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PERSPECTIVE

Don't regret having a good heart, all good things come back and multiply.

Assam rolls out earned salary advance, salary-linked credit scheme for govt employees

GUWAHATI
The Assam government on Tuesday launched an Earned Salary Advance (ESA) and Salary-Linked Credit (SLC) scheme aimed at providing timely and accessible credit to nearly five lakh state government employees through a digital platform.

The initiative is designed to improve financial inclusion and employee welfare by enabling access to formal credit for short-term needs, while reducing dependence on informal and high-interest borrowing sources. As part of the rollout, the state government signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with BillMart on March 15 to facilitate seamless delivery of ESA and SLC services through a digital interface.

The scheme aligns with the vision of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to leverage digital platforms and financial innovation to strengthen employee welfare systems. The MoU was signed in the presence of senior officials, including Environment and Forest Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, Chief Secretary Ravi Kota, and Finance Department officials. According to the Chief Minister, the initiative witnessed strong early response, with 120 beneficiaries availing the facility within the first 12 hours and nearly Rs 1.9 crore disbursed. "The facility is being delivered through FinAssam, Assam's digital financial platform enabling fast, paperless and transparent credit access for government employees," Sarma said in a social media post. Under the scheme, eligible employees can access a portion of their earned salary before payday through ESA, along with salary-linked credit options featuring simplified approvals and repayment mechanisms integrated with payroll systems.

WHO SAID WHAT

Once a BJP government is formed in Punjab, we will bring the first bill to stop 'Religious Conversion' and within two years will make Punjab drug-free. Visuals from Badlav Rally, held in Moga, Punjab. #BadlavRallyPunjab
- Amit Shah, Union Home Minister

Census protests intensify in Manipur; demonstrators demand NRC before enumeration

IMPHAL

Protests against the proposed census exercise intensified in Manipur on Tuesday, with demonstrators attempting to march towards the Directorate of Census at Porompat, demanding that the enumeration process be suspended until key concerns are addressed.

The protest, organised under the banner of the Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation (JFD), witnessed a large turnout. Security personnel intercepted the marchers en route to the Census office, preventing them from proceeding further. However, a small delegation of JFD representatives was allowed to meet officials at the Directorate.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, JFD executive member Sunil Karam reiterated the group's demand for detection of illegal immigrants and



implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) prior to conducting the census.

He expressed concerns over the timing and methodology of the exercise, stating that the prevailing situation in the state was not conducive for a credible enumeration. He cited restricted movement in several areas, the continued presence of internally displaced persons in relief camps, and alleged "unnatural growth" in certain villages and population clusters.

Karam also raised objections to the proposed enumeration process, claiming that officials indicated population counting may be conducted along community lines, with members of different ethnic groups enumerating their respective communities. He alleged that such a method could affect the neutrality of the exercise.

"The government's decision to proceed with the census un-

der current conditions is unfortunate," he said, reiterating the demand that the exercise be deferred until after identification of illegal immigrants and implementation of NRC mechanisms.

He further questioned why authorities have not sequenced the census after completion of NRC-related processes, amid ongoing concerns over demographic changes in the state. Referring to statements by Union Home Minister Amit Shah on illegal immigration, he sought clarity on whether detection and deportation measures would apply uniformly to migrants from all neighbouring countries, including Myanmar.

Protesters raised slogans such as "no census without identification of illegal immigrants" and "no census until internally displaced persons are resettled," and warned of intensifying their agitation if their demands are not addressed.

BJP Likely to Release Assam Poll Candidate List by March 18



GUWAHATI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is expected to finalise its list of candidates for the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly election 2026 by March 18, with the party's Parliamentary Board set to announce nominees for most constituencies in a single list.

Himanta Biswa Sarma, Chief Minister of Assam, said the party would hold its first meeting on Tuesday to discuss ticket distribution and nominations.

"Tomorrow there will be the first meeting over tickets and nominations. The party's Parliamentary Board will publish the BJP candidate list on Wednesday evening," Sarma told reporters during a visit to a Durga temple in Rani, Assam before leaving for New Delhi.

He indicated that the party is in the final stages of preparing the list and that most candidates would be announced together.

"There will be names in one list only. There could be exceptions if one or two constituencies are left pending," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma also confirmed that he would travel to the national capital for discussions related to the candidate selection process.

Responding to reports that Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi had written to the party's leadership expressing dissatisfaction over internal issues, Sarma criticised the Indian National Congress and claimed that its internal environment was deteriorating.

"No Hindu leader will be able to stay in Congress. It does not have that atmosphere. I think by 2030, it will be difficult to find a Hindu leader in the party," he said.

The Chief Minister added that he had not yet spoken with Bordoloi as the latter is currently a sitting Member of Parliament.

"I have not talked to Bordoloi yet because he is a sitting MP. He will lose his seat if he enters BJP. That is why I have set 2029 as the timeline for him," Sarma said.

He further criticised the internal functioning of the Congress, claiming that the party's atmosphere had worsened after the appointment of its new president.

The remarks come amid reports of internal tensions within the Congress over the Lahorigarth Assembly ticket, with Bordoloi reportedly expressing displeasure with the party leadership and travelling to New Delhi to raise the matter with the high command ahead of the state elections.

Nagaland Governor calls for greater support to veterans at welfare rally



KOHIMA

Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav on Tuesday underscored the need for stronger societal support for ex-servicemen while attending a rally focused on veterans' welfare at Kisama Heritage Village.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor said concerns raised by the veteran community would be examined and taken up for appropriate action. A memorandum highlighting key issues faced by ex-servicemen (ESM) League during the event.

The rally, attended by ex-servicemen, Veer Naris and their families, also saw participation from the Indian Army and state officials. The programme was organised by the Army's Spear Corps.

Yadav paid tribute to veterans and their families, acknowledging their contribution to national service, and noted the Army's continued outreach efforts aimed at addressing welfare concerns. Officials at the event highlighted ongoing coordination between civil authorities and the Army to strengthen welfare measures for veterans in the state.

AIUDF names Badruddin Ajmal from Binnakandi in second list for Assam polls



GUWAHATI

The All India United Democratic Front on Tuesday released its second list of candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, naming party president Badruddin Ajmal from the Binnakandi constituency.

As per the list, Hafiz Bashir Ahmed has been fielded from Goalpara East, while Nazrul Hoque will contest from Dhubri. Mazibur Rahman has been nominated from Dalgao and Ashraf Hussain from Chenga.

The party has also announced Abdul Aziz as its candidate from Samaguri, Shihab Uddin from

Karimganj South and Imdad Hussain from Chamarajanagar.

Jamsher Talukdar has been fielded from Golakganj, while Musukha Basumatary will contest from Bijni. Mukut Das has been nominated from Raha, a Scheduled Caste-reserved seat, and Dr Anup Kumar Das Talukdar will contest from Ram Krishna Nagar (SC).

With the release of its second list, the AIUDF has stepped up preparations for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections. Party sources indicated that candidates for the remaining constituencies are likely to be announced in the coming days.

Pre-monsoon storms lash Northeast; 4 killed in Arunachal, widespread damage in Assam

GUWAHATI

At least four people were killed in a landslide in Arunachal Pradesh as intense pre-monsoon storms battered several Northeastern states, with Assam among the worst affected, officials said on Tuesday.

The fatalities were reported from Niti Vihar in Itanagar, where heavy rainfall triggered a landslide. Chief Minister Pema Khandu announced an ex gratia of Rs 4 lakh for the next of kin of each deceased and financial assistance for the injured.

Across Assam, multiple districts reported extensive damage to homes, crops and infrastructure due to strong winds, hailstorms and heavy rainfall.

In Hojai district, a powerful storm overnight blew away tin roofs and damaged several houses, while in Baksa along the India-Bhutan border, up-



rooted trees disrupted power supply and blocked roads, leaving several families homeless.

River island district Majuli also reported significant destruction, with houses damaged in Ahatguri village. In parts of Hojai, Lanka and Karbi Anglong, falling trees blocked highways and disrupted movement.

In Cachar, including Silchar and Dholai, storms led to flooding and injuries. At least six people were injured in Dholai after trees were uprooted, while Silchar witnessed waterlogging that disrupted daily life. The first major spell of rain this season has also hit agriculture, with hailstorms damaging standing rabi crops in parts of Bongaigaon and Cachar districts.

Elsewhere in the region, Manipur reported damage to houses in districts such

as Bishnupur, Kakching and Churachandpur, prompting authorities to initiate relief measures. In Meghalaya, severe hailstorms affected all 12 districts, with West Garo Hills among the worst hit, disrupting power supply and damaging property.

The India Meteorological Department said the weather activity was part of the pre-monsoon season in the region, locally known as "Bordoisila", and not linked to recent storms in Odisha.

The IMD has forecast isolated heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and hail across several Northeastern states and advised residents to remain alert and follow official advisories.

Authorities across the region have stepped up relief and response measures amid concerns over early-season extreme weather.



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ASIAN NATIONS PAY A PRICE FOR A WAR THEY NEVER STARTED



Countries in Asia in particular and the rest of the world in general are facing a crisis following the outbreak of war between the United States of America and Israel, and Iran. This has led to a breakdown in the supply of petroleum products. It has happened as Iranians have blocked the strait of Hormuz through which twenty per cent of world crude is moved to feed countries of Asia and the world.

The result is countries in the region are resorting to measures like four day weeks, schools and colleges closed, rationing with a slowdown in supply of petroleum products. The airlines are raising fares. With the price of crude oil touching 100 dollars a barrel, there is a mood of gloom all round. Fear is if conflict continues the world will face a serious situation with inflation rising and economic slowdown.

India will also face a serious situation as it imports nearly eighty per cent of our requirement of crude oil. To fill the gap with disruption of supplies we have turned to Russia and the USA. At present the situation is better in India as compared to our neighbours. Shortages have led to imposition of the Essential Commodities Act to regulate the supplies. At present, some sectors who get commercial gas cylinders are facing difficult times while the public in general is protected. There is no increase in the price of petrol or diesel. Gas prices however have been raised.

India has to deal with the situation as there is a fear that if the war continues for a long time, it could lead to inflation and a slowdown of economic activity. Another sector which may suffer are farmers as there will be difficulties in getting fertilizers in sufficient quantities. India is in touch with different parties involved in the conflict and has argued that all differences should be resolved through diplomacy and talks instead of war. There is, however, no doubt that in coming time we have to carefully navigate through a difficult situation. Another area of concern will be safety and welfare of a large number of Indians in the Gulf region who remit large sums of money to India which help in meeting the gap between imports and exports.

So far we have taken a neutral position in the conflict and are in a position to play a role. Even the United Nations Security Council has failed to bring the warring countries towards a dialogue instead of war. The present situation is not easy with the Russian conflict with Ukraine, Pakistan's war with Afghanistan, and the conflict in the Gulf between Iran and USA and Israel. The result is a situation in which Asia in particular is being made to pay a price even though they did not start the war.

One had hoped that President Trump, who had been voted on the promise that he would end all wars, had resolved old conflicts instead of launching more attacks. Under the circumstances the only hope is that India remains united and we work to safeguard our interests in India as well as Indians in countries involved in the conflict. It is testing time for all and few will emerge out of it unscathed, with either a loss of face or their country ruined. It will take years to undo the damage done in a few days of bombing or by drones and missiles flying all round. Unlike in the past when tanks leading or soldiers marching as adversaries have no common border. So you can be hit by a drone or missile launched miles away, or a plane circling above, guided by satellites.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work if it is not open. - Frank Zappa

IRAN'S REAL LEVERAGE IN STRAIT OF HORMUZ



B S DARA

The Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil flows, explains why even superpowers tread carefully in confronting Tehran.

In the calculus of modern warfare, military strength is usually judged by the weapons deployed and the armies assembled. Analysts count missiles, fighter jets, and naval fleets to determine who holds the advantage. Yet in the current confrontation involving Iran and Western powers, the most powerful factor shaping the conflict is neither technological superiority nor military firepower. It is geography.

Along Iran's southern coastline runs one of the most strategically consequential waterways on earth: the Strait of Hormuz. This narrow maritime passage, located between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula, connects the oil-rich Persian Gulf to the open waters of the Arabian Sea and beyond. Every day, vast quantities of oil and liquefied natural gas move through this corridor toward global markets. The numbers alone reveal the scale of its importance. Approximately 20 per cent of the world's oil supply passes through the Strait of Hormuz, making it the single most significant oil chokepoint in the global energy system. For many Asian economies, including China, India, Japan, and South Korea, this route represents the primary artery through which their energy lifelines flow. In such a system, geography can confer extraordinary influence. And that is precisely the strategic reality shaping the current war.

The Strait of Hormuz is remarkably small for the role it plays in the global economy. At its narrowest navigational point, the shipping lanes through the strait are only a few kilometers wide in each direction. Yet through this confined channel flows an enormous share of the world's energy trade.

Oil from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar must pass through this corridor before reaching international markets. Tankers loaded in Gulf terminals travel through Hormuz before heading toward Asia, Europe, and other destinations. Because of this concentration of energy traffic, even minor disruptions in the region can cause immediate turbulence in global markets. Traders respond rapidly to geopolitical developments in the Gulf, often pushing oil prices upward whenever tensions rise. Energy markets operate on expectations as much as on physical supply. The mere pos-

sibility of disruption in Hormuz can send shockwaves through oil and gas prices worldwide.

Iran's conventional military capabilities are frequently compared unfavorably with those of the United States and its allies. Western powers maintain superior air forces, advanced naval fleets, and sophisticated intelligence networks.

However, Iran has developed a military strategy specifically designed to exploit the geography of the Persian Gulf. Instead of competing directly with larger navies, Iran has invested heavily in asymmetric maritime capabilities, tools that are particularly effective in narrow waterways. These include Coastal anti-ship missile systems. Naval mines capable of disrupting shipping routes. Swarms of fast attack boats. Armed drones and surveillance platforms.

In the confined environment of the Strait of Hormuz, such systems can pose significant challenges for large naval vessels and commercial shipping alike. Iran does not need to permanently close the strait to exert pressure. Even temporary disruptions, such as harassment of tankers, threats to shipping lanes, or the placement of naval mines, can dramatically increase insurance costs and delay cargo shipments.

In a global economy where supply chains operate with tight margins and precise timing, even small interruptions can have disproportionate effects. Some observers suggest that global oil markets could bypass the Strait of Hormuz through alternative routes.

In theory, pipelines and other maritime corridors could reduce dependence on the strait. In practice, however, such alternatives remain limited. Saudi Arabia operates an east-west pipeline that transports crude from the Persian Gulf to ports on the Red Sea. The United Arab Emirates also maintains a pipeline that allows some oil exports to bypass Hormuz via the port of Fujairah.

Yet these routes together can only carry a fraction of the oil volume that normally passes through the strait. Much of the region's energy infrastructure was built around Gulf terminals and tanker routes converging on Hormuz. Countries such as Iraq, Kuwait, and Qatar remain heavily dependent on the strait for their exports. For them, there is simply no large-scale alternative pathway to global markets. The strategic significance of the Strait of Hormuz explains why even powerful nations approach the current conflict carefully.

For the United States, maintaining the free flow of energy through the Gulf has long been a central pillar of foreign policy. American naval forces have maintained a continuous presence in the region for decades to ensure that shipping lanes remain open. However, direct confrontation with Iran carries risks that extend beyond the battlefield. A prolonged conflict that disrupts Hormuz could trigger a major global energy crisis, pushing oil prices sharply upward and destabilizing economies around the world.

China faces similar concerns. As the world's largest importer of crude oil, Beijing relies heavily on shipments from the Persian Gulf. Any disruption to these flows would immediately affect China's industrial output and economic growth.

India, another rapidly growing energy consumer, depends on stable supplies from Gulf producers. For New Delhi, the Strait of Hormuz represents a vital gateway to energy security. Because of these interdependencies, major powers often balance military pressure with diplomatic caution.

While Iran's geographic position gives it leverage, it also imposes constraints. A full closure of the Strait of Hormuz would harm Iran itself. The country relies on the same shipping routes to export its own oil and maintain economic activity. Moreover, a sustained blockade would likely provoke an international military response aimed at reopening the waterway.

Global energy security is too important for the world's major economies to allow the strait to remain closed indefinitely. For this reason, analysts generally view Iran's strategy as one of deterrence rather than permanent disruption. The ability to threaten the strait can shape negotiations and influence geopolitical calculations without requiring its actual closure.

In other words, Iran's geographic advantage functions more as a strategic bargaining chip than as a weapon to be used outright.

The continuing importance of the Strait of Hormuz highlights a broader truth about global politics: geography still matters.

In an era dominated by advanced technology and global connectivity, physical location continues to shape the balance of power. Natural chokepoints, whether canals, straits, or narrow sea lanes, remain central to the functioning of the global economy.

The Persian Gulf represents one of the most prominent examples of this reality. Every day, tankers carrying

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

AI MAKES the RICH RICHER: Jack Dorsey just fired 4400 hundred employees. Not because the company needed the money. Dorsey admitted each employee made his company millions of dollars. Dorsey fired 4400 employee because AI could do their jobs. RICH DAD LESSON: Think like an employee and AI will replace you. Think like an entrepreneur and hire AI to make you richer....like Jack Dorsey. Take care.

~ Robert Kiyosaki, Author. Entrepreneur, Investor



millions of barrels of oil navigate the narrow waters of Hormuz. Behind each shipment lies a chain of economic activity, from electricity generation and industrial production to transportation networks and consumer goods. Any disruption to this system would reverberate across continents.

The Strait of Hormuz is often described as the artery of the global oil system. Like an artery in the human body, it carries the lifeblood that sustains the wider system. If that artery becomes constricted, the consequences are felt everywhere.

That is why even in times of war, global powers tread carefully around the Persian Gulf. Military decisions in the region must account not only for strategic objectives but also for the economic stability of the world. Iran's influence in the current conflict therefore derives less from its missiles or naval fleets than from the geographic reality of its coastline. As long as the world's energy supply continues to flow through the Strait of Hormuz, Iran will possess a form of strategic leverage that few countries can match.

In the end, the lesson of the crisis is clear: The weapons of modern war may evolve, but geography remains the most enduring form of power.

Better Infrastructure, Security Preparedness Enable Single-Phase Assam Polls

GUWAHATI

Improved infrastructure and strengthened security arrangements have enabled the authorities to conduct the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly election 2026 in a single phase, senior officials said on Monday, a day after the poll schedule was announced.

Polling across all 126 Assembly constituencies in Assam will be held on April 9, as per the schedule released by the Election Commission of India.

Addressing a press conference, Assam Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel said improvements in physical infrastructure and connectivity have boosted confidence in holding the election in a single phase.

"Improved infrastructure, availa-

bility of more buildings, bridges and better connectivity have led to the confidence of conducting the elections in the state in a single phase," Goel said.

Inspector General of Police (Law and Order) Akhilesh Kumar Singh, who is also the nodal security officer for the elections, said the civil and police administrations are now better equipped to handle the extensive logistics required for single-phase polling.

"Single-phase polling requires elaborate planning and logistics. Compared to earlier years, we are now fully prepared. Both civil and police administrations are ready to conduct the elections smoothly," Singh said.

He added that the improvement in the law and order situation, including the withdrawal of the Armed Forces

(Special Powers) Act from most parts of the state, has also contributed to the decision.

For security arrangements, the state has sought deployment of 828 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), of which 200 companies have already arrived. In addition, more than 74,000 personnel from the Assam Police, including home guards, will be deployed for election duties.

Security monitoring has been intensified with strict surveillance along inter-state and inter-district borders and expanded CCTV coverage at sensitive locations. A total of 134 border checkpoints are being set up, with flying squads and static teams maintaining round-the-clock monitoring.

Officials said international bor-

ders will be sealed as per established election protocols during the polling period. Security forces are also conducting area domination exercises and confidence-building measures to ensure voters can exercise their franchise freely.

To prevent the movement of illicit items such as illegal liquor, enforcement teams have stepped up checks across the state.

A special social media monitoring cell has also been established by the CID to track fake news and AI-generated content that could disturb peace during the election period. A dedicated helpline has been opened to receive complaints related to misinformation.

Goel said the election notification was issued following approval from

the Governor, formally initiating the electoral process in the state.

As of March 15, the total number of electors in Assam stands at 2,50,21,413, though the figure may be revised until the last date for filing nominations.

Since publication of the final electoral rolls on February 10 after the special revision, over 1.64 lakh voters have been added while more than one lakh names have been deleted, resulting in a net increase of about 64,000 electors.

The largest share of voters falls in the 20-29 age group with more than 66 lakh electors. The state also has 2,482 voters aged above 100 years and nearly one lakh voters above 85 years, while more than six lakh electors are in the 18-19 age group.

A total of 31,486 polling stations have been planned across the state, with the CEO's office seeking approval for four additional auxiliary stations. Dalgao constituency has the highest number of electors with over three lakh voters, while Amri has the lowest with just over one lakh voters.

More than 1.5 lakh civil polling personnel will be deployed for the election process along with micro-observers and sector officers.

Goel also announced that for the first time EVM ballot papers will carry coloured photographs of candidates. In addition, 100 per cent webcasting will be implemented at polling stations, and mobile phone deposit facilities will be provided to ensure secrecy of voting.

Naga Students Protest Vande Mataram Directive, Submit Memorandum to President

KOHIMA

Students and citizens led by the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) staged a rally in Nagaland's capital on Monday opposing a directive mandating the singing of Vande Mataram at official functions and in educational institutions, terming it an infringement on religious and cultural sensitivities. Carrying placards and banners, hundreds of demonstrators marched through Kohima before assembling at Lok Bhavan. The protesters raised slogans against the directive issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), stating that it undermines secular principles and disregards the beliefs of the Naga people. Placards displayed during the rally read "MHA's January 28 directive is an assault on secularism", "Naga rights are non-negotiable", and "Stop forced policies".

Addressing the gathering, NSF president Mteising Herang said the protest was a collective assertion of the Naga people's identity and faith. He clarified that the demonstration was not directed against any community or the nation, but against the imposition of symbolic practices that conflict with the conscience of the people. The protesters later submitted a memorandum addressed to President Droupadi Murmu through the Governor of Nagaland, urging withdrawal of the directive mandating the singing or playing of Vande Mataram in official programmes and educational institutions across the state. In the memorandum, the NSF also sought dialogue with representatives of the Naga people before implementing policies that may affect the region's cultural and social fabric. The federation stated that the revised version of Vande Mataram contains devotional imagery associated with the worship of a particular deity, which it said conflicts with the religious and cultural sensitivities of the largely Christian Naga population.

"We want to remove the BJP": AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal calls for opposition unity ahead of Assam polls

HOJAI

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) President Maulana Badruddin Ajmal urged the opposition parties to unite after Election Commission of India announced the schedule for Assembly elections in Assam while urging the commission to ensure that the electoral process remain free, fair and impartial particularly in regions not governed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The schedule announced by the poll body, the AIUDF chief said his party supports the decision but stressed the need for neutrality in the conduct of elections. "Our party welcomes this announcement... The Election Commission must ensure that wherever there is no BJP government, elections are held in a free and fair manner. Governance should be strengthened, there should be no favouritism towards anyone," Ajmal said.

He further emphasised that the democratic process should treat all political parties equally during the election period. "Our point is that there should be no discrimination

against any party," he said.

Ajmal also called on opposition parties to come together to challenge the ruling party. "We want to remove the BJP. I urge all non-BJP parties to join together and try to remove the BJP," he said.

The Election Commission on Sunday announced the schedule for Assembly elections in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Assam, along with the Union Territory of Puducherry. Polling in West Bengal will take place in two phases on April 23 and April 29, while Kerala, Assam and Puducherry will vote in a single phase on April 9. Tamil Nadu will go to the polls on April 23. Counting of votes for all five regions will be conducted on May 4.

The election schedule announced by the poll body will cover a total of 824 Assembly constituencies across the five regions, with an estimated electorate of about 17.4 crore voters. Nearly 2.19 lakh polling stations will be set up, and around 25 lakh personnel will be deployed for the conduct of the elections.

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Monday appointed a special observer to oversee preparations for the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly election 2026, which will be held in a single phase on April 9 across all 126 constituencies.

According to an official communication issued by the Commission, retired IAS officer Manjeet Singh has been appointed as the Special Observer for the polls. The appointment has been made under the powers vested in the Commission under Article 324 of the Constitution of India.

The observer will visit Assam periodically to review election preparedness and monitor the conduct of the polling process, while submitting reports and recommendations to the Commission for necessary action.

State Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel will coordinate

with the Special Observer and extend logistical and administrative support during the election period.

Meanwhile, addressing a press conference at Janata Bhawan in Guwahati, Goel said improved infrastructure and enhanced security arrangements have enabled the Commission to conduct the Assembly elections in a single phase.

"Improved infrastructure, including better connectivity through buildings and bridges, has contributed to the confidence in conducting the elections across the state in one phase," he said.

Security officials also high-

Tripura Opposition Terms 2026-27 Budget 'Directionless', Flags Gaps in Jobs, Education

AGARTALA

Opposition parties in Tripura on Monday criticised the state government's budget for 2026-27, describing it as "directionless" and lacking concrete measures to address the concerns of ordinary citizens.

Leader of the Opposition Jitendra Chaudhury said that while the budget had been presented, he had only heard the proposals and was yet to study the detailed figures. He noted that the financial statement was the third budget presented by Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy. Chaudhury said that merely increasing budgetary allocations does not necessarily make a budget pro-people or inclusive.

"A proper plan based on the socio-economic conditions of the state's population is required,



along with a clear roadmap on how positive outcomes will be achieved," he said, adding that the previous two budgets had similar shortcomings and describing the current one as "hollow".

He also raised concerns about the condition of the education sector, stating that the government should have prioritised primary, pre-primary and Madhyamik education. According to him, nearly 400 primary schools in the state are

functioning with only one teacher each. He alleged that the budget does not provide any clear plan for teacher recruitment and that existing teachers continue to face several operational challenges.

The opposition leader further criticised the proposals related to agriculture, saying that despite claims of new initiatives, the budget does not offer a comprehensive plan to support the state's poor and middle-class farmers.

He also argued that the financial plan lacks meaningful measures to generate employment or stabilise key sectors of the state economy. Echoing similar concerns, Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman termed the budget "completely directionless" while speaking to reporters. Barman said the proposals are unlikely to satisfy the people of the state as they do not present a clear roadmap for development. He added that unemployment remains one of the biggest challenges in Tripura but the budget fails to outline a concrete strategy for job creation.

According to the opposition leaders, without detailed and actionable plans addressing education, agriculture, employment and broader economic growth, the budget will not effectively meet the needs of the people of the state.

UPPL May Contest All 15 BTR Seats as Alliance Talks with NDA Remain Unclear

CHIRANG

The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) on Monday indicated that it may contest all 15 Assembly constituencies in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in the upcoming Assam Legislative Assembly election 2026, amid uncertainty over a possible alliance with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

UPPL president Pramod Boro said the party has almost finalised its list of candidates and is prepared to contest independently if required. "We have finalised candidates for most of the seats except two or three. Our core committee meeting has concluded and we are ready to announce the candidates. Since we are not under any pressure, we are prepared to contest all 15 constituencies in the BTR," Boro told reporters.

He added that the party has received a large number of ticket requests from various communities across the region.

"There is strong demand for tickets from different communities. We are discussing these matters and once the process is completed, we will release the candidate list," he said.

The UPPL's indication that it may contest all 15 seats has fuelled speculation that the party may not enter into a seat-sharing arrangement with the Bharatiya Janata Party for the upcoming elections.

Boro said the party has writ-

ten to the BJP seeking clarity on its status within the alliance.

"We have run the Bodoland Territorial Council in alliance for five years. As part of the NDA, we do not want to embarrass anyone. That is why we have written to the BJP seeking clarification on the issues," he said.

The letter, addressed to state BJP president Dilip Saikia, was sent on March 10 seeking clarity on the UPPL's position within the alliance.

While the BJP has not formally responded, Himanta Biswa Sarma had earlier indicated that the party would not enter into a direct alliance with the UPPL for the Assembly polls.

Speaking on March 9 during the concluding day of the "Jana Ashirwad Yatra" in Nalbari, the Chief Minister said the BJP would contest four Assembly seats in the BTR.

He added that any seat-sharing arrangement involving the UPPL would have to be negotiated with the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) rather than the BJP.

"The seat-sharing talks with UPPL will have to be over those 11 seats with the BPF, as there is no scope for further discussion with the BJP," Sarma had said.

With the Chief Minister ruling out a direct BJP-UPPL alliance, political equations in the BTR are expected to shift as parties prepare for the April 9 Assembly polls.

Akhil Gogoi Offers Conditional Backing to Gaurav Gogoi, Accuses Congress of 'Betrayal'

GUWAHATI

Akhil Gogoi, president of the Rajjor Dal, on Monday said he has urged his party not to field a candidate against Gaurav Gogoi in the Jorhat constituency, expressing his desire to see the Congress MP enter the Assam Legislative Assembly.

Addressing reporters, Gogoi said his party would soon release its third list of candidates, followed by the final list. However, he revealed that he had submitted a written request to party leaders suggesting that Rajjor Dal should avoid contesting against the Congress leader in Jorhat.

"I want Gaurav Gogoi to come to the Assembly. We have 126 MLAs, but 99.9 per cent of them do not have proper knowledge of the Constitution. They may win elections, but they do not significantly contribute to lawmaking. If Gaurav comes to the Assembly, he can help frame new laws and strengthen debates," he said.

Gogoi claimed that the organisational base of Rajjor Dal in Jorhat was stronger than that of the Indian National Congress and said some party workers had earlier suggested that Gaurav Gogoi should consider contesting from Titabor or Mahmora instead.



"This is not final. I have only made a suggestion. Our party leaders will meet and take a final decision," he said.

In a significant political remark, Gogoi said he would ask his party to support the Congress leader if he directly approached him.

"If Gaurav removes his ego and directly requests me, I will ask our party to help him. Our organisational network is stronger than Congress in Jorhat. We can assist him," he added.

Responding to questions on whether he had asked Congress not to field a candidate against him in Sibsagar, Gogoi said he had never made such a request.

Recalling the previous election when he was lodged in jail, the Rajjor Dal leader said people had campaigned for him out of goodwill and conviction, leading to his victory. He alleged that Congress had fielded a candidate against him even then despite his incarceration.

"I never asked Congress for anything,

not last time and not this time," he said.

Gogoi further said that Himanta Biswa Sarma should contest from Sibsagar and that Gaurav Gogoi should also enter the fray in the Assembly elections.

"If Gaurav comes to the Assembly, there will be three strong voices - Himanta, Gaurav and me. We can debate key issues," he said, adding that he would rely on public support to secure victory.

He also accused the Congress of sidelining regional forces and attempting to weaken Rajjor Dal.

"Congress believes it can defeat the Bharatiya Janata Party on its own. That is their biggest mistake. Rajjor Dal is the BJP's strongest opponent in Assam," Gogoi claimed.

He further questioned the Congress' strategy for the 2026 Assembly elections, alleging that the party was distributing tickets to leaders' sons as part of a long-term plan aimed at the 2031 polls.

Gogoi also criticised Lurinjyoti Gogoi, accusing him of failing to prevent the collapse of a potential opposition alliance and acting in his party's self-interest.

Despite the criticism, Gogoi said he would continue to oppose the BJP and wished the Congress well if it managed to form the government.

"I have no option but to contest. Congress betrayed us. Still, I want Gaurav Gogoi to win. If they think they can form the government alone, I wish them luck," he added.

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LPG supply stable despite 'somewhat difficult phase': Petroleum Ministry



NEW DELHI

The Union government urged consumers not to panic over LPG supplies and warned against hoarding and black marketing, saying adequate measures are in place to ensure smooth distribution across the country.

Speaking during an inter-ministerial briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said state governments and local administrations have been asked to closely monitor the situation and prevent irregularities in LPG distribution.

"In the present situation, when we are facing a somewhat difficult phase regarding LPG supply, the role of state governments and local administrations becomes very important, particularly in preventing hoarding and black marketing," she said.

Sharma said control rooms have been established in almost all states and several meetings are being held at the state level

to monitor the situation. Raids are also being conducted, while oil marketing companies have activated teams to carry out inspections.

According to her, surprise inspections have already been conducted at nearly 1,100 locations, including LPG distributors and retail outlets.

The government has also requested consumers who have both piped natural gas (PNG) and LPG connections to voluntarily surrender their LPG connection if they can rely on PNG.

Sharma appealed to consumers to opt for online booking of LPG cylinders, assuring that cylinders will be delivered at their doorstep and there is no need to visit distributors in person. She also urged people to avoid rumours and refrain from panic buying.

She added that all refineries are operating at full capacity, petrol pumps are functioning normally and no dry-outs have been reported anywhere. Natural gas supply to CNG and PNG customers

is being maintained at 100 per cent, including CNG for vehicles.

Meanwhile, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said an LPG carrier from the Persian Gulf is expected to arrive in India later in the day.

"I will start with the Shivalik LPG carrier, which sailed from the Persian Gulf, crossed the Strait of Hormuz and is heading towards India. It is expected to arrive today around 5 pm, maybe an hour later. Prior to its arrival, all arrangements, including documentation and priority berthing, have been made at the port," he said.

The ministry is also encouraging commercial LPG consumers to shift to PNG connections wherever possible. To promote PNG usage, some companies have announced incentives, including free gas worth Rs 500 for new domestic PNG consumers who get connected before March 31 and begin purchasing gas.

BJP names 144 candidates in first list for Bengal polls, fields Suvendu from Bhabanipur

KOLKATA

Setting the stage for the electoral battle, the BJP on Monday released its first list of 144 candidates for the West Bengal assembly polls, fielding Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur, a constituency held by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in a direct challenge to the TMC supremo.

The announcement made in New Delhi signals the BJP's attempt to sharpen the electoral narrative around Banerjee versus Adhikari while largely retaining its sitting legislators and inducting candidates from diverse professional backgrounds to broaden its social outreach ahead of the two-phase polls on April 23 and 29.

Adhikari's candidature from both Nandigram and Bhabanipur is widely seen as the party's most high-stakes decision in the first list, underscoring his role as the BJP's principal field commander in Bengal.

While Nandigram carries deep political symbolism as the epicentre of the 2007 anti-land acquisition movement that propelled Banerjee's rise to power, it also became the stage for one of the most dramatic electoral battles in recent years when Adhikari defeated the chief minister there in 2021 by a slender margin of around 1,900 votes.

Bhabanipur, in contrast, is considered Banerjee's political stronghold. She returned to the assembly from the seat in a 2021 bypoll with a margin of more than 58,000 votes. "I will win both the seats and defeat Mamata Banerjee again," Adhikari said after the announcement, projecting confidence that the BJP could challenge the ruling TMC even in its perceived strongholds.

Political observers say the decision also signals the BJP's reliance on Adhikari's organisational network across coastal Bengal and the Jungle Mahal region, where he retains significant influence.



"The BJP is clearly trying to personalise the election around a Mamata versus Suvendu narrative. By fielding him in Bhabanipur, the party is seeking to symbolically challenge the chief minister on her home turf," said a Kolkata-based political analyst.

The first list also indicates the BJP's preference for continuity, with the party renominating 41 of its sitting legislators. Among those repeated are Agnimitra Paul from Asansol South, Chandana Bauri from Saltora and Shikha Chatterjee from Dabgram-Phulbari.

Former state BJP president Dilip Ghosh will once again contest from Kharagpur Sadar, while former Rajya Sabha MP Swapan Dasgupta has been fielded from the Rashbehari assembly seat in south Kolkata.

Two of the candidates are former MPs, and three are ex-MLAs. Female candidates have been given representation on 11 of the announced seats.

The saffron party fielded candidates below 40 years of age in 36 seats, "as a symbol of trust in the youth". Similarly, 72 nominees are in the 41 to 55 age group, while 32

candidates are in the 56 to 70 years age bracket. Four candidates are above the age of 70.

The list reflects a deliberate attempt to project social diversity, with the BJP highlighting candidates drawn from varied professional backgrounds. Of the 144 nominees, 57 come from fields such as teaching, law, medicine, social work and the armed forces.

Teachers account for the largest group with 23 candidates, while the party has also fielded advocates, doctors, retired military personnel, journalists and cultural personalities such as actor Rudranil Ghosh. Former India cricketer Ashok Dinda has been renominated from Moyna.

Soumitra Chattopadhyay, from the family of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, has been made the candidate from Naihati.

"This list reflects grassroots representation and social diversity. Many candidates have strong public engagement in their respective professions," a senior BJP leader said.

The inclusion of 41 sitting MLAs and three former legislators suggests that the party has

opted to bank on existing political networks rather than undertake a large-scale reshuffle.

The BJP's list comes amid intense political debate over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which has triggered controversy after large-scale deletions in several constituencies.

In Bhabanipur alone, over 47,000 names have been struck off the voters' list while more than 14,000 remain under adjudication, developments that have already begun shaping the constituency's political discourse ahead of the polls.

In Nandigram, about 11,000 names have been removed from the electoral rolls during the revision process.

The BJP has argued that the exercise is necessary to remove alleged "bogus voters", while the TMC has accused the saffron party of attempting to manipulate the electorate.

A senior TMC leader dismissed the BJP's candidate list as "political theatrics". "Fielding Suvendu Adhikari in Bhabanipur is more about optics than ground reality. The BJP knows the CM retains a strong support base in the constituency," the leader said.

However, BJP leaders insisted the party was entering the election with renewed confidence, pointing to its rapid political rise in the state -- from a marginal vote share of around four per cent in the 2011 assembly polls to over 38 per cent in 2021, when it emerged as the principal opposition.

Analysts say the first candidate list reveals a strategy built around three pillars: projecting Adhikari as the central challenger to Banerjee, consolidating existing legislative bases by repeating sitting MLAs, and widening the party's social outreach through candidates from varied professional and community backgrounds.

INTERNATIONAL

Israel army says begun 'limited targeted ground operations' against Hezbollah in south Lebanon

TELAVIV

The Israeli military said on Monday it had begun what it described as "limited ground operations" against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Lebanon was drawn into the Middle East war on March 2 when the Tehran-backed Hezbollah attacked Israel in response to the killing of Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes.

Israel responded with air raids on its northern neighbour and troop incursions into border areas.

"In recent days, IDF troops from the 91st division have begun limited and targeted ground operations against key Hezbollah strongholds in southern Lebanon, aimed at enhancing the forward defence area," the military said in a statement.

"This activity is part of broader defensive efforts to establish and strengthen a forward defensive posture, which includes the dismantling of terrorist infrastructure and the elimination of terrorists operating in the area, in order to remove threats and create an additional layer of security for residents of northern Israel," it said.

"Prior to the troops' entry into the area, the IDF conducted strikes using both artillery and the Israeli Air Force", it added.

The announcement echoes similar statements issued in 2024, when Israel and Hezbollah fought a major war in Lebanon, and in 2023, when the military launched a ground assault in Gaza, at the beginning of the genocidal war that killed over 72,000 Palestinians.

Lebanese authorities said on Sunday the death toll from Israeli attacks had reached 850 during the current war, including over 100 children, while more than 830,000 people had registered as displaced.

A bulldozer clears debris from the



rubble of buildings destroyed in an Israeli airstrike, in Dahiyeh, Beirut's southern suburbs, Lebanon, Monday, March 16, 2026.

Israeli strikes kill 12 Palestinians in Gaza, including two children and pregnant woman

In a separate briefing to journalists, military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani said Hezbollah had recently expanded its activities in southern Lebanon.

"We have identified Hezbollah is intending to expand their opera-

tions... and firing hundreds of rockets a day" toward Israel, he said.

"They have also sent hundreds of Radwan terrorists to the south (of Lebanon)," he said, referring to an elite unit within Hezbollah.

Shoshani said the ground operations were "limited in target against locations what we understand Hezbollah is posing a threat towards our civilians," he added.

"Those are new locations that our troops were not operating in yesterday," he said.

"We are also conducting targeted ground operations against specific locations where Hezbollah is operating from," Shoshani said, adding that "we'll operate for as much as we need".

In recent days, Hezbollah has reported targeting gathering points of Israeli forces on the border with Lebanon, as well as movements inside a number of border towns, including "direct clashes" in Khiam.

The town, located across the border from the Israeli town of Metula, was the first point into which Israeli forces advanced after the start of the war.

Since Saturday, Hezbollah has repeatedly announced targeting Israeli forces and vehicles at several positions inside Khiam.

Israel preceded its ground operations with strikes on a number of bridges and roads that connect southern Lebanon to the rest of the country.

Since the beginning of the war, the Israeli military has issued evacuation warnings for wide areas in southern Lebanon, extending more than forty kilometres from its border.

The Israeli military has repeatedly said it would not evacuate Israelis from northern parts of the country, as it had done in the previous 2024 war.

During that conflict, Israel evacuated tens of thousands of residents from northern communities until a ceasefire was struck in November 2024.

Despite that ceasefire, Israel had conducted near-daily air strikes on alleged Hezbollah targets inside Lebanon.

In recent days, the militant group and Iran have launched coordinated rocket and missile attacks against Israel.

Israel, meanwhile, said no direct talks were planned with Lebanon to end the fighting, which has been raging for two weeks.

China says 'maintaining communication' with US over Trump visit



BEIJING

Beijing said it is in talks with Washington over an expected visit by US President Donald Trump, who has pressured NATO allies and China to help reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Trade is set to take centre stage in the potential talks between President Xi Jinping and Trump expected at the end of the month.

However, Trump has suggested he may delay a meeting with Xi if Beijing does not assist in reopening the strait, and warned that not abiding by his request would be "very bad for the future of NATO."

The waterway, critical to oil transportation, has been effectively closed by Iran in retaliation over the US and Israeli war against Tehran.

Beijing's foreign ministry said on Monday that Beijing and Washington "are maintaining communication regarding President Trump's visit to China."

"Head-of-state diplomacy plays an irreplaceable strategic guiding role in China-US relations," spokesman Lin Jian told a press conference.

Lin did not address Trump's recent pressure on NATO allies and China.

The "tense situation" in the strait has "disrupted international trade routes for goods

and energy", Lin said when asked about Trump's comments.

Washington has said Trump will visit China from March 31 to April 2, although Beijing has yet to confirm those dates in line with its usual practice.

Top US and China economic officials met in Paris for talks over the weekend, in a meeting widely seen as setting the stage for Trump's visit.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent met Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer also attending the talks, according to his office.

Bessent said in a statement on Thursday that "economic dialogue" between the countries "is moving forward."

But the meeting follows a turbulent year in US-China economic ties since Trump returned to the presidency.

The United States announced new trade investigations last week into excess industrial capacity, targeting 60 economies including China and other key partners.

The probes will look into "failures to take action on forced labor" and whether these burden or restrict US commerce, according to US officials.

The move opens the door to new penalties, prompting China's criticism earlier

Thursday of "political manipulation".

Beijing said on Monday that it "lodged representations" and urged Washington to "correct its erroneous" trade practices.

"We urge the US side to immediately correct its erroneous energy and shipping industry targets in its Gulf neighbours," Beijing's commerce ministry said in a statement.

The latest round of investigations "is extremely unilateral, arbitrary and discriminatory", it said, accusing Washington of "attempting to construct trade barriers".

Global oil prices have surged by 40 to 50 percent since the war began, with Hormuz choked off and Iran's attacks on energy and shipping industry targets in its Gulf neighbours.

Experts say that China, which maintains large oil reserves, is better equipped than many other nations to deal with the impact of the war.

But it has reason to be concerned about the consequences of the situation in the Middle East on trade.

China's official trade data for January and February, before the war in Iran began, showed that the country's economy is largely buoyed by exports and international trade.

Beyond Policy: How Northeast India's Communities Are Rewriting the Sustainability Playbook

Northeast India occupies a rare ecological crossroads. Spread across the Eastern Himalayas and the Indo-Burma biodiversity belt, the region is among the most biologically diverse landscapes on Earth. Dense forests blanket nearly two-thirds of its terrain, sheltering thousands of flowering plants, hundreds of bird species, and rare mammals like the clouded leopard and the one-horned rhinoceros. From tropical valleys to alpine meadows, this geography has not only shaped ecosystems but also nurtured a mosaic of indigenous cultures whose lives are deeply intertwined with nature.

Yet, this natural abundance is under mounting strain. Expanding highways, hydropower projects, and industrial corridors are steadily transforming fragile landscapes. Climate change is amplifying uncertainty through erratic rainfall, glacial retreat, and rising temperatures. These pressures are not merely environmental—they are eroding traditional livelihoods, intensifying poverty in vulnerable zones, and widening the gap between policy frameworks and lived realities.

It is within this tension between ecological wealth and developmental pressure that a critical question emerges: can sustainability in Northeast India be driven not from the top, but from the ground up?

Rethinking Sustainability: Insights from a National Dialogue

This question formed the core of deliberations at a national seminar on ecology and sustainability held at Jawaharlal Nehru University in November 2025. Supported by the North Eastern Council, the gathering brought together scholars, policymakers, and community representatives to examine how indigenous knowledge systems can inform modern sustainability strategies.

The discussions revealed a consistent pattern. While policies increasingly acknowledge sustainability, their implementation often sidelines the very communities that have preserved these ecosystems for generations. The seminar underscored the urgency of bridging this disconnect by treating local communities not as passive beneficiaries, but as active architects of ecological resilience.

A Region Under Stress
Across the Northeast, ecological vulnerabilities are no longer abstract projections—they are visible, lived experiences.

In the high-altitude regions of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, livelihoods remain heavily dependent on subsistence farming and pastoralism. With limited economic diversification, communities face shrinking crop yields, fodder shortages, and increasing out-migration. Climate variability has made agricultural cycles unpredictable, leaving households exposed to recurring shocks.

Water insecurity is emerging as one of the most critical challenges. Nearly half of the Himalayan springs—lifelines for drinking water, irrigation, and ecosystems—are either drying up or have already vanished. The reasons are layered: deforestation, unregulated extraction, and the cascading effects of glacial melt. For communities that rely on these springs, the crisis is immediate and existential.

Glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) present another growing threat. As glaciers retreat, unstable lakes form and occasionally burst, unleashing devastating floods downstream. The impacts are sudden, often catastrophic, wiping out infrastructure, farmland, and livelihoods within hours.

Meanwhile, urban and industrial expansion is introducing new environmental hazards. Byrnihat, straddling the Assam-Meghalaya border, has emerged as one of the most polluted urban clusters globally, with hazardous air quality levels driven by industrial emissions, vehicular traffic, and weak regulatory enforcement. The consequences are evident in rising health concerns and ecological degradation affecting nearby urban centres.

Layered onto these challenges are deforestation from infrastructure projects, fragmentation of wildlife habitats, and growing conflicts over natural resources. Rapid urbanization is further disrupting traditional land-use systems, weakening community-based governance structures that once regulated ecological balance.

Where Policy Falls Short
India's policy framework for sustainability is extensive and, on paper, progressive. Laws such as the Forest Rights Act (2006) and the Biological Diversity Act (2002) aim to empower local communities with control over forests and biodiversity resources. National missions promote sustainable agriculture, water conservation, and climate resilience. Sikkim's transformation into a fully organic state is often cited as a model of ecological governance.

However, the gap between policy intent and on-ground impact remains stark. Implementation is frequently hindered by bureaucratic delays, conflicting institutional mandates, and limited local participation. Community claims under forest rights legislation often face procedural hurdles. Conservation efforts sometimes clash with the interests of forest departments, creating friction rather than collaboration.

Development schemes, while ambitious, tend to adopt standardized approaches that fail to account for the region's unique ecological and geological characteristics. Infrastructure projects designed without local consultation can disrupt fragile terrains, leading to unintended consequences such as landslides or water scarcity.

Even flagship programmes aimed at sustainability often retain a top-down orientation. The National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, for instance, emphasizes traditional knowledge but struggles to translate this into meaningful grassroots engagement. Similarly, pollution control mechanisms falter in industrial zones where economic priorities overshadow environmental safeguards.

The result is a pattern of "policy presence but participatory absence"—where communities are acknowledged in theory but excluded in practice. **Voices from the Ground**
In contrast to policy frameworks, community perspectives offer a grounded understanding of sustainability—one shaped by centuries of lived experience.

For many villagers, the limitations of existing schemes are evident in everyday life. Livelihood programmes often overlook traditional practices such as transhumance herding, which remains vital in mountainous regions. Instead of imposing uniform solutions, communities advocate for diversified livelihoods that align with local realities—such as eco-tourism, handicrafts, or small-scale agro-processing.

On water management, local voices consistently emphasize the restoration of natural systems. Rather than relying solely on large infrastructure projects like dams, communities call for afforestation, watershed management, and revival of traditional water-harvesting techniques.

In areas prone to glacial floods, indigenous knowledge systems—such as early warning practices based on environmental cues—offer valuable insights. When combined with modern technology, these approaches can significantly enhance disaster preparedness.

In industrial zones, residents increasingly demand accountability. Communities affected by pollution highlight the absence of participatory monitoring mechanisms and call for greater transparency in environmental governance.

These perspectives point to a fundamental truth: sustainability cannot be engineered solely through centralized planning. It must be co-created with those who live closest to the land.

Community Models That Work
Across Northeast India, numerous community-driven practices already demonstrate what effective sustainability looks like in action. In Meghalaya, the sacred groves of the Khasi and Jaintia communities stand as living examples of conservation rooted in cultural belief systems. Protected for generations through spiritual reverence, these forests function as biodiversity reservoirs and carbon sinks without formal enforcement mechanisms.

Nagaland offers another compelling model through its Community Conserved Areas. Villages such as Khonoma have successfully balanced wildlife conservation with economic development, using eco-tourism as a revenue stream while protecting endangered species. Governance is decentralized, with village councils playing a central role. Shifting cultivation, or jhum, often criticized as environmentally destructive, reveals a different narrative when practiced traditionally. With adequate fallow periods, it enhances soil fertility and supports diverse cropping systems.

Rather than abandoning it, integrating scientific insights with traditional methods could make it a model for climate-resilient agriculture. Mizoram's bamboo economy illustrates the potential of circular resource use. Bamboo is utilized across sectors—from construction to handicrafts to bioenergy—minimizing waste while generating livelihoods. This model holds promise for replication in other regions seeking sustainable industrial alternatives. Women-led initiatives in Manipur highlight the importance of inclusive sustainability. From seed conservation to afforestation, these efforts not only protect biodiversity but also empower marginalized groups, ensuring that sustainability is socially equitable.

Flood-prone areas in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh demonstrate adaptive resilience through the practices of the Mising community. Elevated houses, diversified cropping systems, and traditional storage techniques enable them to coexist with recurring floods rather than resist them. Similarly, Nagaland's Zabo farming system integrates forestry, agriculture, and water management into a cohesive framework. By

capturing rainwater at higher elevations and channeling it through settlements to agricultural fields, the system ensures efficient resource use in challenging terrains.

In Sikkim and Darjeeling, communities have adapted government programmes to suit local needs, revitalizing springs and conserving biodiversity through localized innovations.

Scaling the Local
What unites these diverse practices is not just their effectiveness, but their underlying principles. They are adaptive, rooted in local knowledge, and designed around community participation. They address multiple challenges simultaneously—livelihood security, ecological conservation, and social cohesion.

Scaling such models does not mean replicating them uniformly. Instead, it requires creating enabling frameworks that allow communities to adapt and innovate based on their specific contexts.

This involves reimagining governance itself. Policies must move beyond consultation to genuine co-creation, where communities are equal partners in decision-making. Funding mechanisms should prioritize grassroots initiatives, and institutional structures must facilitate collaboration rather than control. Integrating these approaches into broader national visions—such as sustainable development and climate resilience—can transform Northeast India from a region of vulnerability into a global model of community-driven sustainability.

A Way Forward
The future of Northeast India's ecology will depend not only on how development is pursued, but on who shapes it.

Top-down models, while necessary for large-scale coordination, cannot capture the nuances of local ecosystems. Community-driven approaches, on the other hand, offer context-specific solutions that are both sustainable and inclusive.

The challenge lies in bridging these two worlds.

By recognizing communities as knowledge holders, investing in their capacities, and embedding their practices into policy frameworks, India can chart a path that balances development with ecological integrity.

In doing so, Northeast India's experience offers a broader lesson: sustainability is not merely a technical challenge—it is a social process. And the most enduring solutions are often those that emerge from the ground up.

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