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Khemchand Singh Makes First Road Journey to Jiribam Since Manipur Unrest

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PERSPECTIVE
Being an adult is mostly just guessing what to make for dinner forever.

IMPHAL
Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on April 5 arrived in Jiribam district, marking his first road journey to the region since ethnic tensions escalated in the state.

The Chief Minister, who is on a three-day visit, is accompanied by eight BJP MLAs along with state BJP president A Sharda. His visit comes shortly after a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, where the situation in Manipur was reviewed. During his stay, Singh is expected to hold interactions with community leaders from both the Kuki-Hmar and Meitei groups, as well as internally displaced persons affected by the recent unrest.

It is worth to mention that in June 2024, then chief minister N Biren Singh also had planned to visit Jiribam district via the NH 37. However, suspected militants ambushed the advance security convoy of Biren Singh, near Kotlen in Kangpokpi district on NH-37, injuring at least one or two security personnel. The attack had forced Biren Singh to cancel his planned visit to Jiribam.

This is Singh's first visit to Jiribam by road and his second visit to

the district since assuming office, underlining the government's renewed outreach efforts to restore confidence and promote dialogue in the violence-affected region. In a significant move aimed at restoring confidence in conflict-affected areas, Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Saturday travelled to Jiribam district via National Highway 37 India, marking the first such road journey by a sitting Chief Minister since ethnic violence erupted in May 2023.

The Chief Minister, accompanied by A. Sharda Devi and a delegation of eight MLAs, began a three-day visit focused on outreach, confidence-building, and assessment of ground realities in the sensitive border district, located around 217 km from Imphal.

The delegation includes legislators Tongbram Robindro, K. Robindro, Sapam Ranjan, H. Dingo, L. Rameshwar, S. Kunjakeshwor (Keiba), S. Premchandra, Ashab Uddin, and Noor Hussain, along with senior officials such as the Commissioner (Home) and the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department.

The route passes through Kangpokpi district, a Kuki-majority area that has remained sensitive in the aftermath of the ethnic conflict, adding strategic and symbolic significance to the journey.

Officials indicated that the visit will involve interactions with internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as meetings with community leaders to better understand local concerns and expedite relief and rehabilitation measures.

The visit is being viewed as part of the government's broader effort to rebuild trust and restore administrative presence in violence-hit regions. Notably, a similar attempt in June 2024 by former Chief Minister N. Biren Singh to reach Jiribam via the same route had to be aborted after suspected militants ambushed his advance security convoy near Kotlen in Kangpokpi district, injuring security personnel.

Against this backdrop, Saturday's road journey underscores a calibrated push by the state government to reassert connectivity along key transit corridors and signal a gradual return to stability, even as security concerns continue to loom over parts of Manipur.

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IMD forecasts warmer pre-monsoon months, below-normal rainfall in Meghalaya

SHILLONG
The India Meteorological Department has projected above-normal temperatures and below-normal rainfall across Meghalaya during the April-June pre-monsoon period, raising concerns over dry conditions and water stress in parts of the state.

According to the weather office's latest seasonal outlook, both maximum and minimum temperatures are expected to remain higher than usual through the coming months. However, the department clarified that heat wave conditions are unlikely to develop during this period.

The forecast also indicates a potential rainfall deficit across several parts of the Northeast, including Meghalaya, which could intensify dry spells and impact local ecosystems and livelihoods. Officials warned that the combination of elevated daytime and nighttime temperatures may lead to increased thermal discomfort, particularly during extended periods without rainfall. Such conditions could place added strain on vulnerable populations.

The anticipated shortfall in rainfall is also expected to affect water availability and agricultural activities, especially in regions dependent on rain-fed farming. Experts note that early planning will be crucial to manage irrigation demands and sustain crop cycles. The IMD outlook highlights the importance of preparedness measures, including efficient water resource management and adaptive strategies to mitigate the impact of rising temperatures and reduced precipitation in the pre-monsoon season.

WHO SAID WHAT

Silenced, not defeated
My message to the 'aam aadmi' ~
Raghav Chadha, MP (RS), Chartered Accountant.

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The film, which marks Tenzing's directorial debut, has been widely recognised for its nuanced and sensitive portrayal of how conflict affects children and families, capturing the lingering psychological scars and intergenerational trauma shaped by prolonged unrest.

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The Chief Minister cautioned against splitting votes among opposition parties and independent candidates. He argued that a fragmented mandate could stall ongoing development initiatives, appealing to voters to consolidate support behind the BJP. "Every vote for BJP will strengthen my hands and that of Narendra Modi to work for the people of Barak Valley," he said, underscoring the linkage between state and central leadership in delivering infrastructure and welfare projects. At the heart of Sarma's campaign pitch was a renewed employment guarantee. He announced that, if re-elected, his government would generate two lakh jobs, building on the one lakh jobs already provided during its current tenure. The proposed recruitment plan includes approximately 25,000 positions in police and commando forces, 75,000 teaching posts, and additional vacancies across Grade III, Grade IV, and technical sectors.

In a region marked by linguistic diversity and longstanding concerns over educational access, Sarma also promised a targeted recruitment drive for Bengali and Hindi-medium schools. The move is aimed at addressing persistent teacher shortages in Barak Valley, where language remains a politically sensitive issue. Linking employment with broader social mobility, the Chief Minister further pledged that the state government would bear the cost of higher education for students from economically weaker sections. The announcement, positioned as an investment in human capital, drew attention from young voters and parents attending the rallies.

Administrative restructuring and infrastructure expansion formed another key pillar of the BJP's outreach strategy. Sarma announced that Katigorah would be upgraded to a co-district by August 15, while Kalain would be granted municipal status. These measures, he said, are intended to decentralise governance and improve service delivery in the region.

Highlighting connectivity as a driver of economic growth, the Chief Minister reiterated plans to upgrade the Silchar-Dholai-Hailakandi road into a National Highway with support from the Centre. Improved road infrastructure, he argued, would enhance trade, mobility, and access to essential services across Barak Valley. In Borkhola, Sarma combined development assurances with sharp criticism of the opposition, particularly the Indian National Congress. He alleged that the constituency had lagged behind due to Congress representation between 2021 and 2025. Promising targeted interventions, he announced plans for a bridge at Rajnagar, a stadium, and a college in the Tapang area, along with financial assistance for the historic Barambaba temple. Throughout his campaign, the Chief Minister repeatedly emphasised the risks of vote division, particularly cautioning against support for independent candidates. "If votes split, it will benefit Congress," he said, making electoral consolidation a central theme of his outreach.

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Ibobi Singh emphasised that the Census remains a foundational exercise for governance, shaping policy decisions and developmental planning at the national level. "If the exercise is carried out in the current situation, it will not reflect the correct population data," he said, pointing to the challenges of enumerating internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are yet to return to their homes.

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The Chief Minister cautioned against splitting votes among opposition parties and independent candidates. He argued that a fragmented mandate could stall ongoing development initiatives, appealing to voters to consolidate support behind the BJP. "Every vote for BJP will strengthen my hands and that of Narendra Modi to work for the people of Barak Valley," he said, underscoring the linkage between state and central leadership in delivering infrastructure and welfare projects. At the heart of Sarma's campaign pitch was a renewed employment guarantee. He announced that, if re-elected, his government would generate two lakh jobs, building on the one lakh jobs already provided during its current tenure. The proposed recruitment plan includes approximately 25,000 positions in police and commando forces, 75,000 teaching posts, and additional vacancies across Grade III, Grade IV, and technical sectors.

In a region marked by linguistic diversity and longstanding concerns over educational access, Sarma also promised a targeted recruitment drive for Bengali and Hindi-medium schools. The move is aimed at addressing persistent teacher shortages in Barak Valley, where language remains a politically sensitive issue. Linking employment with broader social mobility, the Chief Minister further pledged that the state government would bear the cost of higher education for students from economically weaker sections. The announcement, positioned as an investment in human capital, drew attention from young voters and parents attending the rallies.

Administrative restructuring and infrastructure expansion formed another key pillar of the BJP's outreach strategy. Sarma announced that Katigorah would be upgraded to a co-district by August 15, while Kalain would be granted municipal status. These measures, he said, are intended to decentralise governance and improve service delivery in the region.

Highlighting connectivity as a driver of economic growth, the Chief Minister reiterated plans to upgrade the Silchar-Dholai-Hailakandi road into a National Highway with support from the Centre. Improved road infrastructure, he argued, would enhance trade, mobility, and access to essential services across Barak Valley. In Borkhola, Sarma combined development assurances with sharp criticism of the opposition, particularly the Indian National Congress. He alleged that the constituency had lagged behind due to Congress representation between 2021 and 2025. Promising targeted interventions, he announced plans for a bridge at Rajnagar, a stadium, and a college in the Tapang area, along with financial assistance for the historic Barambaba temple. Throughout his campaign, the Chief Minister repeatedly emphasised the risks of vote division, particularly cautioning against support for independent candidates. "If votes split, it will benefit Congress," he said, making electoral consolidation a central theme of his outreach.

Congress seeks Census deferment in Manipur, cites displacement and risk of flawed data

IMPHAL
Senior Congress leader Okram Ibobi Singh on Saturday urged the Centre to defer the upcoming Census exercise in Manipur until normalcy is restored, warning that conducting it amid ongoing unrest would result in "inaccurate and unreliable" population data.

Addressing a press conference at Congress Bhavan, the veteran leader said the demand has been formally raised by the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, citing the continued displacement of thousands of people due to the conflict in the state.

Ibobi Singh emphasised that the Census remains a foundational exercise for governance, shaping policy decisions and developmental planning at the national level. "If the exercise is carried out in the current situation, it will not reflect the correct population data," he said, pointing to the challenges of enumerating internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are yet to return to their homes.

Manipur short film 'The Nightmare of Bembi' bags Best Psychological Drama at Indian Panorama Festival

IMPHAL
The Nightmare of Bembi, a 23-minute short film directed and produced by Tenzing Pukhrabam, has won the Best Psychological Drama award at the Indian Panorama International Film Festival, marking a significant milestone for emerging cinema from Manipur.

The film, which marks Tenzing's directorial debut, has been widely recognised for its nuanced and sensitive portrayal of how conflict affects children and families, capturing the lingering psychological scars and intergenerational trauma shaped by prolonged unrest.

Lauding the achievement, Yumnam Khemchand Singh said the recognition reflects the depth and creative strength of the state's film industry. In a message shared on so-

CRPF jawan collapses at Imphal airport

BARAK VALLEY POLL PUSH: Himanta Biswa Sarma Unveils 2 Lakh Jobs Plan, Co-District Expansion Drive

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THE OPPOSITION AND THE “ALBATROSS”

Should the “albatross” of good governance, able leadership, hard work and dedication be routinely troubled without reason so much so that such a policy of most of the opposition leaders becomes a moral and political burden to be duly reckoned for retribution and redemption when the will of the people decides the issue with the vote? And when the vivid defeat and rejection of the uncalled for and unwarranted bouts of criticism, attacks and mocking of the present leadership is faced, the queer jibe of “Vote Chor Gaddi Chod” shall automatically be termed as a sheer mendacity and a truculent chorus. The mention of the sea bird Albatross in these lines of political content is only to reiterate not to misjudge the virtue, ability and prowess of leadership of the bete noire of the opposition to an extent of no return. In other words, should most of the leaders from the opposition, in the name of exercising right to criticise the Government, give vent to their pent-up feelings of being out of power, in an unbecoming way leading even to the realms of ultimate putrescence? Should the criticism therefore, make no difference between genuine and misleading sham, between reality and falsehood, between being vicious and gentle even if forceful and last but not least, resort to personal vilification to ugliest and cheapest degrees, settle some scores and all that with a democratically and constitutionally elected Prime Minister, for the third consecutive term in a row, like the one, honestly speaking, so far not experienced by the people of India since 1947 who is on record not having gone on a single day’s leave for holidaying, for taking rest all these 12 years in office and instead is found working 18 hours non-stop for this country. Prejudice apart, the one who is credited with the tangible transformation of this country, the one under whose able and visionary leadership India not only emerges stronger militarily and economically but appears so as well, raising the stature of this country to newer heights, does not deserve the rough deal heaped on him by the opposition. India, under his leadership no longer is seen as a weak, non-assertive and an unheard country, let anyone disagree.

Whatever new, innovative, reformative and beneficial for the country and its people done by him and his Government must be opposed tooth and nail, ridiculed, misinformation spread and even national events like AI Summit disturbed and country’s image lowered and at the top of it, openly boasting about it “Kar Diya Kaam” by our “Youth Congress Walaon nay” is no service to this nation. Now, in respect of West Asia war, a new cheap narrative is peddled, there must be one or more every day invented by them, that “history will never forgive you for ill timed visit to Israel.” See the intrinsic intention and a vain bid to incite that shortly after the so called “ill timed visit” by the PM, Israel and the US got engaged in conflict with Iran and so on, the clarification about which is hardly needed. Should the PM of this country seek permission from such sworn haters and critics for any international assignment, fulfilling a diplomatic obligation and taking part in bilateral issues of interest with a host country? While the fact of the matter is that the present Indian PM is the only one decorated with highest international honours and awards and strangely back home, he is the only one to be repaid by the opposition with abuses, insults and even prayers for his death.

The Mariner in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” did not recognise the magnificent bird Albatross being epitome of good luck, an honest guide, the one who helps him steer the ship through difficult waters and Antarctic ice but inexplicably proves totally senseless and weird in behaviour, ruthless and heartless against the innocent but very useful magnificent bird. Recall how Late Atal Behari Vajpayee was treated by the opposition soon after he became the Prime Minister, how he was removed twice by a vote of no-confidence, how he was booed, hooted, ridiculed and mocked even during his constitutional right to speak in the Parliament. He was pulled down just within 13 days in 1996-the reason, the same put forth against Narendra Modi repeatedly. Again in 1999 just after 13 months, he was pulled down under the same process, one vote of betrayal sealed his fate. Again, not letting him settle, in 2003 Congress again brought a no-confidence motion against his third Government but this time, the move of the Congress got defeated. While replying, he reiterated that “even in opposition, we will continue to play critical role in nation building, our full support in running the house to you is promised if you manage to form a stable Government even with so much distrust among you.” It is imperative to underline that though there was quite evidently mistrust among the opposition but there was complete unanimity, full agreement, a big measure of acquiescence and unity in ousting BJP led Government. Why? This “why” needs an answer from those in politics which they will not but those who vote, must keep deciphering this big “why”. Vajpayee Ji became the PM three times and the forces inimical to stability and coherence, to assertiveness, growth and progress, did not want a stable Government and a strong India but operation of a vicious cycle of pulling down Governments, going for cost push inflationary fresh elections, short duration Governments of Morchas and Fronts with a “fevicolled” tags of “Gareebi Hatao”, “Sampradaya shaktian hatao”. The gullible public kept them believing and trusting too but how long was the question put by them. Anyway, many from the so called anti “sampradaya shaktian”, now fondly remember, refer to and rather miss too the towering personality of Vajpayee Ji and would, rather, in the hearts of hearts, feel remorseful for how they and their seniors in the respective parties ill-treated him. The malaise of caring for Hindus also like other communities being treated as unusual, as an act of dividing society etc has been so deep rooted ever since the partition day that most of the opposition party leaders use that whip against Narendra Modi. Is it not quite possible that after the exit of the present incumbent, whenever so, the same politicians will miss him, recall his statesmanship prowess and leadership qualities and undergo contrition after due self-evaluation?

QUOTE OF THE DAY

‘If you don’t believe it, no one else will’ ~ Usher Raymond IV

HORMUZ TO HOME: SHAPING INDIA’S FUTURE



COL SHIV CHOUDHARY (RETD)

Self-reliance in a geopolitically, militarily and technologically charged era in run up to a secured future is not an isolation; it is the strength to engage the world on your own terms. A war thousands of kilometres away from India can now decide the price of cooking gas in an Indian kitchen, the cost of a farmer’s diesel, or the stability of a young professional’s job. This is the new reality of our world. The rising tensions between Iran, Israel, and the United States are not just another geopolitical episode. Indeed, they are a signal that the world is entering an era where endangering military and devastating technological disruptions will be frequent, fast, and far-reaching. For India, this war and cease of Hormuz, a 21 miles water way is not a distant storm, it is a direct warning. The time to prepare and shape national dominance is not tomorrow, it is now.

At the heart of this crisis lies the Strait of Hormuz, a 21 miles narrow but powerful gateway through which a major portion of the world’s oil flows. If tensions escalate, even rumours of disruption can send oil prices soaring. Ships may avoid the region, insurance costs may rise, and global supply chains may tighten overnight. In today’s deeply connected world, such shocks travel instantly. What begins as a regional tension quickly becomes a global economic tremor, and India feels the impact almost instantly.

India’s biggest vulnerability in such a situation is its dependence on imported oil. A sudden increase in oil prices directly raises the cost of petrol, diesel, and LPG. This, in turn, makes transport, electricity, farming, and daily goods more expensive. The effect is not abstract, it is visible in higher grocery bills, increased travel costs, and rising electricity charges albeit everything. In the short term, fear can trigger panic buying and hoarding, worsening the situation. In the long term, the country may face slower growth, a weaker rupee, and rising inflation. The harsh truth is that the poor and middle class will get worst hit, as even small price increase can disrupt their daily lives.

The real danger goes far beyond oil. Modern conflicts are no longer limited to borders, battlefields, man-made obstacles or physical occupation of territory. They are fought by targeting the systems that keep nations running. Undersea data cables, which carry most of the world’s internet and communication, are silent but critical lifelines. If these are damaged or disrupted, banking systems, digital payments, government services, data flow, movement and communication networks can slow down or even stop. For a country like India, where digital platforms power everything from small payments to national governance, such disruption can create widespread chaos.

Cyber warfare adds another invisible but powerful threat. Today, nations can attack each other with-

out firing a single bullet through hacking, data theft, and system disruption. Power grids, airports, banking systems, and communication networks are all potential targets. India’s rapid digital growth is a strength, but it also increases risk if security is not strong enough. The battlefield has expanded into cyberspace, where attacks are silent, sudden, and difficult to trace.

Economic systems are equally sensitive. During global uncertainty, investors often move money to safer markets, causing capital outflow from countries like India. This weakens the rupee, increases borrowing costs, and creates instability in stock markets. At the same time, global sanctions or payment disruptions can affect trade, slowing down imports and exports. Businesses face uncertainty, and economic momentum weakens.

The effects are also visible in aviation and shipping. Airlines may have to take longer routes to avoid conflict zones, increasing fuel costs and ticket prices. Shipping becomes more expensive due to higher insurance and security risks. Delays in cargo movement disrupt supply chains, affecting industries and leading to shortages or higher prices in markets. Technology and research also suffer, as India depends on global supply chains for advanced components like semiconductors. Disruptions here can slow innovation and reduce long-term competitiveness.

Yet, the deepest impact of such crises is social. Rising prices, job losses, and uncertainty affect everyday life. Families struggle to manage expenses, and inequality increases. What seems like a distant conflict slowly enters homes, affecting food, fuel, jobs, and future security. This is why such global crises are not just economic or strategic, they are deeply human.

In such times, the role of common citizens becomes extremely important. A nation’s strength does not come only from government policies but also from the behaviour of its people. Panic buying and hoarding must be avoided, as they create artificial shortages and push prices higher. Responsible use of fuel, electricity, and essential goods can reduce pressure on the system. Supporting local products and businesses helps strengthen the domestic economy. Citizens must also be alert to misinformation. In times of crisis, rumours and fake news spread quickly, creating unnecessary panic. Verifying information before sharing it is a simple but powerful responsibility. Digital awareness is equally important. Basic cybersecurity habits like using strong passwords, avoiding unknown links, and relying on trusted platforms can prevent larger risks. In a digital economy, individual carelessness can have national consequences.

Financial discipline at the household level also matters. Saving money, avoiding unnecessary expenses, and preparing for uncertainties can help families stay stable during difficult times. Communities must

come together to support vulnerable groups, ensuring that no one is left behind. A calm, informed, and responsible society makes a nation far more resilient.

At the national level, India must act with long-term vision and determination. Energy security and its assured reserves must become a top priority. Expanding strategic oil reserves can provide a safety buffer during supply disruptions. At the same time, India must invest heavily in renewable energy like solar and wind. However, it is equally important to end import dependence to indigenous manufacturing dependence and to be free threats, blackmailing and disruptions.

Strengthening digital infrastructure is another urgent need. India must invest in its own communication networks, satellite systems, and cybersecurity capabilities. Data and connectivity are now as important as roads and railways. Without secure digital systems, economic and administrative stability cannot be guaranteed.

Economic resilience requires careful planning. The government must control inflation, prevent hoarding, and maintain adequate reserves of essential goods. Strong foreign exchange reserves can help manage currency fluctuations. Policies must protect the poor while ensuring financial discipline. Stability during crisis depends on preparation during normal times.

India must also accelerate its shift from an import-dependent economy to a manufacturing and export-driven one. Producing essential goods domestically reduces vulnerability to global disruptions. Diversifying supply chains and trade partnerships ensures that risks are spread and managed better. Strategic reserves of critical materials can further strengthen preparedness.

Exploration, Innovation and research will shape India’s future strength. Investment in science, technology, ideas and innovation must increase. Collaboration between government, industry, intelligentsia and academic institutions is essential. From artificial intelligence to energy storage, India must aim to become a creator, not just a consumer, of technology.

Defence and intelligence systems must also evolve. Modern threats require integration across cyber, space, and traditional domains. Investment in new technologies like drones and cyber defence is crucial. At the same time, better coordination between agencies will ensure faster and more effective responses.

India’s foreign policy must remain independent, balanced and practical without fear, black mailing, over dependence or hinging on illusions. The country should maintain strong relations with multiple nations and time tested allies while protecting its own national interests. Partnerships must be reliable, especially during crises. Strategic autonomy should be backed by strong domestic capability.

The current global situation is a clear reminder that stability is no

longer guaranteed. Events happening far away can directly affect life in India. But within this challenge lies a powerful opportunity. India has the talent, scale and strategic position to become stronger only if it prepares wisely without any delay.

Hormuz is neither the first nor

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

This nation will truly develop only when the Northeast develops. When Assam progresses, the rest of the Northeastern states will also advance. And in this journey, the youth will be the true agents of change.

☐Dhekiajuli, Assam ssamElections2026 #ViksitBharat



the most disruptive puzzle, the future will bring more disruptions whether in energy, technology, or geopolitics. The real question is not whether crises will come, but whether India will be ready. A strong nation is not defined only by its resources, but by its preparedness, discipline, unity, dominance and visible presence. Correct communication to apprise public on the emerging international, national and impact on life is most vital for building collective strength.

Hormuz crisis is not a wakeup call but a loud knock for shaping India’s shape. By reducing dependence, strengthening systems, looking beyond party politics and elections, and encouraging responsible citizen behaviour, it can move and reshape from vulnerability to true strategic dominance. The world ahead will not reward the most powerful alone, it will reward the most prepared. The next global crisis will not ask who is powerful. It will reveal who is ready. And for India, readiness for national power is not a choice anymore, it is making and shaping destiny. India can achieve

Yogi Adityanath Leads NDA Push in Barpeta, Targets Congress-AIUDF Over 'Culture, Infiltration'

BARPETA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday intensified the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) campaign in Assam, launching a sharp attack on the opposition while backing Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) candidate Dipak Kumar Das in Barpeta.

Addressing an election rally, Adityanath accused the Indian National Congress and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) of working in tandem in ways that, he alleged, threaten Assam's cultural identity and heritage.

"The Congress and AIUDF are working together to compromise the culture and heritage of the state," he said, framing the election narrative around identity and governance.

The BJP leader further alleged



that the Congress, during its decades-long rule, failed to safeguard the state's interests. "The Congress had

been in power for 60 years in Assam. But it only encouraged infiltration, violence and riots. It put the local

culture and heritage under threat," he said.

Positioning the NDA as the only

viable alternative, Adityanath asserted that the alliance would take decisive steps to address infiltration and prevent demographic changes. "Each infiltrator will be identified and chased out. BJP-led NDA will not allow love and land jihads or any change in demography," he stated, reiterating a key campaign plank of the ruling alliance.

Projecting the NDA's governance model, Adityanath highlighted what he described as a dual focus on development and preservation of cultural heritage. "Assam has witnessed a massive transformation in the last 10 years, and I urge your sustained support for the NDA in this election," he said, invoking the "vivasat-vikas" (heritage and development) narrative. Taking a dig at the Congress over the cancellation of its

Barpeta candidate's nomination, he remarked that the party had "fled the battlefield even before the election," intensifying the political rhetoric in the run-up to polling.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has ramped up its campaign across Assam by deploying a roster of high-profile leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Their rallies and outreach programmes across key constituencies are aimed at consolidating voter support and reinforcing the party's development narrative ahead of the Assembly elections. With campaigning entering its final phase, Barpeta has emerged as a significant battleground, reflecting the broader contest between the NDA and opposition forces in Assam.

Gaurav Gogoi Targets CM Over Remarks, Opposition Flags Corruption, Syndicate Links

JORHAT

The electoral contest in Sarupathar intensified on Friday as Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) chief Gaurav Gogoi launched a sharp attack on Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over his alleged remarks concerning Kunki Choudhury and her family, accusing him of undermining the dignity of both his office and Assamese society.

Addressing the media after a campaign rally, Gogoi criticised the Chief Minister's comments, stating that "an attack on a woman like her reflects his own character and shows how low it is." He further alleged that such repeated remarks have disrespected the constitutional position Sarma holds, asserting that political change is necessary to restore dignity to governance in the state.

"Again and again, we have seen him disrespecting his position and Assamese society by making such remarks. The sooner we bid him farewell, the sooner we can restore the dignity of the post," Gogoi said, framing the April 9 election as a referendum on political conduct and accountability. Escalating his criticism, the APCC chief accused the ruling establishment of fostering what he described as a "corrupt and syndicate-driven system," urging voters to use the election as an opportunity to remove such elements from power. "We have a good opportunity to remove corrupt and syndicate-running individuals from political power and build a progressive and prosperous society," he added, expressing confidence in a favourable outcome for the opposition.

The remarks came as Gogoi, along with Asom Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Lurinjyoti Gogoi, intensified campaigning in Sarupathar in support of opposition alliance candidate Jibon Chutia.

Owaisi Steps Up Dhubri Campaign, Calls Congress BJP's 'A-Team'; Backs AIUDF as Key Poll Player

DHUBRI

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) chief Asaduddin Owaisi on Friday sharpened his attack on the Congress while campaigning in Assam's Dhubri district, alleging that the party has lost public credibility and is effectively functioning as the Bharatiya Janata Party's "A-team."

Addressing a large gathering on the second day of his visit, Owaisi campaigned in support of candidates of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), including Nazrul Hoque and Jamsher Talukder. He claimed that defections and internal weaknesses have eroded the Congress's standing among voters.

"Congress has become the A-team of the BJP. Leaders continue to defect from the party, and people no longer repose trust in it," he said, intensifying the political rhetoric in a region where minori-

ty votes play a decisive role.

Raising concerns over eviction drives in the state, Owaisi alleged that Muslims in Assam are being "targeted in the name of eviction," and projected the AIUDF as a political safeguard for the community. He criticised the manner in which such drives are conducted, reiterating his earlier remarks that authorities cannot act as "court, judge and jury" in eviction-related matters.

Referring to the previous Lok Sabha elections, Owaisi claimed that voters in Dhubri had been "misled" by the Indian National Congress, arguing that the constituency currently lacks an effective voice in Parliament.

"I miss Badruddin Ajmal in Parliament. The Congress could not stop Modi. Had Ajmal been there, he would have raised his voice against evictions," he said, linking representation with advocacy on contentious issues.

AICC Flags 'Severe Anaemia Crisis' in Assam Tea Gardens, Slams Modi Visit as 'Selective'

JORHAT

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Friday raised alarm over what it described as a worsening public health crisis in Assam's tea garden communities, claiming that nearly 68 per cent of women and children in the estates are suffering from anaemia.

Addressing a press conference at the district Congress office, AICC National Secretary Divya Maderna criticised both the state and central governments for failing to address the nutritional and healthcare needs of tea workers, particularly women.

"Nearly 68 per cent of women and children in Assam's tea gardens are anaemic. This is not just a statistic-it reflects a grave failure in ensuring basic nutrition and healthcare for one of the most vulnerable sections of society," she said.

Maderna questioned the effectiveness of existing welfare interventions, alleging a lack of struc-



tured awareness programmes and inadequate healthcare infrastructure in tea garden areas. She said women workers continue to labour under harsh conditions without access to even basic medical services.

"Are there any structured awareness programmes to educate women about nutrition? Are there sufficient health facilities in these areas? The answer is no,"

she said, adding that the absence of functional public health centres forces residents to travel long distances for routine treatment.

Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his recent visit to a tea estate in Assam, Maderna termed the visit "selective" and alleged that the garden in question was owned by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. She argued that such curated visits fail to reflect the lived realities of workers in struggling tea estates.

"The Prime Minister should have visited ordinary tea gardens to understand the ground reality. A curated visit does not reflect the everyday struggles of workers," she said.

Linking the health crisis to economic distress, Maderna pointed to low wages as a key factor contributing to malnutrition. She noted that the promised increase in daily wages to Rs 351 remains unfulfilled, limiting workers' ability to afford nutritious food.

"With such meagre earnings,

how can workers afford proper nutrition? Anaemia is a direct consequence of this economic neglect," she said.

The Congress leader further accused the government of prioritising "propaganda over policy," alleging that critical sectors such as maternal health, nutrition, and rural healthcare have been sidelined over the past decade. She also flagged broader concerns about the state's healthcare system, claiming it is under mounting strain.

Calling for urgent intervention, Maderna advocated targeted measures including dedicated nutrition drives, regular health check-ups, and sustained awareness campaigns in tea garden areas.

"Without focused action, the cycle of poor health and poverty will continue," she said, urging immediate policy attention to address what she described as a deepening crisis in Assam's tea belt.

Kohima Cathedral Observes Good Friday with Solemn Prayers, Reflection in Nagaland

KOHIMA

The solemn observance of Good Friday was marked with deep devotion at the Mary Help of Christians Cathedral in Nagaland's capital, as the Christian community gathered to commemorate the passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The service was led by Bishop James Thoppil, drawing large numbers of the faithful who participated in a series of prayerful and reflective rituals central to the day's significance in the Christian calendar.

The programme began with a reenactment of the Passion of Christ by the Cathedral Catholic Youth Movement, depicting the final hours and suffering of Jesus. The enactment set a contemplative tone for the obser-



ance, leading into the formal liturgical service.

Devotees then took part in the

Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Veneration of the Holy Cross and the distribution of Holy

Communion. The congregation maintained a reverent silence throughout, reflecting the somber nature of the occasion.

Special intercessory prayers were offered for the universal Church, global leaders, and people facing hardship, echoing messages of peace, reconciliation, and compassion.

A key highlight of the observance was the Veneration of the Cross, during which worshippers approached the altar in silence to pay homage, symbolising Christ's sacrifice and enduring love for humanity.

The ceremony concluded in silence, leaving the faithful in quiet reflection as they await the celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, the most significant event in the Christian faith.

Tripura Congress Unveils TTAADC Manifesto, Pledges Transparency, Tribal Rights Push



AGARTALA

The Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) released its manifesto for the upcoming Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections, outlining a roadmap focused on transparency, protection of tribal rights, and inclusive development.

The manifesto was unveiled by Congress in-charge and MP Saptagiri Ulaka, alongside TPCC president Ashish Kumar Saha, MLA Birajit Sinha, and other party leaders. Highlighting its core agenda, the Congress identified eight priority areas, including transparent and accountable governance within the district council, safeguarding land and forest rights of indigenous communities, and promoting education and skill development. The manifesto also emphasises infrastructure expansion, employment generation, and preservation of tribal culture and identity.

Speaking at the launch, Ulaka expressed confidence in the party's electoral prospects, particularly in the Dharmanagar by-election, where Congress candidate Chayan Bhattacharya is in the fray. He said the party is stepping up its campaign efforts with a series of outreach programmes, including a planned bike rally and a major public meeting.

Ulaka further stated that the Congress would contest the TTAADC polls in alliance with its partners, reiterating the party's longstanding commitment to tribal welfare and development.

Taking aim at the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, Congress leaders alleged that key demands related to the district council have remained unaddressed, accusing the government of attempting to mislead the public.

Reaffirming its position, the party said it aims to strengthen the functioning of the autonomous district council while improving living standards across tribal areas through targeted welfare measures and inclusive governance.

With polling approaching, the manifesto release marks a key step in the Congress's campaign strategy to regain political ground in Tripura's tribal regions.

'Greater Tipraland' with Bangladesh Areas 'Unrealistic, Illegal': Tripura CM Manik Saha Hits Out at TMP Chief

AGARTALA

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha strongly criticised Tipra Motha Party (TMP) chief Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma over his call for a 'Greater Tipraland' incorporating parts of Bangladesh, terming the proposal "unrealistic" and an "illegal statement" that could mislead indigenous communities.

Addressing a campaign rally at Gabardi market in West Tripura, Saha said the demand to include areas of Bangladesh in the proposed state was impractical and potentially violative of legal and constitutional boundaries. "Is it possible?" he asked, warning that such statements could invite legal consequences.

Debbarma had earlier proposed the idea of a 'Greater Tipraland' by including regions such as Cox's Bazar, Chittagong, and Khagrachhari, while appealing for unity among the Tiprasa people. Responding to this, Saha said similar claims had been made in the past by individuals outside India, suggesting an attempt to



create confusion among the public.

"This is nothing but a deliberate attempt to mislead people," the Chief Minister said, adding that such rhetoric could have serious implications.

The remarks came against the backdrop of reported tensions at Gabardi market, where shopkeepers allegedly shut

down businesses following pressure from TMP supporters. Saha criticised such tactics, stating that coercion would not translate into electoral support.

"One can't secure votes by imposing force. The businessmen who thought of voting for the TMP may think twice," he said, expressing confidence that voters

would exercise their democratic rights in favour of the BJP.

Gabardi falls under the Amtali-Golaghati constituency of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), where elections are scheduled shortly. The contest is being closely watched amid shifting political equations between the BJP and TMP, who remain allies in the state government but are contesting separately in the council polls. Reiterating his government's commitment to indigenous welfare, Saha referred to the Tiprasa Accord signed in March 2024, aimed at addressing long-standing demands of tribal communities. He also questioned the intent of parties distancing themselves from the agreement, remarking, "If one doesn't want to stay with us, how can we stay together?"

The Chief Minister further raised questions over the funding of the TMP's election campaign, suggesting that the matter would come under scrutiny. "We know where the funds are coming from, and justice will be done when the BJP forms the government at the tribal council," he said.

Polling for 28 seats of the TTAADC is scheduled for April 12, with counting set for April 17, setting the stage for a high-stakes contest in Tripura's tribal politics.

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CBSE unveils new NEP-aligned curriculum: Three-language formula, dual-level Math and Science from 2026



NEW DELHI

Revamping a course of study aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP), the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Friday announced a new curriculum framework that will introduce a three-language formula from Class 6 and a two-level system in mathematics and science for Class 9, beginning the 2026-27 academic session.

The new framework shows a shift in how subjects are structured and assessed, with a focus on flexibility, multilingualism, and competency-based learning.

According to officials, the three-language formula will be implemented in a phased manner, with students from Class 6 required to study three languages, at least two of which must be Indian. The languages will be organised under a structured framework comprising R1, R2, and R3 levels, as recommended by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

The third language (R3) will be introduced for Class 6 students from the 2026-27 session, ensuring that learners study a minimum of two Indian languages. However, officials clarified that the R3 component will

not yet be mandatory for Class 9 students. Full implementation of the three-language formula will take effect when the current Class 6 batch appears for board examinations in 2031.

CBSE stated that the provisions for exemptions will remain in place for students returning from foreign schools where the third language studied is not available in India, though they will still be required to meet the overall subject requirements.

A major structural reform will also be introduced in mathematics and science at the secondary level. From Class 9 onwards, students will follow a two-tier system comprising a mandatory standard level and an optional advanced level. All students will appear for a common three-hour, 80-mark standard examination. Those opting for deeper subject engagement can take an additional one-hour advanced paper of 25 marks, designed to assess higher-order thinking and conceptual understanding.

Importantly, performance in the advanced paper will not be added to the overall aggregate score. Instead, students securing 50 per cent or more in the advanced component will have this achievement

recorded separately on their mark sheets. The first batch of students to take Class 10 board examinations under this new system will do so in 2028.

The board is also expanding its focus on emerging skills, with computational thinking and artificial intelligence being gradually integrated into the curriculum. These subjects have already been introduced as modules with internal assessments for Classes 9 and 10 and will become compulsory board examination subjects for Class 10 by 2029. Foundational exposure has also been initiated for students from Classes 3 to 8.

In addition, CBSE has made art education, vocational education, and physical education mandatory for Classes 9 and 10. While art and physical education will continue to be assessed through internal school-based evaluations, vocational education will become a compulsory subject with an annual or board examination from the 2027-28 academic session.

Officials said the changes are aimed at promoting holistic development, skill-based learning, and greater academic flexibility, in line with the broader objectives of the NEP.

Bengal polls: Election Commission directs withdrawal of security cover for politicians with criminal cases



KOLKATA

The Election Commission of India (ECI) sought a status report in connection with its directives to withdraw government-provided security cover for political leaders with criminal antecedents from West Bengal police administration as the state is all set to go for polling on April 23 and 29.

The ECI, in its directives to the nodal officers of West Bengal Police (WBP), has asked to send compliance report by noon, following the expiry of its deadline—Thursday midnight—for withdrawing such security coverage.

Leaders, who have been granted bails or are out of jails on parole cutting across their political affiliations, won't be given

security coverage by the state government from now.

The ECI had directed the district magistrates (DMs) cum district election officers (DEOs) and superintendents of police across districts in the state to lift the existing "unnecessary" security coverage for these leaders facing criminal cases.

It had also directed that security cover would also be withdrawn for leaders who have been enjoying such privileges considering their portfolios and so-called threat perceptions.

Besides these directives, the Commission has also asked the police administrations in the state to nab those persons who are accused in non-bailable cases within 10 days.

Alongside, the ECI has directed both the state police and

Kolkata Police to expedite disposal of poll-related criminal cases from previous elections.

Senior field officers—including sub-division police officers (SDPOs) and deputy superintendents of police (DSPs)—have been tasked with preparing lists of absconding accused and launching targeted raids to apprehend them.

Station-level officers have been instructed to identify crime-prone pockets, track history-sheeters, and curb potential poll-related violence.

The Commission has also sought clarifications from the state director general of police (DGP) Siddh Nath Gupta on so many leaders and workers belonging to the ruling Trinamool Congress get state-provided security cover. Gupta has

been asked to submit report in this regard within two or three days, ECI sources said.

Around 2,185 policemen are engaged for security cover for around 832 Trinamool Congress leaders and workers and nearly 140 supporters of the ruling party much the poll dates in Bengal are announced.

"Why do the ruling party leaders require so many state police personnel for the security? DGP has been asked to submit report considering the issue impartially and professionally," sources said requesting anonymity.

The commission has also emphasised the need to ensure security for all political campaign activities, regardless of party, and to safeguard personnel engaged in election duties.

After scrutinising reports of violence related to deletions of adjudicated voters from supplementary lists prepared by judicial officers the commission has also decided to extend deployment of central armed paramilitary forces (CAPF) after announcement of counting of elections on 4 May in the state.

Violence had erupted in parts of the state following the 2021 assembly elections, which saw the ruling Trinamool Congress return to power for a third consecutive term.

Within 24 hours of the results, at least a dozen people were reported killed in post-poll political clashes, with the toll believed to be higher than the casualties recorded during the month-long election process.

In addition to the extended deployment, 200 companies of CAPF's will remain stationed in the state to secure electronic voting machines (EVMs), strong rooms, and counting centres until the completion of the counting process, according to the ECI sources.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump proposes cuts in 'woke' domestic programs to increase defense spending to USD 1.5 trillion

WASHINGTON

President Donald Trump has proposed boosting defense spending to \$1.5 trillion in his 2027 budget released Friday, the largest such request in decades, reflecting his emphasis on U.S. military investments over domestic programs.

The sizable increase for the Pentagon, some 44%, had been telegraphed by the Republican president even before the U.S.-led war against Iran. The president's plan would also reduce spending on non-defense programs by 10%.

"President Trump promised to reinvest in America's national security infrastructure, to make sure our nation is safe in a dangerous world," wrote Budget Director Russell Vought.

The president's annual budget is considered a reflection of the administration's values and does not carry the force of law. The massive document typically highlights an administration's priorities, but Congress, which handles federal spending issues, is free to reject it and often does.

This year's White House document is intended to provide a road map from the president to Congress as lawmakers build their own budgets and annual appropriations bills to keep the government funded. Vought spoke to House GOP lawmakers on a private call Thursday.

Trump, speaking ahead of an address to the nation this week about the Iran war, signaled the military is his priority, setting up a clash ahead in Congress.

"We're fighting wars. We can't take care of day care," Trump said at a private White House event Wednesday.

"It's not possible for us to take care of day care, Medicaid, Medicare—all these individual things," he said. "They can do it on a state basis. You can't do it on a federal."

Money for immigration enforcement, air traffic controllers and national parks

Among the priorities the White

House called for:

— Supporting the Trump administration's immigration enforcement and deportation operations by eliminating aspects of a refugee resettlement aid program, maintaining Immigration and Customs Enforcement funds at current year levels and drawing on last year's increases for the Department of Homeland Security funds to continue opening detention facilities, including 100,000 beds for adults and 30,000 for families.

— A 13% increase in funding for the Department of Justice to focus on violent criminals and the president's promise to stop what the White House calls migrant crime.

— A \$10 billion fund within the National Park Service for "construction and beautification" projects in Washington, D.C.

— A \$481 million increase in funding to enhance aviation safety and support an air traffic controller hiring surge.

Cuts to green energy, housing and health programs

— Cancels more than \$15 billion from the Biden-era bipartisan infrastructure law, including funds for renewable energy projects and cuts to the National Oceans and Atmospheric Association, or NOAA, grants.

— 19% cut in the Department of Agriculture, ending certain university grants, a 13% cut for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and about a 12% decrease to the Health and Human Services department, including cuts to a low-income heating assistance program.

The White House is touting cuts of what it calls "woke programs" that often direct federal investments toward low-income communities. The budget used the word "woke" 34 times.

For example, the administration is looking to cut Community Services Block Grants, which funds activities such as financial and job counseling and helping people obtain adequate

housing. The administration says its cuts would target grants "hijacked by radicals" to promote equity-building and green energy initiatives.

The president also seeks to cut \$106 million in funding from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, which it says has "pushed radical gender ideology onto children."

Supporters and detractors

The Republican chairmen of the House and Senate Armed Services committees applauded Trump's request for defense spending, saying the money would ensure the country's military remains the most advanced in the world while confronting growing threats from China, Russia, Iran and others.

"America is facing the most dangerous global environment since World War II," said Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., and Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Ala.

The top Democrat on House Budget Committee, Rep. Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, said the president was demanding a massive increase in defense while cutting billions from health care, housing and more.

"This budget represents 'America Last,'" Boyle said.

With the nation running nearly \$2 trillion annual deficits and the debt swelling past \$39 trillion, the federal balance sheets have long been operating in the red.

About two-thirds of the nation's estimated \$7 trillion in annual spending covers the Medicare and Medicaid health care programs, as well as Social Security income, which are essentially growing—along with an aging population—on autopilot.

It's the rest of the annual budget where much of the debate in Congress takes place, as Democrats over the years have insisted that changes in the level of spending for defense and non-defense need to be equitable.

The GOP's big tax breaks bill that Trump signed into law last year boosted his priorities beyond the budget pro-

cess—with at least \$150 billion for the Pentagon over the next several years, and \$170 billion for Trump's immigration and deportation operations at the Department of Homeland Security.

The administration is counting on its allies in the Republican-led Congress to push part of president's beefed up defense spending through its own budget process, as it was able to do last year.

It suggests \$1.1 trillion for defense would come through the regular appropriations process, which typically requires support from both parties for approval, while \$350 billion would go in the budget reconciliation process that Republicans can accomplish on their own, through party-line majority votes.

The president's budget arrives as the House and Senate remain tangled over current-year spending and stalemated over DHS funding, with Democrats demanding changes to Trump's immigration enforcement regime that Republicans are unwilling to accept.

Trump announced Thursday he would sign an executive order to pay all DHS workers who have gone without paychecks during the record-long partial government shutdown that has reached 49 days.

Last year, in the president's first budget since returning to the White House, Trump sought to fulfill his promise to vastly reduce the size and scope of the federal government, reflecting the efforts of billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

However, while Trump had sought a roughly one-fifth decrease in non-defense spending, Congress kept such spending relatively flat.

Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, called Trump's new budget "morally bankrupt."

"Trump wants to build a ballroom," Murray said, referring to the White House renovation. "I want to build more affordable housing, and only one of us sits on the Appropriations Committee.

TEHRAN

Iranian and American forces were racing each other early Saturday to recover a crew member of the first US fighter jet to go down inside Iran since the start of the war.

Tehran said it had shot down the F-15 warplane, while US media reported American special forces had rescued one of its two crew members, with the other still missing.

Iran's military also said it downed a US A-10 ground attack aircraft in the Gulf, with US media saying the pilot was rescued. The war erupted more than a month ago with US-Israeli strikes on Iran that killed supreme leader Ali Khamenei, triggering retaliation that spread the conflict throughout the Middle East, convulsing the global economy and impacting millions of people worldwide.

US Central Command did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the loss of the F-15, but White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said: "The president has been briefed".

President Donald Trump told NBC the F-15 loss would not affect negotiations with Iran, saying: "No, not at all. No, it's war." A spokesperson for the Iranian military's central operational command said "an American hostile fighter jet in central Iranian airspace was struck and destroyed by the IRGC Aerospace Force's advanced air defence system".

"The jet was completely obliterated, and further searches are ongoing."

An Iranian television reporter on a local official channel said anyone who captured a crew member alive would "receive a valuable reward".

The US military has

Iran hunts crew member of crashed US jet after one reported rescued

announced the loss of several aircraft during Iran operations, including one tanker that crashed in Iraq and three F-15s shot down by Kuwaiti friendly fire.

Retired US brigadier general Houston Cantwell—who has 400 hours of combat flight experience—said key goals for downed pilots include determining their location and figuring out how to communicate.

"My priority would be, first of all, concealment, because I don't want to be captured," he told AFP.

Fresh strikes meanwhile hit Israel, Iran, Lebanon and Gulf countries—and large blasts rocked northern Tehran, an AFP journalist said. Israel said it had launched a wave of strikes in the Iranian capital, alongside parallel attacks in Beirut.

Strikes by all sides have increasingly targeted economic and industrial sites, raising fears of wider disruption to global energy supplies.

In the area around a bridge west of Tehran that was targeted by the United States, an AFP reporter saw a villa and residential buildings with blown-out windows—but no military installations.

According to the martyrs foundation of Alborz province, cited by the official IRNA agency, the attack killed 13 civilians and wounded dozens.

Writing in the US journal Foreign Affairs, Iran's former foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, said Tehran should make a deal with Washington to end the war by offering to curb its nuclear programme and reopen the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for sanctions relief.

Iran has virtually blocked the key waterway since the war began, where one-fifth of

the world's oil and natural gas normally passes.

Of the few ships that have managed to cross, most have had links to Iran, with 60 per cent of commodity-bearing ships crossing the strait either coming from Iran or heading there, an AFP analysis of maritime data showed.

Iranian military spokesperson Ebrahim Zolfaghari warned that Iran would increase its own attacks on energy sites in the region in response to threats from Trump of attacks on infrastructure.

A drone attack on a refinery owned by Kuwait's national oil company on Friday sparked fires, while a separate Iranian attack damaged a power and desalination complex.

Bahrain said four of its citizens sustained "minor injuries" as a result of shrapnel from an intercepted Iranian drone.

And one person was killed and four others injured after a fire at a gas complex in the United Arab Emirates caused by falling debris from an intercepted attack.

The Israeli military said Friday it had struck more than 3,500 targets across Lebanon in the month since fighting with Iran-backed Hezbollah began.

It added that it would attack two bridges in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa region "in order to prevent the transfer of reinforcements and military equipment".

Lebanese state media later reported that Israel destroyed one bridge in the region.

Lebanon's health ministry said Thursday that 1,345 people had been killed—and 4,040 wounded—since the start of the war.

Hezbollah has so far not announced its losses.

Ledger vs Longing: Inside the BJP-Congress Manifesto Battle for Assam



WHO OFFERS MORE TO ASSAM VOTERS?

With barely days to go before Assam heads to the polls on April 9, the state's political contest has crystallised into a deeper ideological and strategic clash between its two principal rivals—the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress. Their manifestos, released in the final stretch of campaigning, are not merely policy documents; they are competing narratives of Assam's past, present, and future.

On one side stands the BJP, armed with an expansive, data-driven Sankalp Patra that foregrounds governance delivery, infrastructure expansion, and a strong articulation of identity politics. On the other is the Congress, whose more compact People's Manifesto leans heavily on welfare guarantees, inclusive rhetoric, and promises of institutional reform.

Together, these documents transform the election into a referendum between continuity and correction—between a government that asks voters to trust its record, and an opposition that urges them to imagine an alternative.

Two Narratives, Two Openings
The contrast begins from the very first page.

The BJP manifesto opens like an audit report. It meticulously catalogues achievements since 2016, comparing what it calls the "transformation" under NDA governance with the preceding UPA years. Statistics on economic growth, bridges across the Brahmaputra, healthcare expansion, and welfare schemes dominate the opening section. The underlying message is clear: the government has delivered, and continuity will ensure further progress.

The Congress manifesto, by contrast, begins with immediacy and impact. Its opening section lays out five headline guarantees—direct cash transfers to women, financial support for entrepreneurship, pensions for senior citizens, enhanced healthcare coverage, and land rights reforms. It is a direct appeal to voters' lived realities, foregrounding what they stand to gain rather than what has already been done.

In essence, the BJP begins with a receipt; Congress begins with an offer.



Learning how to learn is the most important skill to acquire.

Vision
The BJP's document is expansive, running into dozens of pages structured around

thematic pillars such as security, infrastructure, youth empowerment, women's welfare, and agricultural growth. It first establishes its narrative of "visible change" before transitioning into future commitments—31 major pledges backed by detailed sectoral plans.

Congress, meanwhile, frames its vision around the idea of a "Natun Bor Axom" (New Greater Assam), drawing from historical and cultural memory. It identifies five key stakeholder groups—women, youth, farmers, small entrepreneurs, and tea workers—and outlines targeted commitments for each. Notably, it includes timelines for implementation over 100 days, one year, and five years, attempting to address concerns over execution.

Where the BJP's manifesto is technocratic and layered, Congress opts for clarity and emotional resonance.

Identity: Assertion vs Inclusion
Perhaps the sharpest divergence lies in how the two parties approach the question of identity—a central theme in Assam's politics.

The BJP frames identity as something under threat. Its manifesto promises strict implementation of laws to detect and deport illegal immigrants, reclaim encroached land, and introduce legislation against what it terms "Love Jihad" and "Land Jihad." It also reiterates its commitment to a Uniform Civil Code (with exemptions for tribal areas) and the protection of religious institutions.

This is a vision of Assam rooted in civilisational defence, where governance is intertwined with preserving cultural and demographic balance.

Congress, in contrast, adopts a more pluralistic tone. It speaks of a "shared Assamese identity" and emphasises constitutional safeguards, indigenous land rights, and community harmony. Its commitments include converting land titles for indigenous people, providing land to erosion-affected families, and probing large-scale land allocations.

Notably, Congress avoids direct references to illegal immigration in its manifesto, instead focusing on institutional protections and inclusive development.

Women: A Decisive Electoral Bloc

Both parties recognise women as a critical voting constituency, and their manifestos reflect this.

The BJP builds on its flagship Orunodoi scheme, promising to significantly increase monthly financial assistance and expand coverage to millions more households. It also outlines initiatives aimed at women's entrepreneur-

ship, healthcare, and safety, including all-women police units and community-run canteens.

Congress raises the stakes by proposing universal cash transfers to all women—removing eligibility constraints altogether. It complements this with promises of job reservations, business grants, extended maternity benefits, and institutional mechanisms to address gender-based violence.

The difference here is strategic: the BJP refines and expands an existing welfare model, while Congress proposes a more sweeping, universal framework.

Economic Vision: Big Projects vs Grassroots Revival

The BJP's economic blueprint is ambitious and infrastructure-heavy. It aims to transform Assam into a major economic hub, targeting massive investments in roads, airports, industrial corridors, and high-tech sectors. It highlights ongoing projects such as semiconductor manufacturing, fertiliser plants, and bio-ethanol production as evidence of momentum.

Congress, on the other hand, emphasises reviving traditional industries and strengthening local economies. It focuses on reopening closed mills, promoting regional industrial corridors, and ensuring local participation in economic activity.

In agriculture, both parties promise support measures, but with different emphases. The BJP focuses on financial assistance and mechanisation, while Congress stresses income growth, cooperative credit systems, and widespread adoption of organic farming.

The divide reflects two economic philosophies: one driven by large-scale capital investment, the other by decentralised livelihood support.

Healthcare: Expansion vs Accessibility

Healthcare is another area where both parties promise transformative change.

The BJP proposes massive investments to expand infrastructure, including new hospitals, specialised treatment centres, and universal coverage under existing national schemes. It points to improvements in health indicators as validation of its approach.

Congress counters with a bold promise of significantly higher health insurance coverage per family, along with systemic reforms such as guaranteed ambulance response times, family doctor programmes, and targeted public health missions.

The BJP's model is infrastructure-led; Congress focuses on accessibility and affordability.

Youth and Jobs
Employment remains a central

concern, and both manifestos attempt to address it.

The BJP highlights its track record in government recruitment and promises additional job creation, entrepreneurship support, and global employment opportunities. It also outlines plans for educational reforms and skill development initiatives.

Congress focuses on timelines and accountability, promising legally enforceable deadlines for recruitment processes. It also proposes startup funding, education reforms, and cultural fellowships, including initiatives inspired by Assamese cultural icons.

The contrast here lies in delivery versus assurance—one emphasises past recruitment numbers, the other future guarantees.

Tea Workers: A Crucial Vote Bank

Both parties devote significant attention to tea garden communities, which hold electoral sway across multiple constituencies.

The BJP promises wage increases, land rights, educational infrastructure, and targeted welfare schemes, while highlighting benefits already delivered.

Congress goes further by proposing structural changes, including recognising tea as a primary industry and ensuring industrial-level wages for workers. It also promises housing, education, and healthcare improvements tailored to the community.

Floods and Climate
Assam's recurring floods remain a persistent challenge.

The BJP proposes a large-scale, investment-driven flood management mission, including river rejuvenation and embankment monitoring systems.

Congress takes a broader approach, integrating flood management into climate resilience planning, with proposals for environmental reforms, renewable energy expansion, and scientific river basin management.

Governance and Accountability

Congress places strong emphasis on anti-corruption measures, proposing independent oversight bodies, restrictions on political patronage, and enhanced transparency mechanisms.

The BJP focuses on administrative efficiency, digital governance, and decentralisation, highlighting its record in service delivery and plans for further institutional expansion.

The Fiscal Question
One notable omission in both manifestos is a detailed discussion of fiscal feasibility. The scale of promises—from infrastructure investments to welfare guarantees—raises questions about how these commitments will be funded within the state's financial constraints.

Both documents operate in a space of high ambition, with limited engagement on budgetary trade-offs.

The Emotional Core
Beyond policies and numbers, each manifesto conveys a distinct emotional appeal.

The BJP's message is rooted in confidence: it presents itself as a proven administrator with a clear roadmap and strong backing from the Centre. Its pitch is one of stability, continuity, and national alignment.

Congress appeals to sentiment and memory. It evokes a vision of a more inclusive and harmonious Assam, positioning itself as a corrective force that can restore balance and address perceived inequities.

The Verdict Ahead
As Assam prepares to vote, the choice before its electorate is not merely between two parties but between two narratives.

One asks voters to trust what has already been achieved and to extend that trajectory. The other asks them to believe in the possibility of change and a reimagined future.

Whether the electorate leans toward performance-backed continuity or promise-driven transformation will ultimately determine the state's political direction for the next five years.

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