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PERSPECTIVE

Two things define you: Your patience when you have nothing, and your attitude when you have everything.

POSH Complaint Filed Against GMCH Principal; WCD Department Seeks Immediate Action



KRC TIMES NEWS DESK

GUWAHATI: The Women and Child Development Department, Assam, has forwarded a complaint under the POSH Act alleging sexual harassment, abuse of authority, and retaliation at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH).

The complainant names Achyut Chandra Baishya, Principal of GMCH, as the accused.

In an official communication to the Medical Education and Research Department, Assam, the Women and Child Development Department has urged authorities to take prompt and appropriate action. The department has specifically called for consideration of immediate suspension of the accused, as highlighted in the complaint.

Sources indicate that the complaint outlines serious allegations and calls for urgent intervention in line with provisions of the POSH Act, which mandates a safe and secure workplace for women. Further developments are awaited as the concerned department reviews the matter and decides on the next course of action.

WHO SAID WHAT

500 YEARS OF AHOM EMPIRE!

Global recognition for the 600 year old legacy of Charaideo Moidams! Due to the efforts of the Double Engine Govt led by Adarniya @narendramodi ji, Charaideo Moidams got the @UNESCO World Heritage Site status, in a fitting tribute to the glorious legacy of our Ahom Kingdom. - Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

Second Militant Strike in 24 Hours Rocks Manipur Village, Civilians Injured

IMPHAL

Fresh violence erupted in Manipur's Mongkot Chepu village on Tuesday morning, less than 24 hours after an earlier militant attack left two farmers injured, raising fresh concerns over the deteriorating security situation in the region.

According to residents, heavily armed militants launched a coordinated assault around 7:30 am from the Litan-Sareikhong axis. The attackers reportedly used mortars and automatic rifles, suggesting a high degree of planning and access to sophisticated weaponry.

At least one villager sustained injuries after being hit by splinters from a mortar shell, underscoring the intensity of the attack. The sudden escalation triggered panic among residents, with many scrambling to take shelter.



The violence also disrupted normal life, with schoolchildren among those affected as gunfire and explosions were reported near educational institutions. Visuals circulating on social media showed students taking cover inside classrooms, crouching on the floor as a precaution amid the ongoing firing.

Eyewitness accounts and video footage from the nearby Litan area have further heightened concerns. Locals claimed that gunshots were heard from areas in close proximity to the Litan Police Station, raising questions about security preparedness.

The footage captures the sound of automatic gunfire in the vicinity, prompting scrutiny over how such activity could take place near a security installation.

Residents alleged that the firing was directed towards Kuki-inhabited areas, forcing people to remain indoors amid fears of further escalation. The latest incident has intensified anxiety among locals and renewed focus on the effectiveness of security arrangements in the conflict-hit region.

Manipur CM Unveils \$1.3 Trillion Northeast Economy Roadmap, Puts Focus on Agri



IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Monday unveiled a policy roadmap aimed at transforming the Northeast's agricultural sector as part of a broader vision to build a \$1.3 trillion regional economy by 2047.

Titled "Agricultural Extension Innovations for Achieving a US \$1.3 Trillion North East India Economy @ 2047 (Shillong Declaration)," the document outlines a future-oriented strategy to modernise agriculture through innovation, research and entrepreneurship. The policy was released at an event in Imphal, according to an official statement.

Highlighting the centrality of agriculture to the region, the Chief Minister noted that more than 50 per cent of the population is engaged in the sector, underlining the need for sustained policy attention and investment.

He stressed the role of innovation and entrepreneurship in unlocking the sector's potential, particularly by integrating young people into agri-based startups and linking them to real-world challenges and market opportunities.

Singh said the government, in consultation with the state's Planning Department, will explore measures to maximise benefits from agriculture for the youth, especially within the emerging startup ecosystem.

Describing agriculture as a critical concern at both the state and national levels, he called for continued focus and support to strengthen the sector.

The Chief Minister also emphasised that the Northeast holds significant promise to emerge as a hub for high-value and sustainable agriculture, driven by innovation, research and youth-led initiatives, positioning the region as a key contributor to India's long-term economic growth trajectory.

Tipra Motha to Go Solo in ADC Polls, Pradyot Debbarma Rules Out Alliance



AGARTALA

In a significant development ahead of the Autonomous District Council (ADC) elections in Tripura, Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Monday announced that the Tipra Motha Party will contest the polls independently, ruling out any pre-poll alliance.

Addressing supporters through a live social media broadcast, Debbarma said the party's "alliance is with the 'Tiprasa people,'" making it clear that no political tie-up would be considered unless there is a written assurance for the swift implementation of the 2024 Tiprasa Accord.

"A stage has now come when I am announcing that there will be no alliance with any party or group unless we receive a written assurance," he said.

Reaffirming his position as 'Bubagra', Debbarma asserted that he would not mislead or betray the interests of indigenous communities. He also underlined the potential for greater political outcomes if indigenous groups across the Northeast unite on a common platform, despite

differences in identity, language and culture.

At the same time, he appealed to party supporters to maintain peace and participate democratically in the elections scheduled for April 12 and 17.

The announcement comes amid intense speculation over a possible alliance between Tipra Motha and the Bharatiya Janata Party. Sources indicated that talks between the two sides broke down over seat-sharing arrangements.

According to party insiders, the BJP had proposed a 50:50 formula but was reportedly unwilling to offer more than 14 seats, a proposal that Tipra Motha found unacceptable. The deadlock ultimately led to the collapse of negotiations.

The decision to go solo adds a new dimension to Tripura's political landscape, particularly in the tribal council areas, where Tipra Motha has emerged as a key political force in recent years. With the nomination deadline approaching, political activity has intensified across the state, setting the stage for a closely contested ADC election.

Assam Declares Paid Holiday on April 9 to Facilitate Assembly Poll Voting

GUWAHATI

The Assam government has declared April 9, the day of polling for the state Assembly elections, as a paid holiday to enable citizens to exercise their franchise.

According to an official notification issued by the Labour Welfare Department, the holiday will be applicable across all sectors, including factories, tea plantations, shops, commercial establishments, entertainment venues, contractor-run units, industries, as well as financial and banking institutions.

The decision has been taken under provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which mandates granting paid leave to employees on polling day to ensure they can cast their votes.

Officials said the move follows directions from the Election Commission of India to encourage maximum voter turnout during the elections.

The state government has also urged citizens to participate responsibly in the democratic process and help ensure peaceful and orderly polling across Assam.



Om Birla Accepts Pradyut Bordoloi's Resignation as Assam MP Ahead of Assembly Polls



NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Tuesday accepted the resignation of Assam MP Pradyut Bordoloi, days after the two-term parliamentarian quit the Indian National Congress and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the state Assembly elections.

According to an official communication, the resignation has been accepted with effect from March 20. Bordoloi had stepped down from the Congress on March 17 and formally joined the BJP the following day, marking a significant political shift in Assam's pre-election landscape.

The BJP has since fielded Bordoloi from the high-profile Dispur Assembly constituency, naming him in its first list of 88 candidates. Dispur, which houses the state's administrative headquarters, is expected to witness a closely watched electoral contest.

Reacting to his candidature, Bordoloi expressed gratitude to the

BJP leadership and said he had not sought any position upon joining the party, adding that his move was driven by a desire to play a more meaningful role in public life.

Highlighting his political career, Bordoloi said he has been elected as a legislator four times and served as a minister for nearly 15 years under the government led by former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi. He later represented the Nagaon constituency in the Lok Sabha for two consecutive terms.

Bordoloi also indicated his willingness to work with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, recalling their earlier association in government. He described the partnership as effective in advancing development and addressing insurgency-related challenges.

On his electoral prospects in Dispur, Bordoloi said he would approach voters "with a lot of humility" and seek their support as a BJP candidate, adding that job creation and improving living standards would be central to his campaign.

Elections to all 126 Assembly constituencies in Assam are scheduled to be held in a single phase on April 9, with counting set for May 4, as per the Election Commission of India.

India nominates Meghalaya's living root bridges for UNESCO World Heritage tag

NEW DELHI

India has nominated Meghalaya's iconic living root bridges - known as Jingkieng Jri/Lyu Charai Cultural Landscape - for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the 2026-27 cycle, highlighting the ecological ingenuity of indigenous Khasi communities.

In a written reply in the Lok Sabha, Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said India has also submitted a proposal for the Ancient Buddhist Site, Sarnath for the 2025-26 cycle.

Popularly known as "Jingkieng Jri," the living root bridges are bio-engineered structures created by guiding the roots of rubber fig trees to form natural bridges across streams in the dense forests of Meghalaya. These structures function as vital rural connectivity systems in one of the wettest regions on Earth.

According to UNESCO, the



bridges represent a unique example of harmony between humans and nature, having endured extreme climatic con-

ditions for centuries. Spread across more than 75 remote villages, they continue to support livelihoods while showcasing

traditional ecological knowledge passed down through generations.

The nomination under-

scores the resilience and collective ingenuity of Khasi tribal communities, where co-operation and reciprocity have historically shaped the creation and maintenance of these living structures.

Responding to queries on heritage conservation, Shekhawat said the Archaeological Survey of India currently maintains 3,686 protected monuments, including 27 World Heritage properties. Facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, pathways and landscaping are being provided at these sites.

"Conservation and maintenance of monuments is a continuous process, undertaken based on their needs and available resources," the minister said. India currently has 44 sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, including 36 in the cultural category, seven natural sites and one mixed category property, reflecting the country's diverse heritage landscape.

GUWAHATI

A total of 818 candidates have filed 1,391 nomination papers for the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, with multiple filings in several constituencies pushing up the overall count, officials said.

According to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, nominations have been submitted across all 126 Assembly constituencies in the state, although the figures remain provisional and subject to final compilation. Scrutiny of nomination papers is scheduled for March 24, while March 26 has been fixed as the last date for withdrawal of candidature. In a parallel development, the Election Commission of India has appointed Manjeet Singh, a retired IAS officer, as Special Observer to oversee the conduct of free and fair elections. He arrived in Dispur on March 23 and will be available to receive representations from political parties, organisations and the public.

Officials said stakeholders can

approach the Special Observer daily between 11 am and 5 pm with complaints or concerns related to the electoral process.

Meanwhile, voter awareness drives have been intensified across the state under the SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) programme to boost turnout and promote informed participation. District administrations are organising a range of outreach activities, including street plays, painting and rangoli competitions, slogan-writing contests, digital poster campaigns and workshops to engage voters. Several mascots have also been introduced at the district level to enhance voter engagement, while public figures have been roped in as SVEEP icons. Among them are content creator Abhinav Bora, actor Rajeev Duwarah and para-cyclist Rakesh Banik, who are leading campaigns to encourage greater participation in the democratic process.



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RURAL YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT



Rural youth unemployment in February 2026 rose four months high to 13.1 per cent in Current Weekly Status (CWS), while for urban youths it remained even higher at 18.3 per cent, shows the latest data of the monthly bulletin of Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for the month of February 2026.

It shows that unemployment among youth of age group 15-29 years in rural areas has been continuously on the rise since November 2025 when it was 12.4 per cent. It rose to 12.6 per cent in December 2026 and 12.8 per cent in January 2026. The trend is quite disconcerting because youth unemployment rose during the reaping of the Kharif and sowing of the Rabi crops, when agricultural activities usually rise.

Unemployment for both the rural male and female youth rose in February. Female youth unemployment in the rural areas was worse than male youth unemployment in the last five months for which the bulletin has provided data. Female youth unemployment in rural areas rose to 14.6 per cent in February from 14.2 per cent in January. It was 13.2 per cent in October 2025, which improved a little during November and December 2025, when it was 12.5 and 12.7 per cent respectively. Male youth unemployment in the rural areas rose from 12.3 per cent in January 2026 to 12.5 per cent in February 2026.

For all age, there was no improvement in the unemployment rate in the rural areas which remained at 4.2 per cent in February as in January. There was little improvement for rural female unemployment which came down to 4 per cent in February from 4.3 per cent in January. However, rural male unemployment worsened to 4.3 per cent in February from 4.1 per cent in January.

Urban youth unemployment improved a little and came down from 18.6 per cent in January to 18.3 per cent in February. It was because female youth unemployment improved from 26.4 per cent in January to 24.9 per cent in February. Nevertheless, male youth unemployment in urban areas rose to 16.1 per cent in February, which was five months high since October 2025. In these five months lowest urban male youth unemployment was in November 2025 when it was 15.3 per cent.

For all age group urban unemployment has registered little improvement, which was 7 per cent in January and came down to 6.6 per cent in February. Urban female unemployment came down to 8.7 per cent in February from 9.8 per cent in January. Urban male unemployment also registered a little improvement which came down from 6 per cent in January to 5.9 per cent in February.

All India youth unemployment rate has risen to four months high to 14.8 per cent in February from 14.1 per cent in October 2025. Male youth unemployment rose to 13.7 per cent in February from 13.6 per cent in January. Female youth unemployment came down to 17.6 per cent in February from 17.8 per cent in January.

All India unemployment rate improved a little from 5 per cent in January to 4.9 per cent in February. Female unemployment improved to 5.1 per cent in February from 5.6 per cent in January. Male unemployment remained stagnant at 4.8 per cent in January and February.

As for Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in CWS, that is the number of persons who worked for at least 1 hour on any day during the 7 days preceding the date of survey, there was little improvement, which rose to 40.3 per cent in February from 40.1 per cent in January. Female WPR during rose from 25.4 per cent in January to 25.7 per cent in February. However male WPR registered a decline to 55 per cent in February, from 55.1 per cent in January.

WPR for youth was very low at 35.9 per cent in February, a marginal decline from 36 per cent in January. WPR for female youth declined from 19.1 per cent in January to 19 per cent in February, while WPR for male youth declined from 53 per cent in January to 52.8 per cent in February.

WPR for urban areas in February was 37.2 per cent, 18.6 per cent for female, and 55.2 per cent for male. Low female WPR in urban areas is a serious concern, which is even less at 15.8 per cent for female youth.

WPR in rural areas in February was 41.7 per cent, 29 per cent for female and 54.9 per cent for male. For youth it was 37 per cent, 20.5 per cent for female and 54.1 per cent for male.

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in CWS, that the number of persons either employed or unemployed on an average in a week of 7 days preceding the day of survey, was stagnant at 42.3 per cent in January and February. It was 27.1 per cent for female and 57.7 per cent for male in February.

LFPR for youth declined from 42.3 per cent in January to 42.1 per cent in February. Female youth LFPR declined to 23.1 per cent from 23.2 per cent, and male youth LFPR declined from 61.3 per cent to 61.2 per cent.

Urban LFPR remains stagnant at 39.8 per cent since December 2025. Urban female LFPR is stagnant at 20.4 per cent in January and February, while for male it declined from 58.7 per cent to 58.6 per cent.

LFPR for urban youth declined from 41.6 per cent in January to 41.3 per cent in February, for female it declined from 21.9 per cent to 21 per cent, and for male it rose to 60 per cent from 59.9 per cent.

LFPR in rural areas in February was 43.5 per cent, still low from 43.8 per cent in December 2025. Female LFPR in rural areas in February was 30.2 per cent, and male LFPR at 57.3 per cent.

LFPR for rural youth remained stagnant at 42.6 per cent in January and February. It was 24 per cent for rural female youth and 61.8 per cent for rural male youth.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“We have to dare to be ourselves, however frightening or strange that self may prove to be.” - May Sarton

DEFENDING INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND FOR VIKSIT BHARAT VISION



PROF. (BRIGADIER) (RETD.) NEERAJ SONI

India's demographic dividend-reflects in the fact that nearly 65 percent of its population is below the age of 35 and the median age remains under 30 years-is widely celebrated as a major structural advantage for the country in the twenty-first century. In policy discourse, this youthful demographic profile is often presented as a key foundation for India's aspiration to achieve Vixsit Bharat @2047. However, this optimism risks overlooking a critical constraint: the declining mental wellbeing of India's youth. If this challenge remains insufficiently addressed, the demographic dividend may not translate into productive human capital. The real issue, therefore, is not merely the presence of a large young population, but whether India possesses the psychological resilience and institutional capacity necessary to convert demographic potential into sustained national development.

Recent empirical evidence underscores the gravity of this concern. The Global Mind Health Report (2025) by Sapient Labs ranks Indian young adults aged 18-34 at 60th globally in mental wellbeing, with a score of 33 out of 200. This aligns with the National Mental Health Survey of India, which estimates that 7-10 percent of adolescents suffer from diagnosable mental disorders, while the treatment gap exceeds 70 percent. These figures point not merely to a public health problem but to a structural weakening of the cognitive and emotional foundations of India's human capital.

Drawing on responses from nearly 2.5 million participants across 85 countries, the Sapient Labs study attributes declining mental wellbeing among young adults to several factors: weakening family bonds, declining engagement with spirituality, early exposure to smartphones and digital environments, and increased consumption of ultra-processed food. Together, these trends indicate that the mental health crisis reflects broader transformations in lifestyle, technology use, and social relationships rather than individual pathology alone.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of wellbeing in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. This definition underscores that mental health must be understood not merely as the absence of illness but as the presence of psychological resilience, emotional balance, and social functioning. Consequently, mental health policy must move beyond treatment-oriented frameworks and incorporate preventive, developmental, and community-based strategies that nurture positive wellbeing.

An important insight emerging from global studies concerns the distinction between happiness and mental wellbeing. Countries that rank highly on the World Happiness Index, such as Finland, do not necessarily rank equally high in mental wellbeing across age groups. This divergence indicates that satisfaction with life circumstances does not automatically translate into the psychological capacity to cope with complexity, uncertainty, and stress. Happiness indices largely measure perceptions of social and economic conditions, whereas mental wellbeing reflects deeper psychological competencies necessary for sustained productivity and adaptive functioning. For a rapidly transforming society such as India, where economic and technological transitions are reshaping everyday life, this distinction assumes particular significance.

India's developmental trajectory toward Vixsit Bharat @2047 depends fundamentally on the productivity, creativity, and resilience of its young workforce. Demographic projections indicate that India's demographic dividend may continue to support economic growth until approximately 2055-56. However, demographic advantage alone does not guarantee de-

velopment. Historical experience across countries demonstrates that demographic transitions yield economic dividends only when accompanied by strong educational systems, healthy populations, and cohesive social institutions. Without such enabling conditions, demographic advantage may generate social pressures rather than prosperity. Safeguarding the mental wellbeing of youth is therefore essential for converting demographic potential into sustained economic progress.

Addressing this challenge requires a comprehensive and integrated policy framework. One possible approach may be articulated through the BEST framework, consisting of four interrelated dimensions: Bharatiya lifestyle traditions, enhancement of psychological capital, socio-institutional support systems, and transformative technologies. The first dimension highlights the relevance of Bharatiya lifestyle traditions, many of which historically functioned as mechanisms for maintaining psychological equilibrium. Practices such as Ayurvedic dinacharya, or regulated daily routines, emphasized disciplined patterns of sleep, diet, and physical activity. Traditions of yoga, meditation, and mindful consumption cultivated attentional stability and emotional balance. Equally significant were social institutions such as joint families and neighborhood communities, which historically served as informal psychological support systems. The gradual erosion of these structures due to urbanization, migration, and technological immersion has weakened many of the social buffers that once sustained emotional wellbeing. Revitalizing aspects of these traditions through value-based education, campus wellbeing programmes, and community engagement initiatives may therefore help restore psychological balance among younger generations.

The second dimension concerns the development of psychological capital, a concept increasingly emphasized in organizational and behavioral research. Psychological capital comprises attributes such as hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy, which enable individuals to navigate uncertainty and sustain motivation. In knowledge-driven economies, these attributes function as productive assets influencing innovation, leadership, and adaptability. Educational institutions and workplaces must therefore move beyond purely cognitive models of learning

and incorporate resilience training, emotional intelligence development, and wellbeing-oriented pedagogies.

The third dimension involves strengthening mental health infrastructure and socio-institutional support systems. India faces a significant shortage of trained psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors relative to its population. Expanding community mental health centers, school counseling programmes, and workplace wellbeing initiatives is therefore essential. At the same time, policy responses must address structural stressors affecting young people, including academic pressure, employment uncertainty, urban stress, and social isolation. Mental health policy must thus be integrated with broader developmental planning rather than confined solely to the healthcare sector.

The fourth dimension concerns the strategic deployment of transformative technologies. Digital platforms offer significant potential to expand access to mental health services in a country as large and diverse as India. Initiatives such as Tele-MANAS represent important steps toward providing nationwide tele-counseling services. Artificial intelligence and digital mental health platforms may assist in early detection of psychological distress and personalized interventions. However, technological solutions must operate within robust regulatory frameworks that ensure ethical use, privacy protection, and professional accountability.

It is noteworthy that although global health discourse formally incorporated mental wellbeing into the definition of health only in 1948, Indian intellectual traditions had long recognized the integrated nature of human wellbeing. The Panchakosha framework articulated in the Upanishadic tradition conceptualizes human existence through five interconnected layers: Annamaya (physical), Pranamaya (vital), Manomaya (emotional), Vijnanamaya (cognitive), and Anandamaya (blissful consciousness). This holistic perspective resonates strongly with contemporary interdisciplinary approaches to wellbeing science.

Safeguarding India's demographic dividend therefore requires more than economic planning; it demands sustained attention to the mental resilience, cognitive vitality, and social wellbeing of the nation's youth. If the vision of Vixsit Bharat @2047 is to be realized in substan-

tive terms, protecting the psychological wellbeing of India's young citizens must be recognized as a strategic national priority. The future trajectory of India's development will ultimately depend not only on the size of its population but on the strength, stability, and creative capacities of the minds that constitute it.

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Telecom companies offer Recharge Plans with like 1.5GB, 2GB or 3GB per day, resetting every 24 hours. Any Unused Data EXPIRES at midnight, despite being fully paid for. No refund. No rollover. Just gone. This is not an accident. This is policy. Use it unnecessarily, or lose it by midnight. That's how mobile data works today. I raised this issue in Parliament - ? UNUSED DATA should carry forward into the next cycle, so consumers can use what they have already paid for. ~ Raghav Chadha, MP (RS) National Spokesperson, AAP



Five Tipra Motha Leaders Join BJP Ahead of TTAADC Polls, Allege Corruption and Neglect

AGARTALA

In a show of strength and coordination, candidates of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from four Guwahati constituencies held a joint roadshow on Monday before filing their nomination papers, signalling unity amid recent internal dissent within the BJP's state unit.

The rally featured BJP nominees Pradyut Bordoloi (Dispur), Dipu Ranjan Sharma (New Guwahati) and Vijay Gupta (Central Guwahati), along with Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) candidate Tapan Das (Dimoria).

Supporters from both parties gathered early at Khanapara field, with large crowds turning



up despite overcast weather. The candidates rode together in an open vehicle, moving in a procession through the city towards the District Commissioner's office, as party workers lined the route waving flags and raising slogans.

As per election guidelines, the candidates were to complete the final stretch on foot, accompanied by a limited number of supporters.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma briefly joined the gathering at Khanapara, describing the polls as a "festival of democracy" and expressing confidence in a strong electoral outcome.

"It's a great atmosphere, and we're set to win by record mar-

gins. People will be surprised by the number of seats the BJP secures. I won't put a figure on it yet, but the results will speak for themselves," he said.

Sarma later left for Kaliabor to accompany senior AGP leaders Atul Bora and Keshab Mahanta during their nomination filings. Ahead of submitting his nomination from the 35 No. New Guwahati constituency, Sharma said the turnout reflected public support for the government's performance. "The party's ideology has resonated with voters, and it is evident in the scale of support," he said.

The joint mobilisation comes against the backdrop of internal discontent within the BJP, particularly in the Dispur constitu-

ency, following the announcement of candidates. The party's decision to field a recently inducted former Congress MP had triggered protests among sections of local leadership.

Sitting BJP MLA Atul Bora, who was denied a ticket, had initially hinted at contesting as an Independent or supporting a rival candidate. However, party leaders later intervened, persuading him to align with the party.

Meanwhile, senior BJP leader Jayanta Das has resigned from the party and is likely to contest as an Independent from Dispur.

Polling for the 126-member Assam Assembly is scheduled for April 9, with counting of votes set for May 4.

Mizoram Curbs Fuel Export to Myanmar Amid Supply Concerns

AIZAWL

Authorities in Mizoram's southern districts of Siaha and Lunglei have imposed strict restrictions on the export and movement of fuel to Myanmar, citing concerns over potential shortages and illegal cross-border trade.

The measures were enforced through separate orders issued by the respective Deputy Commissioners, who are also District Magistrates, invoking provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 and other relevant statutes to regulate fuel distribution.

In Siaha district, District Magistrate VL Hruaizela Khlangte promulgated an order under Section 163 of the BNSS, prohibiting the unauthorised export of petroleum products to Myanmar and other countries. Officials said the directive aims to ensure adequate local supply and maintain stability in fuel availability amid global uncertainties.

The order also targets black marketing, directing fuel outlets to regulate bulk sales. Any sale exceeding 500 litres of petrol or 1,000 litres of diesel will now require valid storage permits, a move intended to prevent hoarding and diversion for cross-border trade. A similar directive has been issued in Lunglei district by District Magistrate Navnet Mann, who has banned the transportation of fuel meant for sale in Myanmar. The administration cited reports of unauthorised fuel movement across the international border, prompting tighter enforcement.

Officials warned that transporting petroleum products without a valid licence violates provisions of the Petroleum Rules, 2002. Any breach will invite penal action under Section 23 of the Petroleum Act, 1934, in addition to provisions under the BNSS.

'Assam Facing Crisis': Gaurav Gogoi Flags Migrant Worker Deaths, Alleges Systemic Failure

GUWAHATI

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi has raised alarm over a surge in deaths among migrant workers from Assam, describing the situation as a "crisis" and accusing the state government of systemic failure and inaction.

Citing recent data, Gogoi said at least 162 workers from Assam have died across the country over the past six months. He noted that the deaths occurred in factories, construction sites, mines and due to unsafe living conditions, calling them "not isolated tragedies" but indicators of deeper structural issues.

"Assam is facing a crisis," Gogoi said, adding that a growing number of young people are being forced to migrate due to a lack of employment opportunities within the state. He pointed to declining agricultural prospects, low wages and limited job avenues as key drivers pushing workers into precarious and often hazardous employment outside

side Assam.

The Congress MP also criticised the government led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging that it has failed to acknowledge the scale of the problem or prioritise it politically. "The government has chosen to look away while lives are lost," he said. Taking aim at the state's development narrative, Gogoi argued that the current model prioritises "optics over people," claiming that the lives of migrant workers are being undervalued. He described the situation as a failure of governance and accountability. Assam has historically witnessed significant outward migration, particularly among rural youth seeking better economic opportunities in other states. However, the reported rise in migrant worker deaths has intensified scrutiny over labour conditions, safety standards and the lack of institutional support systems for workers outside the state.

Woman injured in Ukhrul firing; Kuki, Tangkhul groups offer conflicting accounts

IMPHAL

Fresh violence was reported from Ukhrul district on Monday after unidentified armed miscreants allegedly opened fire on civilians working in farmlands in the Litan area, leaving at least one woman injured.

The incident occurred around 1 pm at Langthai Mol farmlands under Mongkot Chepu village, with locals claiming that gunfire originated from nearby elevated terrain, triggering panic and forcing residents to flee.

A young woman from the Kuki community sustained a bullet injury, though her condition had not been officially confirmed at the time of filing this report.

The Kuki CSO Working Committee condemned the incident, alleging it was a targeted attack on civilians engaged in routine farming. In a statement, the group said more than 20 villagers, including women, were trapped in the fields during the firing, describing the



episode as a "grave and inhumane act" and a "direct assault on civilian life and dignity."

The committee also termed the incident part of a "disturbing pattern" of repeated attacks on civilians and urged authorities to immediately halt the firing, rescue those stranded, secure the National Highway 202, and conduct combing operations to disarm those responsible.

However, the Central Working

Committee of the Tangkhul Naga Foothills Organisation rejected the allegations, terming them "misleading" and presenting a different account of the events.

In its statement, the TNFO claimed that the activity in the area involved construction of drains and bunkers by Kuki volunteers, allegedly linked to militants under the Suspension of Operations arrangement. It disputed that those present were solely en-

gaged in farming.

"It was not purely agricultural activity as claimed. Individuals were constructing bunkers above NH-202, from where attacks on Tangkhul Nagas have taken place," the organisation said, cautioning against the spread of "conflicting and unverified narratives" that could further escalate tensions. Meanwhile, a purported video from the scene circulating on social media shows a man alleging that the gunfire originated from a bunker near a Tangkhul Naga-inhabited village. The authenticity of the video could not be independently verified.

Authorities have yet to issue a detailed statement, and there is no official confirmation regarding those involved or the exact sequence of events.

The incident highlights the fragile security situation in the foothill areas of Ukhrul, where tensions remain high amid competing claims and concerns over civilian safety.

Kokrajhar sees multi-party show of strength as BPF, UPPL, Congress file nominations



KOKRAJHAR

The final day of nomination filing for the Assam Assembly elections witnessed heightened political activity in Kokrajhar, with multiple parties holding rallies and processions as candidates formally entered the fray.

Five candidates of the

Bodoland People's Front (BPF) - Sewli Mohilary, Robiram Narzary, Rupam Roy, Shobharam Basumatary and Dr Rezaul Karim - filed their nominations before the District Election Officer after a joint procession from Green Field.

Sewli Mohilary is contesting from Kokrajhar (No. 3), Robiram Narzary from Dotma (No. 2),

Rupam Roy from Baokhungri (No. 4), Shobharam Basumatary from Gossaigaon (No. 1), and Dr Rezaul Karim from Parbatjhora (No. 5).

Ahead of filing nominations, the BPF organised a public meeting where party president Hagrama Mohilary addressed supporters, expressing confidence in both the party's performance and that of the ruling alliance.

He asserted that the BPF faced no major challenge in the region and predicted a sweeping victory for the National Democratic Alliance in the Assembly elections. Mohilary also projected strong prospects for individual candidates, stating that Sewli Mohilary was poised for a decisive win in Kokrajhar. Downplaying recent resignations from the party, he described them as inconsequential. "Many will come, many will go; the

doors of the BPF are open to all," he said. BPF candidates also expressed confidence about their electoral prospects, with Robiram Narzary predicting a strong performance and Rupam Roy pledging to work towards inclusive development.

Meanwhile, candidates from rival parties also entered the contest. United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) nominee Pratibha Brahma filed her nomination from Baokhungri, while the Indian National Congress candidate Shephali Marak also submitted her papers from the same constituency after a separate rally.

With the nomination process now complete, electoral contests across Kokrajhar and adjoining constituencies are set to intensify in the coming days, with multi-cornered fights expected in several seats.

Conrad Sangma Invokes Purno Legacy as GHADC Passes Landmark Tribal Poll Amendment



SHILLONG

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on March 23 invoked the legacy of his late father Purno A Sangma while backing a historic amendment to the election rules of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC), mandating that only Scheduled Tribe (ST) members can contest council polls. Describing the move as one of the most defining decisions of his political career, the Chief Minister said he had sought his father's blessings before supporting the amendment. "He always taught us to stand firm for what is right and to keep our people first," Sangma said in a social media post, adding, "May we continue to walk in his footsteps." Calling the development "historic," Sangma said the decision marked a significant moment not only for the GHADC but for the Garo community at large. He noted that it had taken 74 years since the council's establishment in 1952 for such a reform to be realised.

The amendment was passed unanimously during a special session of the council convened by Governor C H Vijayashankar on March 23, formally requiring ST

certification for all candidates contesting GHADC elections. The move addresses a long-standing demand raised by tribal groups over several decades. Sangma also urged the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) and the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) to adopt similar measures to safeguard tribal identity in their respective jurisdictions. The amendment comes against the backdrop of weeks of protests and unrest in parts of Garo Hills over the issue of non-tribal participation in council elections. The agitation had turned violent in places, leaving at least two people dead and prompting heightened security measures.

Amid the tensions, the state government deferred the GHADC elections, which were initially scheduled for April 10, and extended the council's tenure by six months to facilitate the implementation of the new rule. Despite the unrest leading up to the decision, Sangma framed the moment as a milestone shaped by his father's enduring influence, underscoring the political and emotional significance of the reform in Meghalaya's tribal politics.

NEEPCO, NTPC & NHM in Collaboration with Rotary Club of Agartala Distributes 200 Food Baskets Across Mohanpur Subdivision

OUR CORRESPONDENT

AGARTALA: Continuing its sustained humanitarian initiative, the Rotary Club of Agartala, with support from NEEPCO, NTPC, and the National Health Mission (NHM), carried out another round of food basket distribution across the Mohanpur Subdivision on Monday. The program marks a significant milestone in an ongoing effort that has already seen 1,000 food baskets distributed over the past five months to support vulnerable communities.

In this drive, a total of 200 food baskets were distributed across five locations, benefiting families in need and reinforcing the commitment of the organizing bodies toward social welfare and community support.

The distribution was efficiently managed by two dedicated teams of Rotary members. Team A, comprising Rtn. Sarbani Devbarman-Goswami, Rtn. Sharadindu Bhat-tacharjee, Rtn. Subir Bhaumik, and



Rtn. Rakesh Saha, covered three locations. The team began their activities at Gandhigram PHC in the morning, where 25 food baskets were distributed. They then proceeded to Narsingharh PHC at around noon, distributing 5 baskets, followed by Bamutia PHC early afternoon, where 16 baskets were handed out.

Simultaneously, Team B, consisting of Rtn. (Dr.) Priyanath Das, Rtn. Sukanta Goswami, and Rtn. Rabin-dra Chandra Das, conducted distribution at two locations. At Kath-lamara PHC, 13 food baskets were distributed in the morning, and later at Mohanpur CHC in the afternoon, the largest share of 37 baskets

was provided to beneficiaries.

The initiative was carried out in a well-coordinated manner, ensuring timely delivery and equitable distribution across all designated points. Local residents expressed gratitude for the continued support, particularly in times when access to essential food supplies remains a challenge for many. This collaborative effort between public sector enterprises like NEEPCO and NTPC, along with NHM and the Rotary Club of Agartala, highlights the impact of joint community-driven initiatives. By addressing basic needs such as food security, the program not only provides immediate relief but also strengthens community resilience. Organizers stated that such initiatives will continue in the coming months, with a focus on reaching more underserved areas. The Rotary Club reaffirmed its commitment to humanitarian service, emphasizing that consistent efforts and partnerships are key to making a meaningful difference in society.

The food basket distribution drive stands as a testament to the power of collective action and compassion, bringing hope and support to hundreds of families across the region.

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"Connecting the unconnected"

Rahul targets RSS, BJP over use of term 'Vanvasi' for tribals, also slams Centre on US trade deal

AHMEDABAD

Leader of Opposition and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi accused the BJP-RSS of using the term 'Vanvasi' for tribals and thereby diluting tribal identity, enabling corporate capture of resources, and weakening public institutions.

Addressing the 'Adivasi Adhikar Samvidhan Sammelan' in Vadodra, Gandhi reiterated his demand for a caste Census, which he said, is vital for tribals to get their share in power and wealth of the country.

"Adivasi refers to the original owners of India. Had you visited this land 1,000, 2,000, or even 5,000 years ago, you would have found that every single inch of land was in the hands of Adivasis," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha told the gathering.

"I want to start with the word 'tribal'. If you came 2000-3000 years ago, there is no dispute that all the land belonged to the tribals. Your history is of losing land. Gradually you were being removed... removed... now in the 21st century, a new word has come. The RSS-BJP's word is 'Vanvasi'."

He argued that language itself is being used as a political tool to erase original ownership and weaken tribal claims over land and resources.

"Vanvasi means that you were not the original owner. Adivasi means that this country was yours the water, forest and land were yours. Vanvasi means that water, forest and land are not yours. Vanvasi is an attack on the ideology of Birsa Munda. Look at this Constitution. This was written after independence. It is the law and vision of India. But this is not a new book. This book contains an ideology that is thousands of years old."

Linking identity with policy, Rahul Gandhi moved to governance failures, alleging that protections meant for tribals are being systematically weakened while access to education is shrinking

due to aggressive privatization in Gujarat.

"MGNREGA, PESA law, all this was to give you protection. You talked about the future. All colleges and universities have been closed in Gujarat. Everything has been privatised. How will you get education? Without high-quality government schools, universities or colleges, you cannot get education... Your children can go to high-quality government schools and colleges and study for minimum money and remain competitive. I felt very good that you all met and you talked about the tribal vision."

Escalating his attack, Rahul Gandhi directly targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi: "He folds his hands in front of Birsa Munda, but when it comes time to give power or money, he becomes silent."

He then pointed out that the BJP is claiming that MGNREGA is given to marginalised people for free while the same party continues to overlook corporate debt.

"There is nothing free in MGNREGA, money is given by working hard and it is called free and Adaniji's lakhs and crores are forgiven, that is not free but development. Whose progress? The progress of 90 percent or 500-1000 people. Whose development is happening? The poor, the farmers? Or the billionaires?"

Gandhi also criticised the PM's current foreign policy and economic decisions, accusing Modi of compromising both parliamentary accountability and farmers' interests.

"He made a deal with America in which, for the first time, a Prime Minister of India opened the agricultural sector... Here, farmers work by hand. If their goods enter our market, our farmers will be ruined. That is why no Prime Minister had opened the agricultural sector. Pulses, soybeans, fruits, cotton all have been opened. For four months they resisted, they were stuck, and I kept asking why. Even government officials were

saying the agricultural sector should not be opened."

Pushing further into structural inequality, Rahul Gandhi raised the demand for a tribal census, linking representation with actual participation in power structures from bureaucracy to corporate India.

"The meaning of the tribal census is, how many tribals are there? What is their share in the country's institutions, bureaucracy, corporates. This has been done in Telangana. You are 9 percent, Dalits are 15 percent. How much participation is there? Do you think you have 10 percent participation in the country?"

He reinforced this argument with a critique of systemic exclusion, pointing to decision-making spaces and economic control remaining concentrated among a few.

"The wealth of the entire country is being distributed... But there is no Dalit or backward class anywhere in the line. Look at the list of private hospitals, colleges, corporates. Where are the tribals in this? 16 lakh crores have been waived."

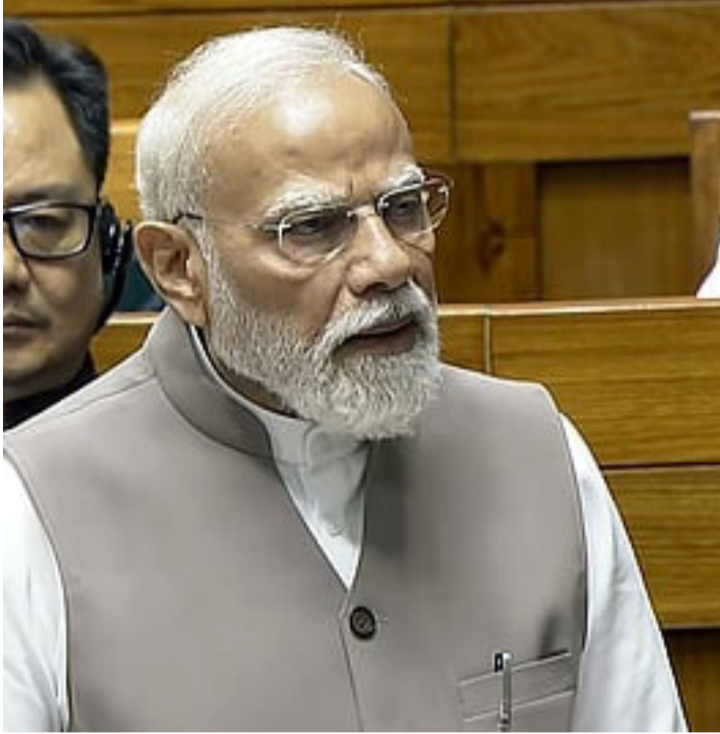
Turning back to privatisation, Rahul Gandhi argued that the shift from public to private control has effectively dismantled reservation-based access, thereby excluding marginalised communities from economic mobility.

He argued that the word 'privatisation' is misleading as it could mean that anyone can own it, be it Dalits or tribals or anyone else, but it actually means that only a few rich people get the benefit.

"Earlier, there was a public sector. There was reservation in it. Tribals, Dalits and backward people could go there. Open the list of Adaniji's company... you will not find a single tribal."

Finally, he tied the issue of land directly to development politics, alleging that tribal land continues to be the first casualty of large-scale projects while dissent on caste census is being politically targeted.

West Asia conflict has created 'unprecedented' challenges for India: PM Modi in Parliament



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday termed the ongoing conflict in West Asia as "worrisome", saying it had created "unprecedented" challenges for India and urging all sides to restore peace.

Addressing the Lok Sabha, the prime minister said the crisis has posed economic, national security and humanitarian challenges. On the energy crisis, Modi said India imports 60% of its LPG and that efforts were ongoing to prioritise domestic supply and ensure smooth petrol and diesel supply across the country, and minimise hardship for the public.

"The situation in West Asia is worrisome. This conflict has been going on for more than three weeks. It has a severe impact on the global economy and the lives of the peo-

ple, and that is why the world is urging all sides for an early resolution to this conflict," Modi told the Parliament.

"The government is appealing to all sides for peace. This war has created unexpected challenges for India — economic, national security and humanitarian," he added.

Modi said that cargo movement through the Strait of Hormuz has been a challenge from the beginning of the war, yet the government is ensuring that gas and fuel supplies remain the least affected.

"Since the war began, the movement of ships through the Strait of Hormuz has become very challenging. Despite this, our government has made efforts to ensure that the supply of petrol, diesel, and gas is not severely impacted. As we all know, the

country imports 60% of its LPG requirement. Due to uncertainty in supply, the government has prioritised domestic LPG consumers. At the same time, domestic production of LPG is also being increased. Continuous efforts have also been made to ensure that the supply of petrol and diesel across the country remains smooth," he said.

Modi said India now imports energy from 41 countries, up from 27 earlier, and has built strategic petroleum reserves of over 5.3 million metric tonnes, with plans to expand this to more than 6.5 million tonnes.

The prime minister told the House that India's concerns are "naturally greater" as the conflict zone is a key trade route and the region is significant given that about one crore Indians live and work in Gulf countries.

"India has extensive trade ties with the countries affected by the conflict, and the region is a key route for our global trade. A significant portion of our crude oil and gas needs is met from this region. It is also important because nearly one crore Indians live and work in Gulf countries. A large number of Indian crew members are employed on commercial ships operating in these waters... Due to these various reasons, India's concerns are naturally greater. Therefore, it is essential that a unified voice and consensus reach the world regarding this crisis from the Parliament," he said.

The prime minister said the security of Indians had been the country's top priority during the conflict, adding that Indian missions in the affected region were extending all possible assistance to its citizens. He informed the House that India remained in constant touch with leaders in the region, adding that he had spoken with most heads of state in West Asia over two rounds of

calls, who had assured the safety of Indians.

Modi also said around 3.75 lakh Indians have returned home safely since the start of the war. He added that the CBSE had cancelled Class 10 and 12 board exams in war-hit countries. "Since the war began, more than 3,75,000 Indians have returned safely to India. From Iran, nearly 1,000 Indians have returned safely so far, of which over 700 are medical students. In view of the situation, CBSE has cancelled Class 10 and 12 exams in the schools in Gulf countries and is taking necessary steps to ensure students' education continues without disruption," he said.

Meanwhile, Modi condemned the attacks on commercial ships and disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, calling them "unacceptable" and urging a peaceful resolution to the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

"India has opposed attacks on energy and transport infrastructure. Attacks on commercial ships and disruptions to international waterways, including trade through the Strait of Hormuz, are unacceptable. India is making continuous diplomatic efforts to ensure the safe movement of Indian vessels even amid the ongoing conflict," Modi said.

"We have always raised our voice in favour of humanity and peace, and believe that dialogue and diplomacy are the only solutions. All our efforts are aimed at reducing tensions and ending the conflict. Any threat to human life is not in the interest of humanity, and India is urging all sides to reach a peaceful resolution at the earliest," he added.

Unfortunately, the prime minister said, some people have lost their lives, and some have been injured in the conflict. Help is being provided to the affected families, Modi said.

INTERNATIONAL

Markets shoot higher and oil futures sink after Trump announces progress with Iran, halt on bombing



WASHINGTON

Wall Street shot higher and global oil futures tumbled on Monday after President Donald Trump extended his deadline for Iran to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz and said the U.S. would hold off on strikes against Iranian power plants and other energy infrastructure for five days.

Trump's post on social media about the strikes came as the war with Iran enters its fourth week.

Futures for the S&P 500 and Dow Jones Industrial Average soared 2.6% before the opening bell. Oil prices also immediately reversed course, sinking as much as 10%. Benchmark U.S. crude slid \$8.23 to \$90 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, tumbled \$9.02 to \$103.17 a barrel.

Global shares dipped Monday across the board, as oil prices continued to climb after U.S. President Donald Trump's latest comments dashed hopes for an early end to the

war in Iran.

France's CAC 40 lost 1.5% in early trading to 7,548.83, while Germany's DAX dove 2.0% to 21,944.26. Britain's FTSE 100 fell 1.7% to 9,754.80. U.S. shares were set to drift lower with Dow futures down 0.5% at 45,659.00. S&P 500 futures fell 0.7% to 6,515.25.

In Asia, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 dropped 3.5% to finish at 51,515.49. In Taiwan, the Taiex shed 2.5% to 32,722.50. Australia's S&P/ASX 200 fell 0.7% to 8,365.90. South

Korea's Kospi dove 6.5% to 5,405.75. Hong Kong's Hang Seng slipped 3.5% to 24,382.47, while the Shanghai Composite declined 3.6% to 3,813.28.

Trump over the weekend warned the U.S. will "obliterate" Iran's power plants if it doesn't fully open the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours, prompting Tehran to say it would respond to any such strike with attacks on U.S. and Israeli energy and infrastructure assets in the region.

"Trump's ultimatum and Iran's retaliatory warnings point to a widening conflict that keeps energy disruption and market volatility elevated with no clear off-ramp in sight," said Ng Jing Wen, analyst at Mizuho Bank in Singapore.

Higher oil prices, which also shook stock markets on Friday, dashed hopes for a possible upcoming cut to interest rates by the Federal Reserve, analysts said. Before the war, traders were betting that the Fed would cut rates at least twice this year. Central banks in Europe, Japan and the United Kingdom also recently held their interest rates steady.

But analysts observed that the markets were starting to react less to each of Trump's remarks, perhaps deciding the narrative for markets was being set elsewhere, not Washington, such as what Iran might do but how global economic growth could be affected by soaring energy prices. Some Asian nations, like Japan, are vulnerable to higher energy prices.

In energy trading, benchmark U.S. crude added \$1.62 to \$99.85 a barrel. Brent crude, the international standard, gained \$1.42 to \$113.61 a barrel. The price of Brent crude has zigzagged lately from about \$70 per barrel before the war began to as high as \$119.50.

In currency trading, the U.S. dollar rose to 159.53 Japanese yen from 159.22 yen. The euro cost \$1.1526, down from \$1.1571.

India reiterates support for Palestine, backs Gaza peace plan: Government in Parliament



NEW DELHI

India's position towards Palestine has been long-standing, and New Delhi remains committed to advancing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, the government has informed Parliament.

In a written response to a query in the Lok Sabha on March 20, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh also said India attended the Board of Peace meeting held at the US Institute of Peace in Washington on February 19 as an "observer".

The question and the response were uploaded on the Lok Sabha website on Monday.

The Board of Peace, unveiled by US President Donald Trump, is being projected by Washington as a new international body to usher in peace and stability in Gaza and beyond, and has triggered speculation that it may respond to other global conflicts as well.

Buildings that were destroyed during the Israeli ground and air operations stand in the northern Gaza Strip, as seen from Gaza Strip, Thursday, Oct. 9, 2025,

following the announcement that Israel and Hamas have agreed to the first phase of a peace plan to pause the fighting.

India stands with Palestine as well: Opposition leaders react to Modi's Israel speech

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was asked whether the government has assured Israel of its "firm support" and has also supported the Gaza Peace Initiative during the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel.

The MEA was also asked whether India had "skipped out of a statement" issued at a joint press conference of diplomats from more than 85 countries at the United Nations on February 17, criticising Israel's plans to tighten control of territory in the West Bank.

It was also asked whether a day after India "skipped a joint appearance" with other countries at the United Nations to condemn Israel for its plans for West Bank settlement, India signed a joint statement on February 18.

"Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi paid a State visit to Israel on February 25-26, 2026. During the visit,

Prime Minister reaffirmed India's support for the Gaza Peace Plan, which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council," Singh said in his response.

"India's position towards Palestine has been long-standing. India remains committed to advancing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region," he said.

The government further said that "in consonance with our position, India associated itself with the joint statement at the United Nations".

The MEA was also asked whether India attended the Board of Peace meeting held in Washington as an observer and whether it still stood for a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine based on 1967 borders.

"India attended the Board of Peace meeting held at the US Institute of Peace in Washington, DC, USA on February 19, 2026, as an Observer," Singh said.

The government said 26 countries participated as members in the meeting, while 22 countries, including India, participated as observers.

In his response, Singh shared the full list of participating countries.

Bulldozers and Ballots: How Eviction Drives Became a Political Theatre in Assam's Election Season

As Himanta Biswa Sarma's convoy rolled through parts of central Assam during the ongoing campaign, an unusual spectacle unfolded along the roadside. A line of bulldozers stood waiting-not as idle construction machines, but as stages. Supporters perched atop them, clutching garlands and petals, cheering as the Chief Minister passed. The imagery, widely circulated across social media, captured more than a campaign moment. It revealed how a piece of heavy machinery has been transformed into a political symbol-one that sits at the intersection of governance, identity, and electoral strategy in Assam.

This emerging symbolism cannot be understood in isolation. It is rooted in a series of aggressive eviction drives carried out across the state since 2021, framed officially as efforts to reclaim government land from "illegal encroachment." According to government figures, over 50,000 people have been displaced and nearly 1.5 lakh bighas of land cleared during this period. Behind these statistics lies a deeply contested narrative-one that blends legality, ethnicity, and political messaging in a volatile mix.

Evictions as Policy and Message
The Assam government has consistently defended the eviction drives as necessary administrative action. Officials argue that reclaiming public land is essential for development, environmental protection, and restoring land to indigenous communities. However, critics contend that the implementation has been selective, often disproportionately affecting marginalized Bengali-speaking Muslim communities.

For many of those evicted, the experience has been abrupt and devastating. Entire settlements have been razed, sometimes with little prior notice, leaving families to rebuild their lives under tarpaulin sheets or in temporary shelters. The absence of systematic rehabilitation measures-such as access to potable water, sanitation, or healthcare-has compounded the humanitarian concerns.

In one recent instance at Hasila Beel in Goalpara district, the Gauhati High Court intervened following a petition by affected families, directing local authorities to ensure basic amenities for those displaced. The case underscored a recurring tension between administrative action and humanitarian obligations.

Citizenship, Identity, and Suspicion
At the heart of the eviction debate lies a long-standing and sensitive issue in Assam: the question of citizenship and belonging. The state's political discourse has, for decades, been shaped by anxieties over migration, particularly from neighboring Bangladesh. These concerns gained institutional expression during the Assam Movement and continue to influence contemporary politics.

Within this framework, the term "illegal encroacher" often overlaps with suspicions of being an undocumented immigrant. In political rhetoric-especially among sections of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-this label is frequently associated with Bengali-speaking Muslims. The conflation of land rights with citizenship status has created a climate where eviction is not merely an administrative act, but a marker of identity and legitimacy.

Complicating matters further are reports that even individuals possessing land documents, or pattas, have not always been spared during eviction drives. In several cases, allegations have surfaced that non-Muslim occupants in similar circumstances were left untouched, fueling perceptions of selective enforcement.

From Governance Tool to Campaign Symbol
What sets the current moment apart is the transformation of the bulldozer from an instrument of policy into a symbol of political messaging. The "bulldozer salute" witnessed during campaign rallies is not just a display of enthusiasm; it reflects a deliberate narrative construction.

In this narrative, the bulldozer represents decisiveness, strength, and a willingness to act against perceived illegality.

For supporters, it signifies the fulfillment of a long-standing demand to protect land and identity. The visual language is unmistakable: **The smartest people are all self-taught, even if they went to school.**



the leader as a figure of authority, returning from a successful campaign against encroachment, greeted by the very machines that executed that mission.

This symbolism resonates strongly with segments of the electorate that prioritize issues of land rights and demographic change. As elections approach, such imagery becomes a powerful tool-condensing complex policy actions into easily recognizable symbols of "achievement."

The Human Cost Behind the Optics
Yet, beneath the spectacle lies a starkly different reality for those directly affected. For displaced families, the bulldozer is not a symbol of governance or victory-it is a reminder of loss. Homes built over decades are reduced to rubble within hours. Livelihoods tied to land, livestock, or local economies vanish overnight.

The absence of structured rehabilitation has forced many into precarious living conditions. Makeshift camps, often lacking basic infrastructure, become temporary homes for months. Seasonal challenges-monsoon rains, winter cold-add layers of vulnerability.

Scholars have described such processes through the concept of "domicide," a term popularized by geographers to denote the deliberate destruction of home. Unlike displacement caused by natural disasters, domicile carries an element of intentionality, often linked to state policy or development projects.

Internationally, concerns around forced evictions have been repeatedly flagged by bodies such as the United Nations, emphasizing that the right to adequate housing is integral to human dignity. While Assam's situation does not fit the mold of a conventional conflict zone, the scale and nature of displacement have drawn parallels in academic and rights-based discussions.

Electoral Timing and Political Calculus
The timing of these developments is significant. With the Assam Assembly elections scheduled for April 2026, political narratives are sharpening across the spectrum. The ruling BJP, which first came to power in the state in 2016, has consistently foregrounded issues of identity, migration, and land protection.

The eviction drives align closely with this ideological positioning. By projecting a firm stance against encroachment, the party reinforces its commitment to safeguarding indigenous interests-a key electoral promise. The visual spectacle of bulldozers in campaign rallies amplifies this message, turning policy into performance.

At the same time, opposition parties have sought to highlight the humanitarian and

legal concerns surrounding the evictions, framing them as evidence of exclusionary governance. The debate thus extends beyond land rights, touching upon broader questions of citizenship, equality, and the role of the state.

A Divided Public Response
Public reaction to the bulldozer symbolism has been sharply divided. For some, it represents long-overdue action against illegal occupation of land-a corrective measure in a state grappling with complex demographic challenges. For others, it signals a troubling normalization of displacement and the erosion of safeguards for vulnerable communities. Social media has played a crucial role in amplifying both perspectives. Videos of bulldozer salutes and eviction drives circulate widely, often accompanied by celebratory or critical commentary, depending on the audience. The digital space thus becomes an extension of the political battlefield, shaping perceptions and reinforcing narratives.

Looking Ahead

As Assam moves closer to the polls, the role of eviction drives in shaping electoral outcomes remains uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the bulldozer has evolved into more than a machine. It is now a contested symbol-representing governance and grievance, authority and anxiety, victory and vulnerability. The coming months will test how this symbolism translates into votes, and whether the narratives built around it can sustain political momentum. Equally important will be the question of what follows beyond the cycle: whether policies will shift towards balancing administrative objectives with humanitarian considerations, or whether the current trajectory will continue.

For the thousands who have already lost their homes, the answer carries immediate and profound consequences. For the state as a whole, it will shape not just the outcome of an election, but the contours of its social and political landscape in the years to come.

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