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PERSPECTIVE

No matter how educated, talented or rich you are, how you treat people ultimately tells all.

Pradyut Bordoloi thanks BJP for Dispur ticket, cites need for 'platform' after switch

GUWAHATI
Former Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi on Thursday expressed gratitude to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for fielding him from the Dispur constituency, a day after quitting the Congress and joining the party. Speaking to reporters, Bordoloi said he had not sought any position while joining the BJP, emphasising that his primary objective was to contribute more meaningfully to public life. "I am grateful. I did not ask anything from the BJP when I decided to join, because what I needed was a platform to work and play a more meaningful role," he said. Highlighting his political experience, Bordoloi noted that he has served as a legislator four times and held ministerial responsibilities for around 15 years. He also indicated his willingness to work with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, recalling their past association.

"The present Chief Minister of Assam and I were colleagues... It was a very effective partnership in terms of development," he said, adding that he would be "very happy" to work together again if given the opportunity. On his electoral prospects, Bordoloi said he would approach voters with humility. "People have to have faith in me... I will go to the people of Dispur as a BJP candidate with humility," he added. Outlining his campaign priorities, he said job creation and improving living standards would remain central, while stressing the need to further accelerate development in Assam and the wider Northeast.

The BJP recently released its first list of candidates for the Assembly polls, fielding Bordoloi from Dispur, while Chief Minister Sarma is set to contest from Jalukbari.

WHO SAID WHAT

"In politics, there is no such thing as a full stop. The future awaits you as well, and your experience and contributions will forever remain an enduring part of our national life,"

Narendra Modi

Centre Links Higher LPG Supply to PNG Rollout Amid Ongoing Shortage

NEW DELHI

Amid a prolonged LPG supply crunch entering its third week, the Centre has offered to increase commercial LPG allocations to states that accelerate the rollout of piped natural gas (PNG) infrastructure, while urging consumers to avoid panic buying. Officials from the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said states could receive up to 30% additional commercial LPG if they fast-track approvals and ease regulatory hurdles for city gas distribution (CGD) projects. The move comes as supply disruptions linked to import constraints continue to strain availability across several regions. Briefing the media, Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma said that while LPG supplies remain constrained, PNG supply to households and industries has not been affected. She encouraged consumers to switch

to PNG where networks are available and called on states to expedite clearances for pipeline infrastructure. Under the incentive framework, states that clear pending applications, grant fresh approvals within 24 hours, reduce rental charges, and allow "dig-and-restore" mechanisms for pipeline laying will be eligible for additional LPG allocations. The Centre has also proposed incremental incentives, including a 3% increase in LPG supply for implementing dig-and-restore schemes and 4% more for waiving annual lease charges for CGD networks. In a communication to states and Union Territories, Oil Secretary Neeraj Mittal flagged concerns raised by city gas operators over high right-of-use charges and lease rents, which he said have dampened investment in CGD infrastructure. To manage the ongoing shortage, the Centre has already supplied commercial

LPG stocks to states and allowed them to prioritise distribution. So far, 15 states and UTs have issued guidelines for LPG allocation. Additionally, 48,000 kilolitres of kerosene have been released to supplement cooking fuel needs, with 12 states utilising the extra quota. Officials maintained that there is no complete depletion of LPG stocks anywhere in the country, though the situation remains "worrisome" due to disruptions in imports. A significant portion of India's LPG supply has been impacted by the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which has curtailed access to nearly 60% of imports. Despite a surge in online bookings now accounting for 93% of orders-long queues persist at LPG distribution centres. Authorities have urged consumers to rely on home delivery and avoid crowding dealerships. While domestic LPG supplies are being prioritised for household use, allocations

to commercial establishments such as hotels had initially been curtailed before being partially restored. Officials reiterated that India remains self-sufficient in petrol and diesel, with no shortages reported in those sectors. The 2026 Assam Assembly elections are shaping up to be more than just a routine political exercise. They represent a critical test of whether the current model of governance anchored in development, welfare, and identity politics can sustain its electoral appeal. For the BJP, the objective is clear: to consolidate its dominance and extend its political hegemony in the state. For the opposition, the challenge is far more complex. It must not only rebuild organisational strength but also articulate a compelling alternative narrative that resonates with voters. Without unity, credible leadership, and a coherent strategy, the opposition risks ceding fur-

ther ground in a political landscape increasingly defined by asymmetry. As Assam approaches 2026, the balance of power appears tilted decisively in favour of the ruling alliance. The combination of organisational strength, leadership clarity, and developmental messaging has given the BJP a significant advantage. Yet, elections are inherently dynamic, shaped by shifting alliances, emerging issues, and voter sentiment. While the "Himanta model" currently dominates the political narrative, the possibility of unexpected realignments cannot be entirely ruled out. What remains clear, however, is that the opposition faces an uphill battle. Unless it can overcome internal divisions and present a united front, the 2026 elections may well reinforce the emergence of a new political order in Assam-one defined by continuity rather than contestation.

SILCHAR

Sitting Dholai MLA Nihar Ranjan Das on Thursday resigned from the primary membership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), shortly after the party announced its candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections. The resignation follows the BJP's decision to field Amiya Kanti Das from the Dholai (SC) constituency, replacing the incumbent legislator. In his resignation letter addressed to the BJP's Assam Pradesh leadership, Das said he had served the party with "honesty and sincerity" and worked to strengthen its organisational base in the constituency. He, however, expressed disappointment over being denied a ticket for the forthcoming polls, stating that his contributions had "not been recognised". "As such, I am tendering my resignation from the primary membership of BJP," he said,

while requesting to be relieved of all organisational responsibilities. Copies of the letter were also sent to the Chief Minister, the party's general secretary (organisation), and the Cachar district unit president. Das was elected to the Assam Assembly in a by-election held after Parimal Suklabaidya was elected to the Lok Sabha from Silchar in 2024. An advocate by profession and a long-time BJP worker, he had won the bypoll by 9,098 votes, defeating Congress candidate Dhrubajyoti Purkayastha. The development comes amid a series of candidate announcements in Barak Valley, where the BJP has largely opted for experienced faces and sitting leaders, but has also triggered discontent among some aspirants denied tickets. With the election campaign gathering pace, the resignation is expected to add a new dimension to the political contest in the Dholai constituency.

BJP opts for experience-heavy slate in Barak Valley, signals continuity ahead of Assam polls

SILCHAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced its candidates for the electorally crucial Barak Valley region, underlining a strategy centred on continuity, organisational strength and winnability across key constituencies. The party has largely retained sitting legislators and fielded experienced leaders, indicating a preference for stability over experimentation in the run-up to the Assam Assembly elections. Former Silchar MP Rajdeep Roy has been nominated from Silchar, marking his return to Assembly politics after over a decade. Party leaders said his candidature is aimed at consolidating the BJP's urban support base with a familiar face. "Given the work carried out by the BJP in recent years, it is natural that the party is on a strong footing. However, we take every election seriously and will contin-



ue to work till the last moment," Roy said. He added that no contest could be considered easy and emphasised the party's commitment to working in the broader interest of society. In Lakhipur, Cabinet Minister Kaushik Rai has been retained, reaffirming the party's confidence in his grassroots connect. Similar continuity is visible in Patharkandi, where Krishnendu Paul has been renominated, and in Ramkrishna Nagar (SC), where Bijoy Malakar remains the party's choice. For the reserved Dholai seat, the BJP has fielded veteran leader Amiya Kanti Das, signalling its continued outreach to Scheduled Caste voters. In Borkhola, former MLA Kishore Nath has been brought back, reflecting the party's reliance on experienced candidates in closely contested constituencies. The party has also introduced

limited generational changes. In the reconfigured UdhARBond constituency, former Lakhipur MLA Rajdeep Goala has been nominated, while in Hailakandi, Milon Kanti Das represents a younger leadership profile. In Karimganj North, former Sribhumi BJP district president Subrata Bhattacharjee has been fielded, pointing to the party's emphasis on organisational depth. Meanwhile, former Congress MLA Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, who recently joined the BJP, has been nominated from Katigorah. Party insiders said the overall candidate selection reflects a calibrated approach, balancing experience with select new faces while factoring in local caste and community dynamics. With the campaign set to intensify in the coming days, the effectiveness of the BJP's continuity-driven strategy in Barak Valley will be closely watched.

PM Modi set to address three election rallies across Assam in early April



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to address three election rallies across Assam on April 1, 3 and 6, ahead of the upcoming state polls, as per sources. Other than PM Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah is also expected to attend several election events and hold multiple rallies in six regions of the country, sources said. This comes after the Election Commission on Sunday announced elections in Assam for all 126 Assembly constituencies in a single phase on April 9, while the counting of votes is scheduled for May 4. Assam will witness a fight between the incumbent BJP-led NDA government and Congress for the 126-seat assembly. The BJP government, led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, will look to secure a third consecutive term, while the Congress aims to defeat the ruling party to return to power. On Tuesday, Assam CM Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the BJP

would announce its assembly poll candidates after a meeting of the party's Parliamentary Board and that the party's allies Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF) will contest 26 and 11 seats respectively. Assam has 126 assembly seats, and the BJP is expected to contest 89 seats. "The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) will contest 26 seats, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) 11 seats, and the BJP the remaining seats. Today, we had preliminary discussions regarding our party list. Tomorrow is our Parliamentary Board meeting. I think the list will be announced late tomorrow night or the next morning," Sarma told reporters in the national capital. Earlier in the day, former Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Assam BJP President Dilip Saikia. Bordoloi has accused the Congress leadership of sidelining him, which led to the end of his lifelong association with the Congress party amid allegations of internal mistreatment. He clarified that the resignation stemmed from "multiple issues" as opposed to a singular ticket allocation for the Assam Assembly elections. "For me, getting a ticket was not a question of life and death. There were multiple issues. What was important for me was to hold my head high. The Congress party has given me a lot," he told the media. "I want to make it very clear that I am in my second term in Lok Sabha, and there are another three years to go. I could have accepted the humiliation if I wanted to remain as an MP. But I decided to leave and work," he added.

Manipur's Sanajaoba Leishemba among least wealthy Rajya Sabha MPs: ADR

NEW DELHI

Sanajaoba Leishemba, the Rajya Sabha member from Manipur, is among the least wealthy parliamentarians in the Upper House, with declared assets of around Rs 5 lakh, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The report, based on affidavits of 229 out of 233 sitting MPs, places Leishemba as the second-poorest member of the House. He is preceded by Sant Balbir Singh of the Aam Aadmi Party, who has declared assets of about Rs 3 lakh. Prakash Chik Baraik of the Trinamool Congress ranks third among the least wealthy MPs, with assets of approximately Rs 9 lakh. At the other end of the spectrum, Bandi Partha Saradhi tops the list with declared assets exceeding Rs 5,300 crore, followed by Rajinder Gupta with over Rs 5,063 crore and Alla Ayodhya Rami Reddy with more than Rs 2,577 crore. The ADR analysis shows that 31 MPs, or about 14 per cent of those examined, have declared assets worth over Rs 100 crore. The average assets per Rajya Sabha MP stand at Rs 120.69 crore. Party-wise, MPs from the AAP have the highest average declared assets at Rs 574.09 crore, followed by the YSR Congress Party at Rs 522.63 crore. Congress MPs average Rs 128.61 crore, while BJP MPs report an average of Rs 28.29 crore. TMC MPs have an average of Rs 17.70 crore. On the criminal background of MPs, the report states that 73 members, or 32 per cent, have declared pending cases against themselves, with 36 facing serious charges. Among these, one MP has declared a murder case, four have cases related to attempt to murder, and three have disclosed cases involving crimes against women. Party-wise, the BJP has the highest number of MPs with declared criminal cases at 27 out of 99 members, followed by Congress with 12 out of 28 MPs. Four MPs each from the TMC and AAP have also declared cases, while three each from CPI(M) and BRS have reported similar disclosures.

Tripura nears full Aadhaar e-KYC for ration cards; 62,000 fake entries scrapped



AGARTALA

Tripura is close to achieving 100 per cent Aadhaar-based e-KYC coverage for ration cards, with the state government accelerating efforts to digitise and streamline the Public Distribution System (PDS). Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Sushanta Chowdhury informed the Tripura Legislative Assembly that Aadhaar linkage and e-KYC of all members under 4.87 lakh ration cards have already been completed. Digital ration cards for these beneficiaries have also been generated and distributed through fair price shops across the state. During the Aadhaar seeding drive, nearly 62,000 fake ration cards were identified and cancelled in 2018, significantly cleaning up the system. The in-

formation was shared in a written reply to a query by MLA Sudip Roy Barman. The Minister said Aadhaar-based e-KYC is mandatory under Government of India norms for availing benefits through the PDS. Of the remaining 5.01 lakh ration cards, e-KYC for 84,152 cards has been completed so far. He noted that migration for employment, business engagements outside the state and change of residence have slowed progress towards complete coverage. The department, however, is conducting awareness campaigns and coordinating with local representatives to ensure pending beneficiaries complete the process. Chowdhury expressed confidence that full e-KYC coverage and distribution of digital ration cards will be achieved in the coming months. He added that Aadhaar linkage under the National Food Security Act framework has improved transparency and reduced irregularities. Officials said Aadhaar linkage with at least one member per ration card has already reached near-total coverage, while around 95 per cent of all registered beneficiaries have been linked. With verified e-KYC for at least one member in each household, the government maintains that no fake ration cards currently remain in the state database.

Dholai MLA Nihar Ranjan Das quits BJP after ticket denial in Assam polls

SILCHAR



VOLUME:1, ISSUE 729

WAR AGAINST IRAN: ITS GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES

The outbreak of war between the United States-Israel and Iran marks one of the most dangerous geopolitical crises of the 21st century. The joint military strikes launched by Washington and Tel Aviv against Iranian leadership, military infrastructure, and nuclear facilities in late February 2026 have not only intensified tensions in the Middle East but have also triggered profound global repercussions. The conflict has expanded beyond a bilateral confrontation, drawing in regional countries, destabilizing energy markets, and reshaping international diplomacy. The stakes of this war extend far beyond Iran or Israel; they threaten to redefine global power dynamics, challenge international law, disrupt economic stability, and raise fears of a broader regional or even global war. The ramifications of this conflict illustrate how deeply interconnected the modern geopolitical order has become.

The roots of the current conflict lie in decades of hostility between Iran, Israel, and the United States. Since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran's anti-Western and anti-Israeli posture has been a defining feature of its foreign policy. Over the years, Tehran has supported armed groups across the Middle East, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and various militias in Iraq and Syria, which the United States and Israel regard as threats to the regional vis-a-vis world security, besides its desire to have the nuclear weapon. It is with this background that the present conflict has been considered as a justified action by the world at large.

For years, the western powers have feared that Tehran's nuclear ambitions could lead to the development of nuclear weapons. Negotiations and sanctions have attempted to curb these ambitions, but diplomatic efforts have repeatedly faltered. In February 2026, the United States and Israel launched coordinated air and missile strikes targeting Iran's military infrastructure, nuclear facilities, and leadership. The operation was justified by Washington and Tel Aviv as a necessary measure to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and to neutralize its perceived threats. The strikes reportedly targeted multiple Iranian cities, resulting in the assassination of key Iranian leaders. Iran responded swiftly, launching ballistic missiles and drones against Israeli territory and American military bases across the Middle East. Thus, what began as a targeted military operation quickly escalated into a full-scale regional confrontation and the most immediate impact of the war has been the destabilization of the Middle East.

Iran's retaliatory attacks have extended beyond Israel, striking U.S. military installations and allied states in the Persian Gulf. These strikes demonstrate the far-reaching military capabilities of Iran and highlight the vulnerability of U.S. bases and allied states in the region. The Gulf region, already fraught with tensions, now faces the prospect of widespread military escalation. This multi-front escalation underscores the complexity of Middle Eastern geopolitics and such kind of dynamics make de-escalation extremely difficult. If the conflict continues, the countries like Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon could potentially become battlegrounds for competing powers, repeating the tragic pattern of proxy wars that have characterized the region for decades.

The war, beyond the battlefield, has already begun to disrupt the global economy. The Middle East remains world's most critical energy-producing region, and any major conflict there inevitably affects global oil markets. One of the most alarming developments has been Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway through which roughly one-fifth of the world's oil supply passes. The disruption of shipping routes has triggered a surge in global oil prices and created volatility in financial markets. Within days of the conflict's outbreak, crude oil prices jumped significantly, raising fears of inflation and economic slowdown worldwide. For energy-importing countries such as India, Japan, and many European nations, the conflict could result in rising fuel costs and economic strain. If the war continues or intensifies which Iran would wish to, the analysts warn that oil prices could climb even higher, potentially pushing the global economy toward recession. Furthermore, aviation, tourism, and international trade has also been affected. Thus, in a globalized economy, the regional wars no longer remain regional; they send shockwaves across continents and the after-effects are becoming more visible to those countries who have played no role in this conflict. Another major consequence of the war is the potential reshaping of the global alliances. The conflict has already exposed divisions among major powers. Non-alignment has gone for a toss. Russia and China have condemned the U.S-Israeli strikes, arguing that they violate international law and threaten global stability. Meanwhile, Western allies have offered either varying degrees of support or caution. The European Union, while concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions, has expressed fears about the humanitarian and economic consequences of the conflict, though the United Kingdom has shown its intent to stay neutral. The International organizations such as the United Nations have called for restraint and diplomatic dialogue, but their influence remains limited in the face of escalating hostilities. This situation raises the possibility that the war could deepen global geopolitical polarization. The conflict may reinforce emerging blocs — one led by the United States and its allies, and another consisting of the states that challenge the Western dominance.

The present conflict highlights the evolving nature of warfare in the 21st century, with increasing involvement of cyber warfare, information campaigns, and economic sanctions. Cyber attacks have reportedly accompanied the military strikes, targeting Iranian government systems, media outlets, and digital infrastructure. Iran is widely believed to possess significant cyber capabilities, raising the possibility of retaliatory attacks against the Western financial systems, infrastructure and energy networks. If cyber warfare escalates, the consequences could extend far beyond the Middle East. Critical infrastructure around the world — from banking systems to electricity grids — could become targets in an increasingly digital battlefield. The war thus represents not only a military confrontation but also a technological contest that could redefine modern warfare. While geopolitical debates dominate headlines and the news channels across the globe are in a race to be the first to break the news, the human cost of the conflict is beyond assessment and settlement. The airstrikes, missile attacks, and urban combats have already resulted in significant casualties and displacement. Thousands of civilians have either reportedly been killed or injured since the conflict began, and the large number of people have been forced to flee their homes. Evacuations of foreign nationals and diplomatic staff from Iran and neighboring countries have also taken place, reflecting the growing security risks across the region. Humanitarian organizations warn that if the conflict continues, the Middle East could face another refugee crisis comparable to the Syrian civil war. Such a crisis, if happens for the real, would place immense pressure on the neighboring states and Europe, potentially fueling political instability and migration debates across continents.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.”

Epicurus

IRAN NEEDS CHANGE OF MINDSET NOT REGIME



K N PANDITA

The ongoing war has brought ruin to Iran. The slogans, which the Ayatollahs deemed their jugular vein, were like “to hell with Zionists (seyhun ha be jahannam) and “Death to America” (marg bar America). These petrifying slogans became frequent that many mullahs, instead of beginning the sermon to the congregations with bismillah (in the name of Allah) began with one or the other abusive slogans against Israel and America.

Why is the Iranian theocracy lethally hostile and inimical towards the State of Israel and its people of Zionist faith? No convincing reply is forthcoming, not even from the Ayatollahs. Their physical boundaries do not meet; they are not contiguous states; their language, religion, history, geography, culture, life style etc. nothing has any commonality. Why then the hate syndrome?

Two observations can be hypothesised. First, the proselytized Iranian Islamic theologians and jurists claim to be the true Musselman because they honour the Quranic injunction of hating and decimating Zionists — something which the Arabs are loath to follow. The second hypothesis is that America has been the enemy number one (shaitan-i-rajem) or “the devil incarnate” supporting Israel because there is a majority of pro-Jewish lobby in the American Congress.

Logic does not support either of these assumptions. If, according to Shia interpretation, the Quran ordains killing of a particular community for whatever reasons, then the Allah of the Musselman is neither rahmatu'n lil alameen (blessing for two worlds) nor al rahman-al raheem (the benevolent and forgiving). Moreover, if the followers of the Shia faith really believe in the particular injunction of the Quran, why then should Iran choose to become a member of the UN and a myriad of its organizations, committees and subcommittees? Why did Iran approach the UN SC invoking the clauses of human rights and demanding the SC chastise Israel and ensure restoration of peace there? Does Iran want endorsement from the Security Council for Iranian belief of decimating a whole community with which she is at ideological discrepancy? Secondly, the US is a democratic and secular nation. The administration of that country is run according to its constitution which strictly forbids religion to interfere in state affairs. There are several hundred elected members of the American Congress who profess or do not profess a particular faith. It is not Iran's business to make an issue of who is in majority in the US Congress and who is in minority just as no country in the world is bothered about who is in majority position in Iranian Majlis.

Iran's argument is that Jews have grabbed Palestinian territory belonging to Muslims. But Iran forgets that the British government had previously issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, expressing support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people; in Palestine.

Following World War II and the British decision to terminate the mandate, the United Nations proposed a plan to partition Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed, coinciding with the end of the British Mandate. This declaration took place in Tel Aviv on the day the British mandate ended.

If it was not acceptable to Iran, she should have confronted the British government. But Teheran did not because Great Britain was a super power not be intimidated.

None of Iran's reasons for belligerence towards Israel is supported by logic. In other words, by sticking to the illogical posture, Iran gives a right to Israel to take punitive action against spreading anti-Israel hatred and animosity among the Shia community world over. It is for Iran to decide whether the posture strengthens her image in the eyes of the international community and human rights chapters.

Iran-Israel armed clashes have been going on more often after the ouster of Shah Reza Pahlavi, and takeover of the Iranian regime by the theocratic dispensation. Some Iranian experts in the West assert that Iran never became truly Islamic. More than anybody else, the Shia theologians and jurists are conscious of this reality. The simple reason is that a thousand-year-long Achaemenian and Sassanian empires of Iran had built a civilization and a nation that would not easily accept an alien civilization and culture. That is why soon after the occupation of Iran by the Arabs till date, there have been recurring revolts against the imposed culture. Although those revolts proved abortive yet they did dilute the unevenness of foreign rule while lending sustenance to the indigenous traditions.

We know that Islamic Iran's apostolic sector has always wielded considerable influence with the working class. Yet conspicuously, that class never aspired to grab political power. But the Islamic Revolution of Iran of 1979 led by Ayatollah Khomeini is clearly distinguishable from its earlier forms. The Ayatollahs grabbed the government and after the exit of the father of the revolution, the country that had changed its nomenclature from Iran to Islamic Republic of Iran, pandered to rabid Islamism and the rule of sharia, positively incompatible with the ethos, tradition and Iranian mind's outreach. The animus which Iran has been nursing against Israel all these years has ultimately turned

counter-productive, something that had to happen at the end of the day. Iran invited its destruction by lionising the Hamas for their atrocious attack on innocent Israelis on October 7, 2025, which took a toll of more than 1200 innocent souls including women, children and infants.

The irony of fate is that a brilliant nation with glorious past and rich cultural heritage — a nation gifted by nature with intelligence, wisdom and aesthetics — should have fallen a victim to self-sponsored destruction. Not to speak of the greatness of the ancient monarchies of Achaemenians or Sassanians, even the Safavi monarchs who proclaimed Shia faith as the state faith of Iran, had treated the minorities, particularly the Jews, with justice and helped them establish their localities and habitats as in New Julfa. This locality founded in 1606 by a decree of Shah Abbas I, is one of the most enduring examples of cultural coexistence and global commerce in early modern Iran. This Armenian quarter in Isfahan became a hub where Christian faith, Persian artistry, and international trade flourished side by side. Alas! The Ayatollah rejected their glorious tradition of tolerance.

Iranian theocracy has sown the wind; she is reaping the whirlwind. In the lure of obtaining a weapon of mass destruction, the theocratic regime let its marauding Islamic revolutionary guards massacre thousands of its own citizens. The killing of many precious scientists, technocrats, bureaucrats, generals, students, doctors, lawyers and other professionals or skilled persons has immensely impoverished the Iranian society. Is this the gift of the Islamic theocracy which had ousted the monarchical rule for its sin of being secular and benign?

The worst is yet to come. It is the internal crisis knocking at the door. The religious supremo who used to issue death warnings to Israel and America day in and day out, lies buried in his grave along with almost all his close kith and kin. The notorious Revolutionary Guards are speedily isolating Iran by shooting missiles on almost all neighbouring Arab states. They are lionising themselves for shooting missiles at Saudi Arabia, Turkey and others forgetting that they are dragging Iran to an abyss of disgrace. They are forgetting that anti-regime voices are becoming stronger and the demand for change of regime has become very loud. The country's economy stands shattered, and Iran stands isolated completely. Big powers never fight other peoples' battle, The Islamic world is a pack of paper tigers driven by a beggar state with a nuclear bomb in hi begging scrip.

The redemption lies in Iranian enlightened class taking over the regime through mass uprising so that a truly democratic and secular

regime is established. The regime of the enlightened think has to pick up courage and declare abandonment of nuclear venture. It must pledge for friendly relations with major powers of the world and refuse to fall in the lap of one or the other super power. Foremost of everything else, a democratic and secular Iran must develop cordial relations with its closest neighbours in the Gulf region abandon anti-Israel mindset and establish trade and cultural relations with as many countries as

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Rs. 19,000 crore.

That is what Banks collected in last 3 years just for not maintaining 'Minimum Account Balance.'

Not from the rich. Not from big borrowers.

From the poorest accounts in the system.

Their crime? They didn't have enough money.

A farmer misses the minimum balance - Penalty.

A pensioner withdraws money for medicine - Penalty.

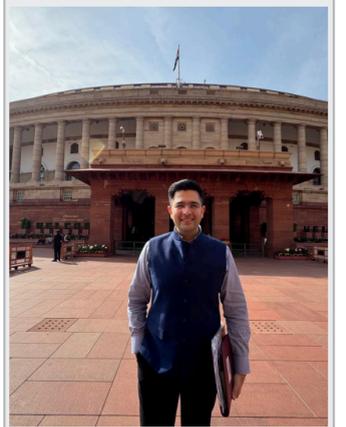
A daily wage worker falls short by a few hundred rupees - Penalty.

The poor keep money in banks for safety. Not to be quietly fined for being poor.

Financial inclusion should protect small savings, not punish small balances.

In Parliament today I proposed ending minimum balance penalties so the banking system stops charging people for their poverty.

~ Raghav Chadha, MP (RS), National Spokesperson , AAP



possible.

All those who have stakes in Iran should understand that it is a great nation with glorious past. Its people have tremendous potential for positive contribution in all walks of life. Iran has the potential of regaining its glory and grandeur as one of the proudest and most prosperous nation of the Asian Continent. Its oil and gas reserves should become its backbone of its economy and not a source of threat and intimidation. The world powers with vie with one another in cultivating the friendship of Iran once Iranian people declare a secular democratic dispensation as their goal. The need of the hour is that the patriotic, liberal and democratic intellectuals and think-tank of Iran should come forward and provide proper direction to the people, political leadership and the regime. Their approach to the problem should be without anger, revenge and retribution. Their guidance and vision have to be hundred times stronger the huge stockpile of arms, missiles, drones and fighters for which the theocratic regime spent trillions of dollars, and to no purpose.

BJP Fields Congress Turncoats Bhupen Borah, Pradyut Bordoloi in Assam Poll List

GUWAHATI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has handed Assembly election tickets to two high-profile former Congress leaders-Bhupen Kumar Borah and Pradyut Bordoloi-as part of its candidate list for the 2026 Assam Legislative Assembly polls, signalling an aggressive strategy to consolidate its political base.

Borah, a former president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) who served from 2021 to 2025, has been fielded from Bihpuria in Lakhimpur district, a constituency he represented for two consecutive terms. After over three decades with the Congress, Borah recently switched sides, citing internal discord and alleging marginalisation within the party's state unit.

He had also accused senior Congress



leader Rakibul Hussain of exerting disproportionate influence in the Assam

unit, claiming it led to the sidelining of several senior leaders. Borah joined the BJP in February, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma welcoming his entry and drawing parallels with his own past defection from the Congress.

In a swift political development, Bordoloi-sitting Lok Sabha MP from Nagaon-resigned from the Congress on March 17 and joined the BJP the following day. He has now been nominated from Dispur, one of the state's most prominent urban constituencies. A long-time Congress leader, Bordoloi cited "humiliation and isolation" within the party over the past two years as key reasons for his departure.

He also pointed to the growing role of Imran Masood in Assam Congress affairs, stating that his decision to quit was driven by both personal dignity and

what he described as the larger interests of the state. His exit came at the cost of relinquishing more than three years of his parliamentary tenure.

The twin defections have dealt a blow to the Congress's organisational strength in Assam, reducing its already limited representation in the Lok Sabha from the state. Responding to the developments, APCC chief Gaurav Gogoi downplayed the impact, stating that disagreements over individual seats should not lead to party exits, while Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia described the departures as "very unfortunate."

The developments align with Sarma's broader political strategy of inducting leaders from rival parties-a process he has said began in 2016 and is now nearing completion. He has also

indicated that further defections could take place ahead of the elections.

Beyond these high-profile inclusions, the BJP's candidate list covers constituencies across Lower, Central, and Upper Assam, including Rangia, Palasbari, Guwahati Central, Nagaon, Mangaldai, Dhemaji, and Tinsukia. Sarma will contest again from Jalukbari, while senior leaders such as Chandramohan Patowary, Ranjeet Kumar Dass, and Pijush Hazarika have also been re-nominated.

Polling for Assam's 126 seats is scheduled for April 9 in a single phase, with counting set for May 4. The BJP is seeking a third consecutive term in office, while the Congress faces the immediate challenge of rebuilding its organisation following the exit of two of its prominent leaders within weeks.

Nagaland issues storm alert till March 21, warns of lightning and gusty winds

KOHIMA

The Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority has issued a weather alert forecasting thunderstorms, lightning and strong winds across Nagaland from March 17 to 21.

According to the advisory, most districts are likely to witness frequent thunderstorms accompanied by light to moderate rainfall, with isolated heavy showers expected in Longleng on March 17. Weather activity is expected to peak on March 17 and 18, with gradual improvement in some areas from March 20.

Strong surface winds reaching speeds of 30-40 kmph are also likely during the initial phase, raising the risk of damage to temporary structures, uprooting of trees and disruption to power and transport services. Districts including Dimapur, Kohima, Peren, Phek, Wokha, Mokokchung, Tuensang and Kiphire have been identified as vulnerable to the impact of strong winds.

Widespread thunderstorms are expected in Dimapur, Kohima, Wokha, Mokokchung, Mon, Tuensang, Zunheboto and Peren throughout the forecast period. Some relief is likely in districts such as Kiphire, Phek and Zunheboto towards March 20-21, while cloudy to overcast conditions may persist intermittently in Kohima, Wokha, Nuland and Tseminyu. The authority has advised residents to remain cautious, avoid open areas during lightning strikes and take necessary safety precautions. While conditions may ease slightly towards the end of the period, localized thunderstorms and rainfall are expected to continue across the state till March 21.

SC paves way for Tripura village polls after decade; EC commits to June deadline

NEW DELHI/AGARTALA

The Supreme Court of India has cleared the way for long-delayed Village Council elections in Tripura, with the Tripura State Election Commission assuring that the entire process will be completed by June 2026.

In an affidavit submitted before the apex court, the Commission said polling and declaration of results for the Village Councils under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) would be concluded within the stipulated timeline.

A Bench comprising Justice Manoj Mishra and Justice Manmohan heard the matter on Wednesday, taking up petitions related to the decade-long delay in Village Council polls as well as pending legislative issues concerning the TTAADC.

The petition on delayed elections was filed by Pradyot

Kishore Manikya Debbarma, founder of the Tipra Motha Party. The court accepted the Election Commission's affidavit outlining the proposed schedule and fixed May 20 as the next date of hearing. It also indicated that the elections would be conducted under its supervision.

In a related development, the court admitted a separate writ petition concerning pending bills of the TTAADC that are yet to be acted upon by the state government, and is expected to issue notices to the respondents.

Welcoming the development, Pradyot Debbarma said Village Council elections would be held after nearly a decade, calling it long-awaited justice for the Tipra people.

The move is seen as a significant step towards restoring grassroots democratic processes in the tribal areas of the state after years of delay.

Amid Father's BJP Switch, Prateek Bordoloi Withdraws from Margherita Seat

GUWAHATI

A day after Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), his son Prateek Bordoloi on March 19 withdrew his candidature from the Margherita Assembly constituency, citing the prevailing political circumstances.

In a letter addressed to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Prateek Bordoloi said the decision was taken to ensure clarity and maintain the confidence of both voters and party workers.

"It would not be appropriate for me to continue as a candidate in the present circumstances," he stated, adding that any ambiguity regarding his position could be unfair to the electorate as well as grassroots Congress workers.

The move follows the sudden shift in political



alignment triggered by his father's defection to the BJP, a development that has generated unease within sections of the Congress in the region and raised concerns over mixed messaging ahead of the Assembly elections.

Despite withdrawing from the contest, Bordoloi reaffirmed his commitment to the Congress, asserting

that his faith in the party's principles remains intact. He said he would continue to work for the organisation and contribute to the development of Margherita in any capacity assigned by the leadership.

He also acknowledged the role of the party in shaping his political outlook, describing it as rooted in inclusive

development and secular democratic values, and expressed gratitude to the leadership for the trust reposed in him.

Party observers view the withdrawal as an attempt to preserve organisational discipline and avoid confusion among voters at a time of shifting political equations in Assam.

'Congress built him, BJP lured him': Rakibul Hussain hits out at Bordoloi's switch

GUWAHATI

Congress MP Rakibul Hussain on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on former party colleague Pradyut Bordoloi over his defection to the Bharatiya Janata Party, saying the Congress had "nurtured and built" him while his exit raises questions of loyalty.

"Earlier, he did not have a strong base in Nagaon - we brought him in and helped him become an MP," Hussain said, reacting to Bordoloi's move.

Bordoloi joined the BJP in New Delhi on Wednesday in the presence of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and state party president Dilip Saikia, a day after resigning from the Indian National Congress. His departure leaves the Congress with just two of its three sitting MPs from Assam.



Hussain said the shift was particularly striking as Bordoloi had earlier been among the most vocal critics of Sarma within the Congress. "His language was more forceful than mine. He used to criticise Himanta Biswa Sarma even more strongly," he said.

He also recalled that Bordoloi, as chairman of the Congress Manifesto Committee, had prepared a detailed chargesheet against the Assam government-lat-

er released by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra-targeting issues such as corruption, unemployment, tribal concerns and flagship schemes.

"That document was his own work and strongly targeted the government. But now, he appears to be siding with Himanta Biswa Sarma - which raises serious questions," Hussain said.

Pointing to Bordoloi's political journey, Hussain said the Congress had backed him even

after electoral setbacks. "When he lost in Margherita, he was given another opportunity at someone else's expense. This should not be forgotten," he added.

While Priyanka Gandhi described the defection as "unfortunate" and linked it to dissatisfaction over ticket distribution, Hussain struck a more critical tone.

"Many deserving people did not receive tickets, but did they leave Congress? No. The Congress party nurtured and built all of us," he said.

Bordoloi's exit marks the second major defection from the Congress in Assam in recent weeks, following the departure of former state unit chief Bhupen Kumar Borah, intensifying concerns within the party over erosion of leadership ahead of the Assembly elections.

Manipur CM launches State Focus Paper, outlines Rs 3,500 crore credit roadmap



IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Wednesday unveiled the State Focus Paper 2026-27, projecting a credit potential of around Rs 3,500 crore to drive "credit-led development" in the state.

The document, prepared by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Manipur Regional Office, was released during the State Credit Seminar 2026 held at Sangai Hall in Imphal.

According to the paper, 51 per cent of the projected credit flow will be directed towards agriculture and allied activities, 37 per cent to the MSME sector, and the remaining 12 per cent to other priority areas.

Describing the theme "Credit-Led Development in Manipur" as timely, the Chief Minister said the projections reflect evolving development priori-

ties and the changing structure of the state's rural economy.

He noted that while agriculture remains the backbone of livelihoods, challenges such as fragmented landholdings and increasing climate risks necessitate diversification and value addition to enhance farmers' incomes.

Highlighting the importance of allied sectors, Singh said activities such as animal husbandry, fisheries, horticulture and poultry offer significant potential for income generation and employment in rural areas.

Speaking at the event, NABARD General Manager and Officer-in-Charge Partha Mandal said the State Focus Paper serves as a key planning and credit monitoring document for the upcoming fiscal year. He added that it has been compiled based on Potential Linked Plans prepared for all 16 districts of the state.

Centre Pushes Northeast Jute Expansion with MoU, Tech-Led Value Chain Plan

GUWAHATI

The Centre has intensified its focus on developing the jute sector in the Northeast, positioning Assam, Nagaland, and Meghalaya as emerging hubs through policy support, institutional collaboration, and technology integration.

At a State Agriculture Conference on Jute convened by the Ministry of Textiles, stakeholders reviewed crop preparedness and outlined strategies to strengthen regional value chains. The meeting, chaired by Textiles Secretary Neelam Shami Rao, notably excluded traditional jute-producing states such as West Bengal and Bihar, indicating a strategic shift towards expanding cultivation into non-traditional regions.

Senior officials from Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Odisha attended the conference, alongside representatives from key institutions including the National Jute Board (NJB), Jute Corporation of India (JCI), ICAR-CRI-JAF, and the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC).

A major outcome of the meeting

Quest!

Allodoxophobia is the fear of opinions.



was the signing of a tripartite memorandum of understanding involving the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHDC), NJB, and JCI. The agreement aims to strengthen the entire jute value chain in the Northeast by improving market access, enhancing

procurement systems, and promoting local processing and value addition to reduce dependence on raw fibre exports.

Officials described the initiative as a potential "game changer" for jute growers in Assam and neighbouring states, where cultivation remains

underdeveloped despite favourable agro-climatic conditions.

The conference also reviewed sowing progress, seed availability, and the adoption of improved farming practices under the Jute-ICARE scheme, which provides certified seeds, mechanisation tools, and field-level demonstrations to farmers.

In a significant technological push, NRSC under Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) showcased the Jute Crop Information System, a geospatial platform designed for real-time crop monitoring, acreage estimation, and data-driven planning-tools expected to help states like Assam scale up cultivation more efficiently.

The Centre also highlighted the need to upgrade retting infrastructure, a key determinant of fibre quality, and encouraged the adoption of mechanised solutions to reduce labour intensity in the sector.

With the Northeast increasingly being positioned as a new growth frontier for jute, the Ministry reiterated its commitment to boosting productivity, improving fibre quality, and enhancing farmer incomes through targeted interventions. The latest measures signal a broader policy shift aimed at integrating the region more deeply into India's jute economy while building sustainable, locally anchored value chains.

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Railways saved Rs 6k cr in electric push, says Vaishnaw

Discontent brewing within TMC after 74 sitting MLAs denied tickets for upcoming assembly polls



NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways has saved Rs 6,000 crore by shifting from diesel to electric energy to run trains, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Responding to a debate on demands for grants of the Railway Ministry, he said that the national transporter has become the second largest cargo carrier in the world.

Vaishnaw said that during the cumulative tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, 35,000 kms of new railway tracks have been laid while 27,000 kms have been electrified.

The railways minister said while staff cost is the biggest expenditure of the Indian Railways, energy is the second biggest expenditure.

He noted that in coming times diesel locomotives will fade away making way for electric locomotives.

The minister and Opposition members locked horns after Vaishnaw criticised the opposition states Kerala, Tamil Nadu and

West Bengal for not allocating grants for development related schemes, especially the ones related to land acquisition for railway projects.

Vaishnaw said since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014, politics of performance has taken over from politics of vote.

He said that in a visionary decision, PM Modi had decided to merge the railway budget with the general budget, which has led to an increase in financial allocation for his ministry.

Now, new trains are inaugurated and new projects are launched throughout the year, which was not the case earlier, he said. Railways' financial health has increased and so has transparency in publishing accounts, he added.

Vaishnaw noted that the Finance Ministry and other agencies keep a tab on monetary health of the Indian Railways using elaborate IT systems.

As many as 210 MPs participated in the debate, which lasted two days. At the end of the debate, the House approved the demands for

grants for the Railways Ministry for 2026-27.

Health insurance is a priority for this government and it is expected that the country will have insurance for all by 2033, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. Replying to supplementary queries during Question Hour, she said the insurance sector is expanding and during 2024-25 it covered 58 crore lives.

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday revoked with immediate effect the suspension of eight opposition members who were barred from the House on February 3 for "unruly" behaviour, with Speaker Om Birla stressing that there should be no display of placards, posters, photos or AI-generated images inside the House or in the Parliament complex. Congress chief whip K Suresh requested the House to consider the revocation of the 8 opposition MPs, saying whatever had happened in the House was regrettable, and that his party was ready to cooperate in the smooth functioning of the House.

He stepped down as the party's chairman in Jalpaiguri district shortly after the candidate list was announced on Tuesday. Expressing displeasure with the party leadership over being denied the ticket, Roy alleged that "money power" had influenced the decision.

"I have been with Mamata Banerjee since the time she left the Congress and formed the Trinamool Congress. Today I have been defeated by money. Someone must have given money, and that

KOLKATA

Discontent is brewing within the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal after the party leadership denied tickets to 74 outgoing MLAs for the upcoming assembly elections in two phases on April 23 and 29.

A day after the Trinamool Congress supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee along with Abhishek Banerjee, national general secretary of the ruling party in Bengal, announced the list of candidates for 291 of the 294 assembly constituencies on Tuesday, signs of disgruntlement intensified among a section of the 74 legislators.

"Those who are denied tickets should not misunderstand. They will be given other responsibilities in the party after the elections," the Trinamool Congress supremo said after the announcement of the list of candidates on Tuesday. However, that did not quell the feeling of betrayal among several of these MLAs.

Khageswar Roy, a four-time Trinamool Congress MLA from Rajganj in Jalpaiguri, resigned from the district party post after being denied a ticket from the constituency.

Roy, a long-time organiser of the Trinamool Congress in north Bengal, predicted a defeat for the party in the constituency after Swapna Barman, a gold medallist in the 2018 Asian Games, was fielded from the seat.

Former heptathlete Barman, a native of Jalpaiguri district, had joined the Trinamool Congress earlier this year when state ministers Bratya Basu and Chandrima Bhattacharya handed over the party flag to her at a programme in February.

The athlete, who had earlier indicated that injuries had forced her to step away from competitive sport, is currently employed with the Railways.



is why my name was dropped," Roy told reporters after announcing his resignation.

The outgoing MLA claimed that a person who has "never worked for the party" has been nominated from the constituency replacing him. Roy said he had built the party organisation in Rajganj over the years and that denying him a ticket was an "injustice". "The Trinamool Congress will lose the Rajganj seat," he said.

However, Roy said he had not yet decided whether he would join another political party. "I have sent a letter to the party. Let us see what decision the leadership takes," he said.

Former heptathlete Barman, a native of Jalpaiguri district, had joined the Trinamool Congress earlier this year when state ministers Bratya Basu and Chandrima Bhattacharya handed over the party flag to her at a programme in February.

The athlete, who had earlier indicated that injuries had forced her to step away from competitive sport, is currently employed with the Railways.

Tajmul Hossain, the outgoing MLA from Harishchandrapur in Malda, was also denied the ticket this time. The Trinamool Congress has fielded Matur Rahaman from the seat instead of Tajmul.

An upset Tajmul, a three-time MLA from the constituency, said, "The party will have to face the consequences for not giving me the ticket this time."

He told reporters on Wednesday afternoon, "I am stunned by the party's decision. I cannot even imagine that I won't be given the ticket. I have been with the Trinamool Congress for the past 15 years. Surprisingly, some other person was nominated. The candidate does not know anything about the party. He has no mass connection in the area. It is a breach of trust with me."

Trinamool workers close to Tajmul alleged that IPAC, a political consultancy roped in by the ruling party, is instrumental behind the move.

A large number of Trinamool Congress workers in Harishchandrapur said they won't actively participate in programmes organised by the party during the

election campaign.

The candidate list reflects a significant overhaul, with the party dropping roughly 33% of its legislators in a bid to counter anti-incumbency. Among those denied tickets are several prominent names including former cricketer Manoj Tiwari, Vivek Gupta, Sabitri Mitra, Ratna De Nag, Paresh Pal and Kanchan Mallick.

Party sources said the decision was driven by ground-level feedback. "There were concerns about anti-incumbency in several constituencies. Renominating the same candidates could have hurt prospects," a senior leader said, requesting anonymity. At the same time, the Trinamool has retained or reintroduced several key figures. Former minister Jyotipriya Mallick, who was jailed in connection with the alleged ration distribution scam and later granted bail, has been fielded from Habra in North 24 Parganas, while senior advocate and MP Kalyan Banerjee's son, Sirshannyo Banerjee, will contest from Uttarpara, a recent Pakistani attacks, saying the war was imposed on Afghanistan.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump's failed strong-arming of allies on Iran shows that pressure is losing its effect

PARIS

"We've long had your back, now it's our turn. That is how the famously transactional U.S. President Donald Trump is framing his demands that allies help him with the Iran war. He wants to call in IOUs for decades of U.S. security guarantees.

The string of refusals indicates his stock of European goodwill is low. He has put allies through the wringer since returning to the White House, bullying them over tariffs, Greenland and other issues, and disparaging the sacrifices their soldiers made alongside U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

Now he's demanding — not just requesting — that they send warships to help the U.S. unblock the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil passes — essentially mop up behind the conflagration that he and Israel ignited in the Middle East.

The reply has been a "global raspberry." That's how a veteran French defense analyst, Francois Heisbourg, described allied responses.

No close ally has come forward with immediate help. Britain is flat-out refusing to be drawn into the war. France says the fighting would have to die down first. Others are non-committal. China, which is not an ally but was also asked to help, is ignoring Trump's call.

"This is not Europe's war. We didn't start the war. We were not consulted," European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said Tuesday.

Trump's frustration with the 'Rolls-Royce of allies'

Trump has singled out the refusal from the United Kingdom. Prime Minister Keir Starmer cultivated ties with Trump and reached an early trade deal with the administration, but is now among allies who refuse to join a regional war with no clear endgame.

The U.K. "was sort of considered the



Rolls-Royce of allies," Trump said Monday, adding that he'd asked for British mine-sweeping ships.

"I was not happy with the U.K.," Trump said. "They should be involved enthusiastically. We've been protecting these countries for years."

Starmer said Britain "will not be drawn into the wider war" and that British troops require the backing of international law and "a proper thought-through plan" — suggesting those were not in place.

He initially refused to let U.S. bombers attack Iran from British bases before accepting their use for strikes on Iran's ballistic missile program.

Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, former commanding general of the U.S. Army in Europe, said allies are "looking at the United States in a way that they never have before. And this is bad for the United States."

Having previously appeased Trump, some European leaders are "starting to realize that there's no benefit or value in using flattery," he said.

Going to war without consulting allies was in keeping with Trump's America-first outlook.

Bermann, a French former ambassador to China, the U.K. and Russia.

"And even in asking for a helping hand, he is doing so in a brutal manner, saying 'You're useless, we're the strongest, we don't need you, but come,'" she said.

Retired naval officers say that unblocking the Strait of Hormuz with military escorts while the war rages and without Iran's consent would be dangerous.

France, which has rushed its Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean, is working with other countries to prepare such a mission once the air war has subsided. French military spokesman Col. Guillaume Vernet said any escorting would be conditional on talks with Iran, and Macron has published two calls in eight days with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

"On a scale of zero to 10, I'd say he's been an eight," Trump said Monday. "Not perfect, but it's France. We don't expect perfect."

"We will protect them, but they will do nothing for us, in particular, in a time of need," Trump said Tuesday.

Allies in Europe and Asia need oil, gas and other products from the Middle East to flow again. That gives Trump some leverage.

Allies also know from experience that resisting Trump carries risks of retaliation.

"It really could be anything. Are the Europeans prepared for that?" asked Ed Arnold, a former British army officer and now a researcher at the Royal United Services Institute, a London think tank.

European allies need Trump's continued blessing for U.S. weaponry, intelligence, and other support for Ukraine, as well as financial pressure on Russia. The U.S. has started to chip away at some sanctions on Moscow by temporarily allowing shipments of Russian oil to ease shortages stemming from the Iran war. Allies also want him to reengage in talks to end the war.

Zelensky to discuss Russia-Ukraine war with UK's Starmer and NATO chief in London

LONDON

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived in London on Tuesday for talks with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the British government said, as European countries look to keep international attention on Russia's invasion of Ukraine while the unfolding Iran war engages world leaders.

Starmer's office said that NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte will also join the meeting at 10 Downing St. to discuss peacemaking efforts in Ukraine and "the need to maintain sanctions pressure on Russia."

The meeting comes days after the US temporarily waived some Russian oil sanctions in a bid to ease pressure on global supplies triggered by the war in the Middle East, which was sparked by the joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran starting on Feb. 28.

Zelenskyy criticized Washington's move to ease sanctions, saying it would provide a windfall for Moscow to keep up its attacks on Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump says he wants to secure a peace deal that ends Europe's biggest conflict since World War II and has rattled the continent's leaders, who reckon that Russia could pose a credible security threat to the European Union by the end of the decade.

But US-brokered talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv, which so far have yielded no significant progress on key issues, have lost momentum amid the Middle East conflict.

At the same time, Trump has spurned Zelenskyy's offer of help for the United States and its Persian Gulf partners in fighting Iranian drones. Ukraine has become one of the world's leading producers of high-tech, battle-tested drone interceptors.

British officials say that Russia and Iran are collaborating on drone technology and tactics in the Middle East.

Drone combat experts from the UK and Ukraine have been sent to the region to help Iran's neighbors repel its drone attacks.

Starmer's office said the UK and Ukraine will sign a deal combining "Ukraine's expertise and the UK's industrial base to manufacture and supply drones and innovative capabilities."

Britain is also funding an "AI Center of Excellence" in conjunction with the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense. Zelenskyy, announcing his arrival in London on X, said his priorities are "more security and opportunities for Ukraine."

Starmer said in a statement that "drones, electronic warfare and rapid battlefield innovation are now central to national and economic security, and that has only been further magnified by the conflict in the Middle East."

"By deepening our defense partnerships, we are strengthening Ukraine's ability to defend itself from Russia's brutal, ongoing attacks, while ensuring the UK and our allies are better prepared to meet the threats of the future." Russia's Defense

Ministry said Tuesday that its air defenses intercepted and destroyed 206 Ukrainian drones overnight over Russian regions, the annexed Crimean Peninsula and the Azov Sea. A total of 40 intercepted drones were flying toward Moscow, the ministry said.

Asked about an increase in Ukrainian drone attacks on Moscow over the past few days, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that authorities in Kyiv were "continuing absolutely futile resistance" against Russia's invasion.

Zelenskyy said late on Monday that counterattacks by Ukrainian forces at eastern and southern points along the front line have wrecked Moscow's plans for a March offensive.

His comments couldn't be independently verified, but the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said Monday that Ukrainian counterattacks "are likely constraining" some Russian offensive operations.

Ukraine's air force said that Russia launched 178 long-range drones of various types across the country overnight starting late Monday, with 154 of them either intercepted or jammed while 22 more struck their targets.

In the southern Ukraine city of Zaporizhzhia, a Russian strike damaged a terminal of Ukraine's biggest private delivery company, Nova Poshta, the company said on Telegram. Eight people were wounded, according to Ivan Fedorov, the head of the regional military administration.

Assam 2026: Can a Divided Opposition Counter the 'Himanta Model'?

As Assam moves steadily toward the 2026 Assembly elections, the contours of a high-stakes political contest are beginning to take shape. Yet, unlike previous electoral cycles, the emerging narrative is not one of a balanced contest between two competing coalitions. Instead, it is increasingly defined by the dominance of the ruling alliance, the strategic consolidation of power by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and a visibly fragmented opposition struggling to regain coherence.

To understand the likely trajectory of the 2026 polls, it is necessary to revisit the 2021 Assembly elections—an electoral moment that not only reaffirmed the strength of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led alliance but also exposed structural weaknesses within the opposition that persist to this day.

The 2021 Assam Assembly elections were conducted under extraordinary circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the political aftershocks of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC), had created a charged and uncertain atmosphere. Despite these challenges, the BJP-led Mitrajot-comprising the BJP, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL)-secured a comfortable victory.

The alliance won 75 out of 126 seats, with the BJP alone claiming 60 seats and a vote share exceeding 33 percent. In contrast, the Congress-led Mahajot, which included the All India United Democratic Front (AI-UDF), managed to secure only 50 seats. The "Grand Alliance" experiment, though ambitious on paper, failed to translate into electoral success.

Several factors contributed to this outcome. The BJP effectively combined welfare politics with identity-based messaging, projecting itself as both a development-oriented government and a defender of Assamese cultural and political interests. The slogan of "Jati, Mati, Bheti" (community, land, and hearth) resonated across diverse demographic segments.

Equally significant was the role of Himanta Biswa Sarma, whose political acumen and administrative experience helped craft a campaign that balanced populism with governance credibility. His transition from a key Congress ??? to a central BJP strategist—and eventually Chief Minister—symbolised a broader realignment in Assam's political landscape.

From 2021 to 2026: The Opposition's Gradual Erosion

In the years following the 2021 elections, the opposition—particularly the Indian National Congress—has faced a steady decline in organisational strength and political coherence. A series of high-profile defections has weakened the party's internal structure, eroding both leadership depth and grassroots networks.

Many leaders who exited the Congress cited a lack of clear direction, internal factionalism, and the growing appeal of the BJP's governance model. These defections have not only reduced the Congress's electoral base but have also enabled the BJP

to penetrate regions that were once considered opposition strongholds. The situation has



been further complicated by the inability of opposition parties to present a united front. While regional formations such as the Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajgor Dal emerged from the anti-CAA movement with considerable public enthusiasm, their electoral impact has been limited.

In 2021, only Akhil Gogoi of the Rajgor Dal managed to win a seat. Since then, efforts to build a cohesive anti-BJP platform have remained fragmented, with ideological differences and leadership rivalries preventing meaningful consolidation.

The 2024 Lok Sabha Signal: BJP's Expanding Dominance

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections served as a crucial indicator of the evolving political landscape. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secured 11 out of 14 parliamentary seats in Assam, reinforcing the BJP's dominance and highlighting the opposition's continued struggles.

This performance not only demonstrated the BJP's electoral strength but also set a formidable benchmark for the 2026 Assembly elections. It underscored the party's ability to mobilise voters across regions and communities, leveraging both organisational efficiency and narrative control.

For the opposition, the results were a stark reminder of the challenges ahead. Without a credible alliance or a unifying leadership figure, the task of mounting a serious challenge to the BJP appears increasingly daunting.

The 'Himanta Model': Development as Political Strategy

At the heart of the BJP's electoral strategy lies what may be described as the "Himanta model" of governance—a blend of aggressive development initiatives, targeted welfare schemes, and strategic political messaging.

Infrastructure and Healthcare Expansion

One of the most visible aspects of this model is the expansion of healthcare infrastructure. Assam has witnessed the establishment of multiple new medical colleges, including institutions in Jorhat, Barpeta, and Tezpur, with additional facilities under development in Nagaon, Dhubri, and Kokrajhar.

This expansion has not only improved healthcare access but has also generated employment opportunities and contributed to regional development.

Employment and Administrative Reforms

The government has also prioritised transparency in recruitment processes, particularly through mechanisms such as the Teachers Eligibility Test (TET). Large-scale recruitment drives for government jobs have been positioned as a response to youth aspirations, helping to build a

narrative of fairness and opportunity.

Economic Growth and Fiscal Expansion

Economically, Assam has demonstrated steady growth. From a Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of approximately ₹4.09 trillion in 2021, the state has continued to expand at a rate that often outpaces the national average. While it still trails industrial powerhouses like Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the gap is gradually narrowing.

This economic trajectory has been used effectively by the government to reinforce its development credentials.

Identity and Development: A Hybrid Political Formula

What distinguishes Assam's current political framework from that of other states is its unique blending of identity politics with developmental governance.

In states like West Bengal, political discourse is often centred around regional identity under dominant parties such as the Trinamool Congress. In Kerala, politics remains structured around a bipolar contest between the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF).

Assam, however, presents a different model. The BJP has successfully integrated Assamese sub-nationalism with a broader national development narrative. By aligning regional aspirations with central schemes and policies, the party has created a hy-

brid political formula that appeals to a wide spectrum of voters.

Key Electoral Faultlines for 2026

As the 2026 elections approach, several critical issues are expected to shape voter behaviour and campaign strategies.

1. Delimitation and Electoral Geography

The recent delimitation of constituencies has significantly altered Assam's electoral map. By redrawing boundaries, the exercise is widely perceived to favour the ruling alliance, particularly through the consolidation of indigenous voter bases in key constituencies.

2. The NRC and CAA Legacy

Although large-scale protests have subsided, the legacy of the NRC and the implementation of CAA rules continue to influence political discourse. These issues remain sensitive, particularly among communities directly affected by citizenship debates.

3. Welfare Politics and Direct Benefits

Flagship welfare schemes such as Orunodoi, which provides direct financial assistance to women, are likely to play a central role in the BJP's campaign. These initiatives have helped the government cultivate a strong pro-poor image, particularly among rural and economically vulnerable populations.

The expansion of such schemes ahead of the elections could further strengthen the ruling party's electoral prospects.

The Leadership Question: A Void in the Opposition

One of the most significant challenges facing the opposition is the absence of a unifying leader capable of matching the political influence of Himanta Biswa Sarma. While the Congress retains a legacy presence, it has struggled to project a clear leadership alternative.

Regional parties, despite their grassroots connections, lack the organisational reach and resources required to mount a statewide challenge. Efforts to forge alliances have been sporadic and often undermined by competing interests.

In contrast, the BJP's leadership structure remains centralised and disciplined, with Sarma emerging as the undisputed face of the party in Assam.

The Road to 2026: Continuity or Contestation?

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