to produce stronger long-term benefits because they allow households to plan expenditures, invest in small enterprises, and manage financial shocks.

The absence of such continuity in Manipur's programme has therefore become a central point of criticism.

Political Timing Raises Questions

Another factor fueling debate is the timing of the announcement. Manipur's Legislative Assembly elections are due in early 2027, placing the new scheme within the broader political cycle leading up to the polls.

Opposition parties have accused the government of attempting to deploy welfare announcements as a strategy to rebuild political goodwill amid ongoing dissatisfaction over the handling of the ethnic conflict.

The state government has rejected such allegations, insisting that the scheme is motivated purely by humanitarian considerations.

Nevertheless, the political context remains difficult to ignore. The slow pace of rehabilitation for displaced families has already generated frustration among affected communities.

The state government has previously set targets to resettle more than 40,000 displaced individuals—representing over 10,000 families—by March 31, 2026. Yet progress has been uneven.

By early 2026, roughly 16,500 to 17,000 displaced persons had reportedly been resettled in phases, leaving thousands still living in temporary accommodation.

Protests by internally displaced persons demanding safe return to their homes have become increasingly frequent, underscoring the emotional and economic toll of prolonged displacement.

In this environment, critics

argue that financial assistance—while welcome—cannot replace meaningful progress toward rehabilitation and reconciliation.

Institutional Vacuum Complicates Implementation

Beyond political concerns, the practical challenges of implementing the scheme are considerable.

One of the most serious hurdles is the absence of functioning local democratic institutions.

Manipur's Panchayati Raj Institutions have remained defunct since their terms expired in 2022. Elections have not been conducted due to the continuing "disturbed conditions" resulting from the ethnic conflict.

Similarly, the state's Autonomous District Councils in the hill regions have faced prolonged delays in holding elections amid demands for greater autonomy.

This institutional vacuum creates a complicated environment for welfare distribution.

In many areas, administrative committees, bureaucrats, or local political networks now manage development programmes and relief distribution. Former elected representatives—whose terms have technically expired—often continue to wield informal influence within communities.

The resulting overlap of authority has created competing power structures, raising concerns about transparency and fairness.

Without elected grassroots bodies to verify beneficiary lists, determining who qualifies for the women's assistance scheme could become a contentious process.

Risks of Politicization and Exclusion

In conflict-affected regions, welfare programmes can easily become entangled in local political dynamics.

Community leaders, activists, and former local representatives have warned that beneficiary identification may be vulnerable to favoritism or ethnic bias if not carefully monitored.

Women living in remote relief camps or informal settlements—particularly widows or single mothers without strong political connections—could face difficulties in accessing the scheme.

Accurate identification of beneficiaries requires reliable data, Aadhaar-linked bank accounts, and robust verification systems. Yet administrative capacities remain stretched in

many parts of Manipur due to the ongoing crisis.

In Assam, by contrast, the relative stability of institutions has helped ensure consistent delivery of Orunodoi benefits.

Digital transfers, standardized eligibility criteria, and involvement of local bodies have reduced the risk of political interference.

Replicating that level of administrative efficiency in a state still grappling with conflict-related disruptions will be far more challenging.

Aid Alone Cannot Replace Rehabilitation

Another limitation of the new scheme is its narrow focus on financial relief rather than long-term recovery.

Women displaced by violence often face multiple challenges beyond income loss. These include disrupted education for children, loss of farmland or businesses, psychological trauma, and uncertain prospects for returning home.

Without addressing these broader issues, financial assistance may only provide temporary respite.

Many policy experts argue that women's empowerment programmes in post-conflict environments must combine cash support with livelihood development.

For example, initiatives involving self-help groups, skill training, and community enterprises can enable women to generate sustainable income while rebuilding social networks.

Manipur has a strong tradition of women-led economic activity, particularly in sectors such as handloom weaving, handicrafts, and small-scale trading.

Strengthening these sectors through targeted support could transform relief camps into centers of economic recovery rather than spaces of prolonged dependency.

Lessons From Assam's Experience

Despite the differences between the two states, the success of Assam's welfare programme offers several lessons.

First, transparency is essential. Clear eligibility criteria and publicly available beneficiary lists help build trust and reduce allegations of favoritism.

Second, reliable digital payment systems minimize administrative delays and corruption. Direct transfers to bank accounts ensure that funds reach beneficiaries without intermediaries.

Third, continuity matters. Recurring payments create a stable income stream that households can rely upon.

Finally, welfare programmes must operate independently of electoral cycles to maintain credibility.

If Manipur's government wishes to transform its wom-

en's aid scheme into a lasting social support system, these principles could serve as useful guideposts.

The Path Forward

For the ₹350-crore initiative to succeed, several steps may prove critical.

The state government will need to establish transparent mechanisms for identifying beneficiaries and distributing funds. Independent monitoring by civil society organizations or national agencies could help strengthen credibility.

Equally important is the restoration of grassroots democratic institutions. Conducting elections for Panchayati Raj bodies and Autonomous District Councils would provide legitimate local representatives who can oversee welfare implementation and resolve disputes.

Linking financial assistance with broader rehabilitation programmes—such as housing reconstruction, livelihood support, and skill development—could also amplify the scheme's impact.

Ultimately, the success of the initiative will depend not only on the amount of money allocated but also on the governance structures that deliver it.

A Test of Trust in Post-Conflict Manipur

Manipur's women have long played a central role in the state's social and political life. From historic protests led by the Ima Keithel mothers' groups to contemporary civil society movements, women have often stood at the forefront of community resilience.

The new assistance scheme acknowledges their sacrifices during one of the most difficult periods in the state's recent history.

Yet recognition alone is not enough.

If implemented transparently and integrated into broader recovery efforts, the programme could provide meaningful support to thousands of families struggling to rebuild their lives.

If poorly managed or politicized, however, it risks becoming another short-lived welfare announcement that fails to address the deeper wounds left by conflict.

For Manipur, the ₹350-crore women's aid plan represents more than just a budgetary allocation.

It is a test of whether the state can translate promises of compassion into effective governance—and whether a society emerging from violence can rebuild trust through inclusive, accountable welfare.

The women of Manipur, who have carried families and communities through years of uncertainty, now wait to see which path the initiative will take.

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