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**PERSPECTIVE**

Bob Marley's last words were 'Money can't buy life'.

**Meghalaya Class 12 Results Declared: 86.84% Pass, Marginal Dip from Last Year**

**SHILLONG**  
The Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) on Tuesday announced the Class 12 examination results, recording an overall pass percentage of 86.84%, slightly lower than last year's 87.10%. Out of 48,623 candidates who appeared for the examinations, 42,228 students successfully cleared them, reflecting a largely consistent performance across the state despite the marginal dip. Gender-wise results remained strong, with boys registering a pass percentage of 94.14%, while 92.88% of girls passed the examination.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma congratulated the successful candidates and toppers. In a message, he praised students for their achievements and wished them success in their future endeavours. Among the toppers, Waangal Lama of Gorkha Pathshala Higher Secondary School, Shillong, secured the first position with 585 marks. Vishal Kumar of Embee Rosebud Higher Secondary School, Tura, stood second with 576 marks.

The third position was jointly secured by Prajakta Roy of Seven Set Higher Secondary School, Shillong, and Prinita Das of Pechon A Sangma Memorial Police Public School, Tura, both scoring 575 marks.

District-wise, West Jaintia Hills recorded the highest pass percentage at 94.99%, followed by South West Khasi Hills at 94.60% and East Khasi Hills at 94.17%.

**WHO SAID WHAT**

**The Congress is not only corrupt but also unwilling to work. As a result, many projects in Assam remained stalled for years. We are rapidly changing this situation. ~ Narendra Modi, PM**

**'Security Key to Growth': Amit Shah Links Barak Valley Development to Curbing Infiltration**

**"WE ARE STRIKING THE NAMES OF INFILTRATORS FROM THE VOTER LIST": AMIT SHAH**

**SILCHAR**  
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday asserted that sustainable development in Assam's Barak Valley depends on strong internal security and curbing infiltration, as he addressed an election rally in Hailakandi.

Campaigning for BJP candidate Milon Das, Shah emphasised that economic growth and welfare delivery are closely tied to a stable law-and-order environment. "Lasting development is only possible when there is peace and stability. Without security, progress cannot sustain," he said.

Striking a balance between security and development, Shah highlighted efforts by the BJP-led governments at both the Centre and in Assam to improve law and order while accelerating infrastructure and social sector initiatives.

Outlining a roadmap for the Barak Valley region, he pointed to ongoing and proposed upgrades in road connectivity, healthcare infrastructure, and admin-



istrative decentralisation. He also referenced the planned establishment of an Assam Secretariat in Silchar, aimed at reducing dependency on Dispur for governance and improving administrative efficiency in the region.

Shah highlighted investments in healthcare, including expanded medical and cancer care facilities, as part of efforts to improve access to quality treatment.

Focusing on welfare measures, the Home Minister underscored initiatives targeting tea garden communities. Citing wage growth, he said daily wages for tea workers in Assam have increased

from Rs 94 before 2014 to Rs 258 under the current government, with a target of raising it to Rs 500 per day within the next five years.

He also noted that around 3.5 lakh families across nearly 700 tea gardens have been granted land pattas, calling it a major step toward securing land rights for workers. "In the first phase itself, this process has been completed in 106 tea estates across 20 districts," he added.

Shah further outlined promises for farmers and vulnerable sections, including enhanced income support, assured procurement at minimum support price (MSP), subsidies for farm mechanisation, financial assistance for women, affordable essential commodities, and housing for economically weaker sections.

Crediting the state government for improving law and order, Shah said peace accords and initiatives to integrate youth into the mainstream have helped Assam transition from unrest toward

stability and growth.

Calling for electoral support, he urged voters to back the BJP and its ally Asom Gana Parishad, stating that continuity in governance would accelerate development in Hailakandi and the wider Barak Valley.

"A stable government will ensure that security-led development continues to benefit every section of society," he said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday, April 7 said the government is taking steps to remove alleged "infiltrators" from electoral rolls, while accusing opposition leaders of opposing measures aimed at addressing illegal immigration.

Addressing a public rally in Assam's Cachar district, Shah claimed that names of "infiltrators" are being identified and struck off voter lists. He criticised West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, alleging that their opposition to such actions is driven by political considerations.

Shah also referred to the debate surrounding the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), stating that certain opposition leaders had earlier opposed granting citizenship rights to refugee communities, particularly Bengali Hindus, while now allegedly supporting undocumented migrants for electoral gains.

"They opposed the CAA and resisted giving rights to refugee Bengali brothers and sisters, but are now welcoming infiltrators because they are seen as a vote bank," Shah said at the rally.

Reiterating the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) position, the Home Minister asserted that the government would continue efforts to identify and deport illegal immigrants in accordance with the law. He maintained that such actions are necessary to safeguard national security and the integrity of the electoral process.

Opposition parties have consistently criticised the BJP's stance, alleging that it risks targeting specific communities and raising concerns over due process.

**Rocket Strike on Civilian Home in Manipur's Bishnupur Kills Two Children, Heightens Hill-Valley Tensions**

**THREE KILLED IN CRPF FIRING DURING PROTEST; INTERNET SUSPENDED IN FIVE MANIPUR DISTRICTS**

**IMPHAL**  
Fresh violence has jolted Manipur after a suspected militant rocket attack on a village in Bishnupur district left two young children dead and their mother critically injured in the early hours of Tuesday.

The incident occurred in Tronglaobi, where a projectile-believed to be a rocket-struck a civilian residence with devastating force. According to initial reports, suspected Kuki militants targeted the house, triggering a powerful explosion that killed two siblings on the spot and left their mother with serious injuries.

The victims have been identified as a five-year-old boy and his five-month-old sister. The blast caused extensive damage to the structure and sparked panic across the village, with residents rushing to the site in a desperate attempt to rescue those trapped under debris.

Local accounts suggest that the projectile may have been launched from nearby hill slopes, indicating a firing range of over three kilometres. The village lies along the sensitive hill-valley interface near



Churachandpur district—a region that has witnessed recurring tensions and sporadic violence in recent months.

In the aftermath of the attack, security forces have intensified deployment across particularly in vulnerable pockets along the hill-valley boundary. Search operations and area domination exercises have been launched in adjoining hill areas to track down those responsible.

Authorities said surveillance has been heightened across other sensitive villages to prevent any escalation, even as the latest incident threatens to further strain the fragile security situation in the state.

At least three people were killed and several others injured after Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel allegedly opened fire on protesters in Manipur's Bishnupur district on Tuesday, amid

escalating tensions following a deadly militant attack.

The incident occurred at Tronglaobi Maning in the Gelmom area, where a large crowd had gathered outside a CRPF camp to the recent projectile attack that killed two minor siblings and left their mother critically injured. According to eyewitness accounts, protesters accused security forces of failing to prevent the earlier attack and alleged that armed groups were operating freely in nearby areas. Tensions escalated when sections of the crowd reportedly attempted to breach the camp, triggering clashes with security personnel.

Witnesses claimed that some barracks and vehicles inside the camp were damaged during the unrest. As the situation spiralled, CRPF personnel allegedly opened fire to disperse the crowd.

At least three people were reported killed on the spot, while several others sustained injuries. The wounded were rushed to nearby hospitals in ambulances and private vehicles, with some critically injured later referred to medical facilities in Imphal for advanced treatment. Officials,

however, were yet to issue an official confirmation on the exact number of casualties at the time of filing this report.

The violence comes against the backdrop of widespread anger over the suspected militant attack in Tronglaobi, where two children were killed after an explosive projectile was hurled at a residence.

Protests erupted across multiple parts of the state, including Moirang, Pangei, Mantripukhri, Lilong and areas along Tiddim Road. In Imphal city, demonstrators blocked key roads at Checkon, Keishamthong, Kwakeithel, Singamei and Khurai, allowing only emergency services to pass.

Amid the deteriorating law and order situation, the Manipur government imposed a three-day suspension of internet services across five districts - Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal, Kakching and Bishnupur - effective from 2 pm on April 7.

The shutdown covers mobile data, broadband, VSAT and VPN services, with authorities citing concerns over the spread of misinformation and potential mobilisation of mobs through social media platforms.

**Assam Police Search Pawan Khera's Delhi Residence, Seize Devices in Probe Linked**



**GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI**  
An Assam Police team on Tuesday conducted a search at the Delhi residence of Congress leader Pawan Khera and seized electronic devices as part of an ongoing investigation linked to allegations made against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his family.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Debojit Nath, speaking to reporters outside the residence, said Khera was not present at the time of the visit. He confirmed that a search operation was carried out and certain electronic devices were taken into custody for further

examination. Police officials said "incriminating material" was recovered during the search, though specific details were not disclosed citing the ongoing nature of the investigation. The case has been registered at the Crime Branch Police Station in Guwahati, Nath said, adding that efforts are underway to trace Khera, whose current whereabouts are yet to be ascertained.

Officials further stated that due procedure was followed, with the Assam Police team informing the Delhi Police upon arrival. A local police unit subsequently joined and assisted in the search operation. The development comes amid a sharp political escalation after Khera alleged that the Chief Minister's wife possessed multiple passports and that details of her assets had not been fully disclosed in election filings.

Responding to the allegations, Sarma dismissed the claims as "baseless" and accused the Congress of spreading misinformation allegedly sourced from foreign social media networks to influence the Assam Assembly elections. He termed the accusations "malicious" and said they amounted to a punishable offence.

Police confirmed that an FIR has been registered against Khera in connection with his statements, intensifying the political and legal confrontation between the ruling dispensation and the opposition.

**Kanchanjunga Express Hits Buffalo Herd Inside Tunnel Near New Haflong**

**HALFLONG**  
Rail services on the Lumding-Badarpur hill section were briefly disrupted on Monday after the Kanchanjunga Express collided with a herd of buffaloes inside a tunnel near New Haflong in Assam's Dima Hasao district.

According to railway sources, the incident occurred around 11:55 am inside Tunnel No. 16, located close to New Haflong Hill station. The moving train struck a group of buffaloes that had strayed into the tunnel, resulting in multiple animal casualties and temporary obstruction of the track.

Preliminary reports indicated that several buffaloes were trapped near the locomotive following the impact. At least eight animals were found dead at the site, while others were reported injured.

Railway officials said teams from the Railway Engineering Department and the Railway Protection Force (RPF) were immediately rushed from New Haflong to the location. Clearance operations were launched to remove the carcasses and restore safe movement along the route. As part of the emergency response, the train was reversed back to New Haflong station to facilitate the removal of the animals and ensure the safety of the rake and tracks. Officials confirmed that the track was cleared soon after and train services on the Lumding-Badarpur hill section resumed normal operations following the completion of the exercise. No injuries to passengers or railway staff were reported. Authorities are expected to review safety protocols to prevent animals from entering vulnerable stretches of railway tracks, particularly tunnels in hilly terrain.

**Opposition Alliance to Win 72-73 Seats in Assam: Kharge**



**GUWAHATI**  
Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday asserted that the Opposition alliance is poised to form the next government in Assam, projecting a tally of 72-73 seats in the 126-member Assembly.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati, Kharge expressed confidence in the Congress-led alliance's electoral prospects, stating, "The Congress-led alliance is going to form the next government in Assam. We will win 72-73 seats."

He launched a sharp attack on Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging widespread corruption and accusing the government of operating "syndicates" across multiple sectors. "No Chief Minister in India is so egoistic and arrogant like him. He is working only for his family's development and running syndicates in tea, school, coal, egg, land and betel nut," Kharge claimed.

The Congress chief further alleged that members of the state Cabinet possess "assets worth thou-

sands of crores," and called for repercussions from the central leadership and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He specifically urged Mohan Bhagwat to comment on the allegations.

On the controversy surrounding Congress leader Pawan Khera and his claims regarding the Chief Minister's family, Kharge said investigative agencies under the central government should probe the matter. "They have already filed an FIR against Khera. Let them investigate. We will face the case as it progresses," he said.

Kharge also took aim at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asserting that he "has no right" to criticise Congress leader Rahul Gandhi or the Gandhi family, citing their historical role and sacrifices for the country.

Responding to allegations that the Congress engages in minority appeasement, Kharge dismissed the charge, stating that such claims are made by those with "little understanding."



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## FROM ROTE TO REAL

**A** quiet but powerful transformation is unfolding in India's classrooms. Beginning the academic year 2025-26, the Central Board of Secondary Education has made Skill Education, titled Kaushal Bodh, compulsory for students of Classes VI to VIII across all affiliated schools. This is not a minor curricular adjustment. It is a decisive shift in how the nation understands learning itself.

For decades, middle school education has largely revolved around textbooks, note making, and examinations. While academic foundations remain essential, the world our children are preparing to enter demands far more. Creativity, collaboration, technological fluency, emotional intelligence, and problem solving are no longer optional attributes. They are survival skills. In making skill education mandatory, CBSE has acknowledged this reality and responded with intent.

Under the new framework, schools will devote nearly 110 hours per year in each grade to structured, project based modules drawn from NCERT's Kaushal Bodh activity books. These hours are not meant to replace academic subjects but to enrich them. Learning is organised across three domains: Living Things, Materials and Machines, and Human Services. Together, they ensure that children experience knowledge not as isolated information but as something living, practical, and deeply connected to the world around them.

In the Living Things domain, students may cultivate school gardens, observe ecosystems, and understand sustainability through direct engagement. In Materials and Machines, they will experiment with crafts, basic tools, coding, artificial intelligence concepts, and hands on construction tasks. Through Human Services, they will explore financial literacy, health awareness, community engagement, and essential life skills. Assessment will move beyond memory recall to continuous, project based evaluation that values participation, reflection, teamwork, and innovation.

This reform draws its strength from the spirit of the National Education Policy 2020, which advocates experiential learning and reduced exam pressure. It recognises that meaningful education cannot thrive in an atmosphere of fear and mechanical repetition. When students build, design, plant, repair, calculate, or collaborate, they do more than complete an assignment. They discover their own capabilities. They begin to see themselves not merely as learners preparing for marks but as individuals capable of creating value.

For students, this shift promises a more engaging and empowering school experience. A child who codes a simple application begins to understand logic and digital architecture. A group that plans a mock budget for a community event learns mathematics, responsibility, and teamwork in one exercise. A gardening project becomes a lesson in science, patience, and environmental ethics. Such exposure in middle school is critical, for it is during these formative years that curiosity either flourishes or fades.

Teachers stand at the heart of this transformation. The reform invites educators to evolve from instructors to facilitators of exploration. It calls for thoughtful planning, reflective discussions, and a willingness to experiment alongside students. CBSE and NCERT orientations aim to prepare teachers for this transition, yet the true success of the initiative will depend on the spirit with which it is embraced. When teachers encourage inquiry and allow space for creativity, classrooms come alive.

School leaders carry an equally vital responsibility. Timetables must be thoughtfully restructured. Composite skill labs or adaptable activity spaces must be envisioned, even within existing infrastructure. What matters is not elaborate equipment but a culture that values hands on engagement. Leadership commitment will determine whether Kaushal Bodh becomes transformative practice or a routine compliance exercise.

CBSE has also issued clear guidance to schools on how this transition should unfold in practice. Institutions are encouraged to integrate approximately 110 hours of skill learning each year through flexible timetabling, often by scheduling two consecutive periods twice a week to allow meaningful project work. Schools are advised to utilise the NCERT Kaushal Bodh activity books as core resources and develop composite skill labs or adaptable workspaces where students can experiment, build, and collaborate. Capacity building programmes conducted by CBSE are preparing teachers for this shift so that skill education does not remain a theoretical idea but becomes a vibrant, hands-on experience embedded within the culture of the school.

Parents, too, are partners in this journey. Skill education challenges the narrow definition of achievement as examination scores alone. When parents celebrate effort, creativity, and initiative, children gain confidence to explore without fear of failure. Conversations at home about projects, ideas, and community experiences will reinforce what schools seek to nurture.

The introduction of compulsory skill education at the middle school level signals a broader philosophical change. It affirms that education must prepare children not only to pass examinations but to participate meaningfully in society. It bridges the divide between thinking and doing, knowledge and action, aspiration and ability.

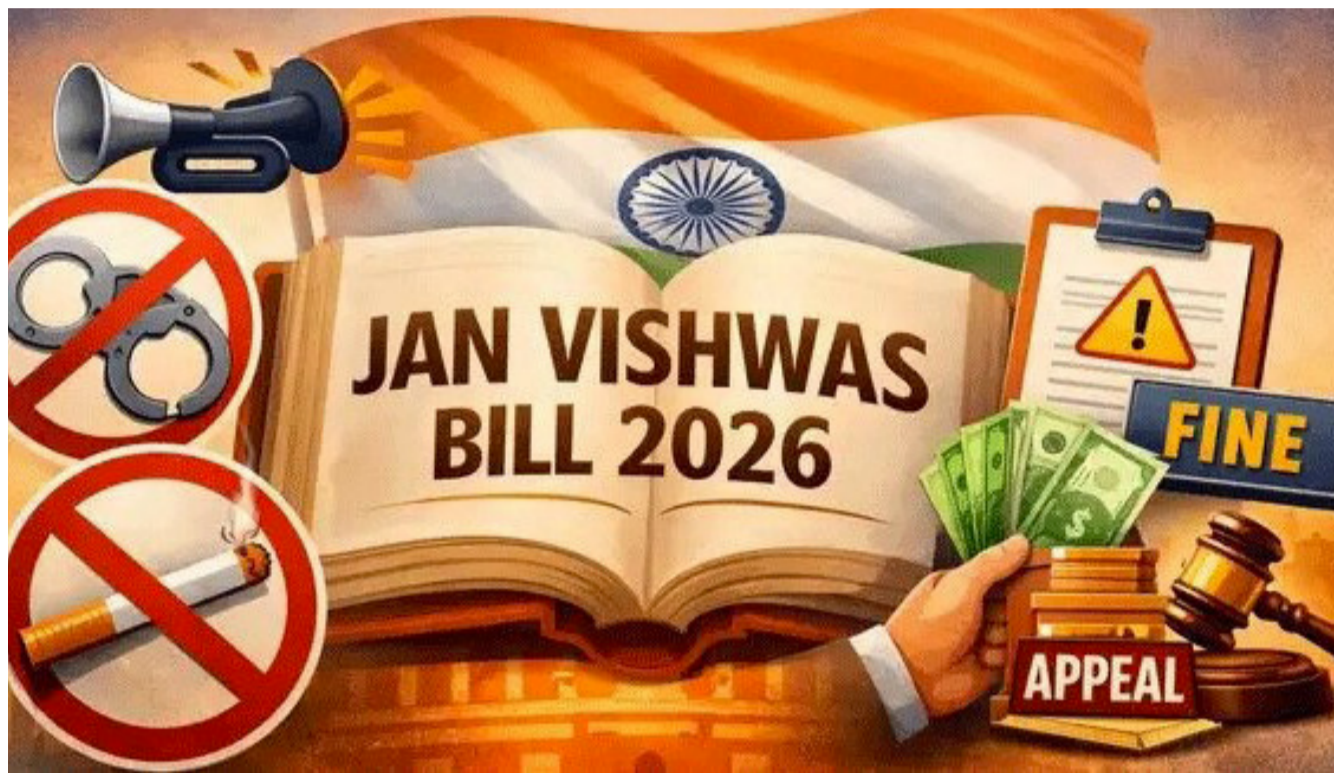
If implemented with conviction, this reform has the potential to reshape the educational landscape. It can cultivate a generation that respects labour, understands technology, values sustainability, and approaches challenges with courage and imagination.

In the years to come, the true measure of this initiative will not lie in circulars or timetables. It will be visible in confident young citizens who know how to think, create, collaborate, and contribute. When classrooms shift from rote to real, education regains its purpose. And when education regains its purpose, the nation moves forward with strength and hope.

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**"If you don't fail, you're not even trying." - Denzel Washington**

# JAN VISHWAS BILL 2026: BOOSTER DOSE FOR BUSINESSES



SANT KUMAR SHARMA

The Jan Vishwas 2026 Bill is a part of the ongoing reform process initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government over a decade ago. Harassment of businessmen and common citizens due to regulatory provisions was fairly common in an era of 'License Raj' that earlier Congress-led governments fostered. Deregulation or lesser regulatory laws has always helped market sentiment and proved to be beneficial. The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which provide employment to a large number of people, have been major beneficiaries of the government loosening its grip. Entrepreneurs now face far less challenges in scaling up as they don't have to face too many ifs and buts, hallmark of earlier regulatory regimes. Small businesses are often the hardest hit by complex compliance as they often do not have lawyers working for them who will see them through the complex maze of regulatory laws. This Bill will help them as it removes the sword of "Inspector Raj" and spending time in jails for procedural errors. We have often heard about long pendency in our courts and by moving minor cases to administrative adjudication, the Bill helps reduce this backlog. Officials will have adjudicating powers to conduct inquiries and impose penalties. Since there will be appellate mechanisms too, the structured mechanism will help unlog the courts. By some estimates, it is believed that as much as one-third of court cases may just vanish over time, unburdening the courts.

We have seen in the past how decriminalising minor infractions helped improved the ecosystem, encouraging investors and entrepreneurs. The new Bill is a clear indication that as a nation, we are shifting gears and moving towards a trust-based governance model. The focus is now on corrective measures rather than punishing people with criminal charges. Ever since its inception, this government has led by example by putting in place a basic philosophy of "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" that rewards honesty.

The new amendments seek to remove lacunae observed over the last three years and complex regulations that led to corruption and fixers (middlemen in offices) will become a thing of the past. Simplifying laws and removal of control-based system, like doing away with the 2012 retrospective tax amendment, which hit Vodafone and Cairn Energy, have helped improve India's image globally as a reliable investment destination. The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2023, was also aimed at amending certain enactments for decriminalising and rationalising offences to boost trust-based governance for ease of living and doing business.

The replacement of criminal penalties with civil penalties in many areas will lead to twin benefits of making governance trust-based and business-friendly. The Bill has a very wide sweep as it changes 784 provisions across 80 Central laws, introducing

uniform enforcement. Its goal is to improve regulatory efficiency, ease of living and ease of doing business.

At one time, when Modi headed Gujarat government as CM, he used to organise 'Vibrant Gujarat' summits aimed at attracting investments. Little bureaucratic interference, and hastening up various processes, including land allotment and acquisition, processing subsidy components faster, and such other measures were the hallmarks that he established. Most of those experiences and insights which he gained then are now being replicated at the national scale.

The current Bill is not based on whims as its basis is a deep consultation process involving a 24-member Select Committee which held 49 meetings. At these meetings, inputs received from various stakeholders, including ministries, experts and industrialists were duly considered. This ensured a balanced approach to decriminalisation where public harm/benefits remained the top criteria for incorporation of the changes.

It is not a monochromatic law in

This will help companies avoid unnecessary legal cases, ensure compliance and encourage them to scale up in an honest manner. The sector, particularly the trend witnessed in the recent past of enhanced manufacturing, use and export of generic drugs, is a huge positive. The new changes will help make pharma units more competitive and help capture a bigger share of the global market.

The graded enforcement mechanism that it introduces will lead to issuance of warnings for first-time or in some cases, even second time minor lapses. It also has new provisions which go a step further and under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009, businesses are to be given a specified time period to rectify non-compliance before penalties come into play.

The new provisions for dealing with minor civic violations is encouraging for urban residents as it makes compliance easier and removes the threat of imprisonment that gave too much powers in the hands of officials. This sure is going to curb corruption and encourage growth as the fear

prove existing mechanisms substantially. Minor procedural violations and serious road safety offences are clearly demarcated as only minor offences are decriminalised. One very significant change in the new regime is that graded monetary penalties and administrative action replace provisions of imprisonment.

For the 'Make in India' and 'Startup India' initiatives, reduced compli-

### DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

**Continues to stand out. Our general government Debt-to-GDP ratio, which includes the States' debt, at approximately 81%, is the lowest among major economies after Germany. More importantly, India is the only major economy where the IMF projects this ratio to fall significantly to 75.8% by 2030 while the debt outlook for the advanced economies such as US, China, Germany, and others is projected to worsen. ~ Nirmala Sitharaman, Union Finance Minister of India**



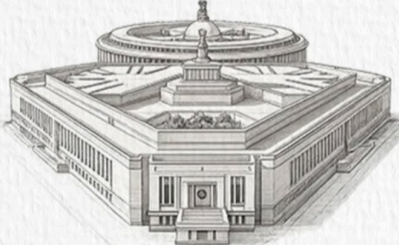
ance burden will prove to be catalytic enhancers for growth. The growing numbers of recognized startups, over 2.12 lakh going by the last count, will be helpful as it will strengthen the investment climate.

The hand holding by various government agencies to correct minor infringements will help businesses operate more easily, instead of trying to trap them in cases.

These reforms are actually a significant step away from a punishment-based architecture to a supportive governance model. By sharpening the competitiveness of our business environment and simultaneously making them citizen-friendly, India's global ease of doing business rankings stand to improve. For the financial year just gone by, Indian exports stood at over \$790 billion and these can only rise further in the coming years as our defence sector has also joined the bandwagon. These developments align well with our fast growing economic strength and presence in new markets globally. Overall, it is one more step in the direction of aspirational goal of Viksit Bharat 2047 when we will be a century old as an independent nation.

## Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026

### 4 Pillars of the Trust Based Governance Reform



Warning before Punishment	Proportionate Penalties	Faster, Fair Resolution	Dynamic Penalty Framework
First-time & minor lapses are met with warnings, not immediate penalties, giving citizens and businesses a fair opportunity to comply.	Penalties are aligned with the severity of the offence, ensuring fair & balanced enforcement.	Adjudicating Officers & Appellate Authorities enable quick, transparent resolution, reducing burden on courts.	Fines to be periodically revised, keeping enforcement effective & relevant over time.

that it touches only one sector as if offers relief all around. One of the engines of our economic growth over the last few years has been the pharmaceutical sector. By introducing several changes to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act 1940, the new law has become lenient towards procedural infringements like failure to submit timely returns or statements.

factor goes away. The reforms in the National Highways Act, 1956, will not only reduce court cases, they will also lead to a better regulatory system. The movement of goods, transport sector, is a vital clog in any type of economic activity and a more liberalised transportation will help economic growth, create opportunities. The changes to the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, will im-

# Congress' slogan is family first, looks after selfish interests: PM Modi in Assam

HOJAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday slammed Congress, accusing the party of looking after its own interests and depriving Assam of development under its government.

Addressing an election rally in Assam's Hojai in support of BJP's candidate Shiladitya Dev, PM Modi lauded the NDA government's efforts to maintain electricity supply in the district. Calling Assam a model state in terms of electricity, he noted that the Centre has provided Rs 70,000 to 80,000 under PM Surya Ghar Muft Yojana to install solar panels.

While PM Modi tapped into civic issues in Hojai, he also accused the Congress of a "family first" ap-



proach.

Expressing confidence in NDA's victory in the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, PM Modi said, "Be it Hojai, East or West Karbi Anglong, you have reached here with energy from every region. This mood shows that Assam has decided to secure the biggest win for the BJP-NDA. The development of every region is a priority for the NDA. That is why, in the very beginning, our government declared Hojai as a separate district. However, Congress kept Assam in trouble and deprived it of development. Till Congress was in power here, it only looked after its own selfish interests."

"On one side, the BJP and NDA double-engine government is work-

ing to improve the lives of every family in Assam. On the other side, Congress is busy building the future of only two families. One family is the royal family living in Delhi, and the other is a family in Assam. Their slogan is family first," he added.

He alleged that Congress focuses only on "lying and corruption," calling the Gandhi family "the most corrupt family."

"Apart from familial politics, they have no strength. That's why they focus on two things. Lying and corruption. The royal family they have in Delhi is the most corrupt family. There are thousands of crores of rupees in corruption cases running against them. The family is out on bail," PM Modi said.

He added that the NDA government has changed the situation in Assam, providing electricity connections to lakhs of families.

He said, "The facilities, such as roads and railways, were in a deplorable state, and there was also an electricity trouble. Under Congress, Assam depended on other states for electricity, and Assam's electricity companies were incurring losses. Due to the shortage of electricity, neither farming could be carried out nor industries could be established. We have changed the situation. Assam is becoming a model for other states of the country in the matter of electricity."

"In the past 10-11 years, electricity has reached even those lakhs of

families in Assam who have been waiting for electricity connections for years. With the Central Government's PM Surya Ghar Muft Yojana, the government is giving financial assistance of around Rs 70 to 80 thousand for installing solar panels. Lakhs of families in Assam are now connected with this scheme, and their electricity bill has become zero," the Prime Minister added.

In Hojai, BJP's Shiladitya Dev is pitted against Congress' Jhilli Chowdhury. The seat is currently held by BJP MLA Ramkrishna Ghosh.

The polling for all 126 constituencies in the Assam Assembly will be held in a single phase on April 9, while the counting of votes is scheduled for May 4.

## Assam Polls 2026: Kokrajhar Ramps Up Readiness with Voter Awareness Rally Ahead of April 9 Voting

KOKRAJHAR

The district administration in Kokrajhar has intensified preparations for the upcoming Assembly elections, organising a voter awareness rally on Monday to promote participation and ensure peaceful polling on April 9.

The rally, held in Kokrajhar town, was led by senior officials including District Commissioner P. Uday Praveen and Superintendent of Police Akshat Garg. Several other officials, including the Additional Superintendent of Police, also took part in the initiative.

The event aimed to encourage eligible voters to actively participate in the democratic process while also signalling the administration's preparedness to maintain law and order during polling.

Officials said similar outreach programmes are being conducted across the district as part of a broader strategy to ensure smooth and secure elections in all five constituencies under Kokrajhar.

Addressing participants, the District Commissioner assured that the administration is fully equipped to conduct free, fair, and peaceful elections. He added that adequate measures have been put in place to prevent any disruptions and to instil confidence among voters.

With polling in Assam scheduled in a single phase on April 9, authorities across districts have stepped up both voter awareness drives and security arrangements in the run-up to the elections.

## Nagaland By-Poll: Night Curfew Imposed in Parts of Mokokchung to Prevent Law-and-Order Disruptions

KOHIMA

Authorities in Mokokchung district have imposed a night curfew in select areas ahead of the upcoming by-election, citing concerns over a possible breach of public peace.

The restrictions, enforced under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), were ordered by District Magistrate Ajit Kumar Verma and came into effect immediately on April 6.

According to the official directive, the curfew will apply to Longkhum Village, Mangmetong Village, and the Aichen area, including the 2nd NAP Camp. The administration said inputs from sector magistrates and district police indicated a likelihood of disturbances that could threaten public safety and property.

The order prohibits the assem-

bly of five or more persons in the notified areas between 6:00 pm and 5:00 am daily until further notice.

Officials clarified that exemptions have been granted to law enforcement agencies, armed forces, and security personnel on duty. Government officials engaged in election-related duties, along with medical personnel and those involved in essential services, are also exempted.

The administration stated that the preventive measure is aimed at ensuring the smooth conduct of the by-election to the 28-Koridang Assembly Constituency, where the Model Code of Conduct is currently in force.

Authorities have warned that any violation of the curfew will attract legal action under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, underscoring the need for strict compliance to maintain order during the election period.

## SC Orders CBI Probe into Rs.1,270 Cr Contracts Linked to Arunachal CM Pema Khandu's Family

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court of India on Monday directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to initiate a preliminary enquiry into the award of public works contracts in Arunachal Pradesh allegedly linked to family members of Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

A bench headed by Justice Vikram Nath directed the CBI to register a preliminary enquiry (PE) within two weeks and proceed in accordance with the law. The agency has also been asked to submit a status report on the progress of the probe within 16 weeks.

The court specified that the enquiry should examine the award and execution of public works, contracts, and work orders issued between January 1, 2015, and December 31, 2025.

The direction comes in response to a public interest litigation alleging that contracts worth approximately ₹1,270 crore were



awarded over the past decade to four firms purportedly linked to members of the Chief Minister's family.

During the hearings, senior

advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner organisations, cited an affidavit filed by the state government and argued that multiple contracts had been

awarded to companies owned by Khandu's relatives, raising concerns over conflict of interest.

The plea was filed by the Save Mon Region Federation and the Voluntary Arunachal Sena. The state government, however, has previously described the petition as "sponsored litigation."

The apex court had reserved its order on February 17 and earlier directed the state to submit a comprehensive affidavit detailing contracts awarded during the 2015-2025 period, including those linked to the Chief Minister's family. Khandu has been named as a respondent in the case, along with his relatives, including Rinchin Drema and Tsering Tashi.

The petition also raised specific allegations regarding the firm "Brand Eagles," reportedly linked to Drema, claiming it secured multiple government contracts despite potential conflict-of-interest concerns.

The detailed order from the court is awaited.

## Tripura Poll Tensions: Eight BJP Workers Injured in Alleged Tipra Motha Attack in Sepahijala

AGARTALA

At least eight workers of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were injured following an alleged attack by supporters of the Tipra Motha in Sepahijala district on Sunday, escalating political tensions in the state ahead of elections.

The incident occurred at Bubbhram Chowdhury Para under the Nalchar Assembly constituency, where BJP workers had gathered to inspect the site of a temporary party booth office that was reportedly set on fire the previous night.

According to party sources, a group of miscreants allegedly attacked the workers shortly after local MLA and state minister Kishor Barman visited the location early in the morning and advised them to rebuild the structure.

Several of the injured were



taken to nearby health facilities, while those with serious injuries, including fractures, were referred to Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital in Agartala for advanced treatment. A local ST Morcha leader reportedly sustained a fractured arm.

Party leaders claimed that the situation could have turned more

serious had the attack occurred earlier, suggesting that the minister himself might have been at risk.

After being informed of the incident, Barman visited the injured workers at the hospital and later condemned the attack, attributing it to what he described as "fear of defeat" among political rivals.

In a strongly worded statement, the minister alleged that elements previously associated with political violence under the Communist Party of India (Marxist) were now operating under the banner of Tipra Motha. He also took aim at the party's leadership, making indirect remarks about Pradyot Kishore Debbarma and questioning the functioning of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC).

Referring to the slogan "Thansa," coined by Debbarma, Barman alleged a lack of transparency in the council's administration and raised concerns over the utilisation of development funds, claiming that auditing processes were not being allowed.

There was no immediate response from Tipra Motha regarding the allegations at the time of filing this report.

## Manipur CM Khemchand Singh Urges Unity, Highlights Public Support During Noney Visit



IMPHAL

Yunnam Khemchand Singh, Chief Minister of Manipur, on Monday called for collective unity and cooperation among citizens, particularly in Noney district, to build a stronger and more prosperous state.

Speaking on the occasion of the Bharatiya Janata Party Foundation Day, the Chief Minister—who is also a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Manipur unit—emphasised the importance of public participation in achieving long-term development goals.

Singh expressed gratitude for the warm reception he received at Noney district headquarters while returning from Jiribam to Imphal. He noted that a large gathering of party karyakartas, accompanied by traditional dancers, turned out to welcome him, describing the reception as a reflection of growing public

confidence in the government's development agenda.

"The energy, enthusiasm, and proactive spirit shown by the people reaffirm our collective resolve to move forward on the path of progress," he said, highlighting the significance of grassroots support in governance.

In a post shared on social media, Singh said the increasing public trust strengthens the government's vision of building a "Viksit Manipur" by 2047. He underscored that continued support from party workers and citizens would help accelerate transformative initiatives aimed at inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Reiterating his administration's commitment, the Chief Minister said efforts would continue to make Manipur—particularly Noney district—a model of good governance, transparency, and effective administration.

## 'Real Owners Identified': Himanta Biswa Sarma Rejects Congress Charges on Dubai Flats, Calls It 'Fake AI Campaign'

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday firmly rejected allegations by the Indian National Congress regarding undisclosed foreign assets, asserting that the Dubai properties cited by the opposition are not linked to him or his family.

In a statement posted on X, the Chief Minister said his team had identified the "real owners" of the two apartments in Dubai referenced in what he described as a "fake AI campaign" orchestrated by Congress. According to Sarma, the properties belong to individuals named Md. Ahmad and Fatima Sulaiman. He also alleged that the opposition relied on documents sourced from the document-sharing platform Scribd, urging the public to independently verify the claims.

The controversy intensified after Rinku Bhuyan Sharma filed a First Information Report (FIR) on April 6 against Congress leaders over allegations that she holds multiple foreign passports. Terming the accusations defamatory and



based on fabricated material, she called for a formal investigation and urged the Assam Police to coordinate with the Ministry of External Affairs to establish the facts.

The allegations were initially raised by Congress leader Pawan Khera during a press conference in New Delhi. Khera

claimed that Sarma possessed passports from the UAE, Egypt, and Antigua and Barbuda, and that two Dubai-based properties linked to her had not been disclosed in Sarma's election affidavit. Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi also amplified the claims on social media, questioning the Chief Minister's disclosures and flag-

ging potential legal violations.

Responding sharply, Rinku Bhuyan Sharma dismissed the allegations as "fabricated" and "AI-generated," asserting that neither she nor her family members hold multiple citizenships, noting that Indian law does not permit dual citizenship.

Backing her stance, the Chief Minister termed the charges "malicious, fabricated, and politically motivated," and warned of impending legal action. He said both criminal and civil defamation proceedings would be initiated within 48 hours, accusing the Congress of attempting to malign his family ahead of the April 9 Assembly elections.

Senior leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party rallied behind Sarma, with party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi dismissing the allegations as baseless and lacking credible evidence. The BJP maintained that the claims were intended to divert attention in the run-up to the polls. The Congress, however, stood by its allegations, stating that the matter raises serious concerns over transparency in election affidavits and potential foreign financial links. The party indicated it would continue to pursue the issue through legal and institutional channels, setting the stage for a sharp political confrontation ahead of voting.

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## Criminal charges no bar: Up to 38% candidates tainted in 3 poll-bound states



NEW DELHI

In spite of directions from the Supreme Court, political parties across poll-bound States continue to field candidates with criminal records. An analysis of the latest affidavits submitted with nomination papers in Kerala, Assam and Puducherry shows that between 14% and 38% of candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves.

According to data released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Kerala Election Watch, based on candidates' self-sworn affidavits, political parties in the Kerala Assembly Elections 2026 have once again followed their old practice of giving tickets to individuals with criminal records. This time, around 38% of candidates have pending criminal cases.

All major parties contesting the Kerala Assembly elections have fielded between 42% and 100% candidates who have declared criminal cases against themselves. While in Assam and Puducherry, the proportion of candidates with criminal cases stands at about 14% and 23% respectively.

According to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Assam Election Watch of candidate affidavits, the State has a total of 722 candidates, of whom as many as 102 have declared criminal cases. Candidates with serious criminal cases number about 79 (11%). In Puducherry, out of a total of 294 candidates, 66 (23%) have declared criminal cases, while at least 38 candidates (13%) face serious criminal charges. As far as Assam is concerned, the ADR analysis notes a slight improvement compared to previous elections, though criminalisation in politics remains significant.

"Serious cases" against candidates in the State include offences such as attempt to murder and crimes against women, among others, the ADR said. In Puducherry, 6 out of 12 (50%) DMK candidates have declared criminal cases against themselves. Even though the ADR analysis of candidates' criminal backgrounds in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal for the 2026 Assembly elections is not yet available, historical data suggest consistent patterns in both

States. West Bengal has typically recorded moderate-to-high levels of criminalisation, with around 15-25% of candidates facing criminal cases, while Tamil Nadu has generally reported about 10-15%. Similar trends are expected to continue in the 2026 Assembly elections as well. In its directions dated February 13, 2020, the Supreme Court had specifically instructed political parties to explain why candidates with criminal antecedents were selected and why individuals without such records could not be chosen. As per these mandatory guidelines, the reasons must relate to the candidate's qualifications, achievements and merit.

During the two State Assembly elections held in 2025, it was observed that political parties cited reasons such as popularity, social work, or claims that cases were politically motivated—grounds that ADR considers neither sound nor cogent. "This data clearly shows that political parties have no interest in reforming the electoral system, and our democracy will continue to suffer at the hands of lawbreakers who become lawmakers," the Association added.

## Mamata says TN CM, Congress in tactic understanding with BJP; vows push for opposition unity

BETHUADAHARI

TMC chief Mamata Banerjee alleged that the BJP had entered into a "tacit understanding" with the Congress and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin, claiming that many IAS and IPS officers from West Bengal had been sent to the southern state as poll observers, hampering development work in the state.

She claimed that, though five states are going to the polls simultaneously, the Election Commission transferred around 500 officers in West Bengal in comparison to a handful in other poll-bound states.

Banerjee said she would tour the country to forge opposition unity against the saffron party after the Assembly elections.

Addressing a poll rally in Nadia district in support of party candidates, the CM claimed that several officers of the West Bengal cadre had been sent to Tamil Nadu as observers by the Election Commission following the announcement of Assembly polls.

"You (BJP) must be having some tacit understanding with the Congress and Stalin," she alleged.

"They (BJP) are placing their own officers in prominent positions in West Bengal to ensure their free movement," she claimed.

The main contest in Tamil Nadu is between the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA) -- which includes Congress, DMDK and VCK -- and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), led by the AIADMK with BJP, PMK, AMMK and others as allies.

Asserting that the TMC will target the BJP in Delhi after winning the Assembly polls in Bengal, Banerjee said they will take along all parties for that purpose if needed.

"I will tour the country to stitch together opposition unity," she said. The TMC supremo claimed that the voter list on which the BJP came to power in 2024 was discarded three months before the Assembly elections in West Bengal.

"You (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) should resign, the home min-



ister, the whole government should resign," Banerjee asserted.

"Keep in mind that if you don't, people will make you do so," she said.

TMC chief Mamata Banerjee on Monday alleged that the BJP had entered into a "tacit understanding" with the Congress and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin.

FIR lodged against TMC Behala Paschim candidate, six others over alleged vandalism

Banerjee alleged that if the BJP comes to power in Bengal, it will put restrictions on fish, meat and egg consumption.

"Due to the SIR exercise, 250 people died in Bengal, and you (BJP) must take responsibility for that. I don't blame the Election Commission, they are only parrots like the CBI and the ED," she said.

The chief minister said the TMC does not support the gherao of judicial officers in Malda's Mothabari, and alleged that the BJP had benefited from

the division of votes in Bihar with the help of AIMIM.

"We do not support any attack, but the officer who got the mastermind arrested has been sent to Tamil Nadu," she alleged, referring to IPS officer Supratim Sarkar being deputed as an observer.

Banerjee also questioned the citizenship process, asking why those who had been in India for a short time were granted citizenship while long-time residents faced deletion from voter lists.

"We want to see a united India," she said. Banerjee alleged that Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal went to Nandigram on Sunday, accompanied by BJP supporters.

Urging voters to respond through the ballot, Banerjee claimed that around 24 lakh names were restored in the electoral rolls due to her efforts.

Maintaining that her government would not allow detention camps in the state, she said, "We will scuttle any move to push out people from Bengal

through NRC."

Banerjee said she would file her nomination from the Bhabanipur Assembly constituency on April 8.

TMC chief Mamata Banerjee on Monday alleged that the BJP had entered into a "tacit understanding" with the Congress and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin.

Addressing a TMC rally at Samudragarh in Purba Bardhaman district, the chief minister said this election is different from the previous ones and alleged that the BJP engineered the deletion of a large number of names from the voter list through the SIR exercise.

"BJP leaders have used AI to delete the names of voters en masse; this will be avenged," she warned.

Claiming that the BJP has stopped central funds for various welfare projects in the state, Banerjee said, "Such moves will not stop development work in Bengal."

"I urge the people of Bengal to avenge the SIR-related harassment by defeating the BJP," Banerjee said.

Speaking at a poll rally at Santipur in Nadia district, the TMC chief said the party celebrates all festivals, whether it be Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Eid or Christmas.

"But the BJP is trying to create division among the people in the name of religion. Teach them a lesson," Banerjee said.

Mocking the BJP over its promise to give Rs 3,000 to every woman in the state replacing Lakshmir Bhandar scheme where Rs 1,500 is given to general caste and Rs 1,700 to women from the scheduled caste and tribes, Banerjee said, "You will instead give bulldozer." The chief minister said her government introduced 105 welfare schemes for the people.

Asserting that this election is a "dharma yudh" (crusade), she said in this case, dharma is that of humanity, that of living with all.

"Your (BJP) dharma is of dividing people, but my dharma is of unity, yours is of taking away voting rights while mine is to restore those," the TMC chief said.

## INTERNATIONAL

### Trump says 'entire' Iran could be 'taken out' in one night as Tehran rejects ceasefire proposal

WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump warned Monday that all of Iran could be "taken out" Tuesday at the expiry of a deadline he issued for the Islamic republic to reopen the key Strait of Hormuz waterway.

"The entire country could be taken out in one night and that night might be tomorrow night," Trump told a news conference on Monday, referring to his ultimatum to Iran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz by midnight GMT Wednesday or face strikes on its infrastructure.

In the press conference, Trump said that the US will destroy all of Iran's bridges and power plants in 'four hours' if no deal is reached.

"Every power plant in Iran will be out of business, burning, exploding and never to be used again," he said, threatening the same for the country's bridges.

"I mean complete demolition by 12 o'clock (0400 GMT Wednesday), and it'll happen over a period of four hours -- if we wanted to."

He further argued that Iranians were willing to suffer for their freedom, saying the United States had intercepted communications urging to "please keep bombing."

"They would be willing to suffer that in order to have freedom," Trump told a press conference.

He further said that more than 170 US military aircraft were used in the rescue of the crew of a fighter plane downed in Iran.

He also threatened an unspecified media outlet with jail time if it does not reveal the person who leaked information about a US military pilot who was missing in Iran.

"We're going to go to the media company that released it, and we're going to say, 'National security. Give it up or go to jail,'" Trump told a news conference.

The presser comes a day before his deadline to destroy Iran's energy infrastructure and bridges if its leaders do not comply with US demands.



President Donald Trump pretends to aim a sniper gun while speaking with reporters in the James Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House, Monday, April 6, 2026, in Washington.

Earlier Iran rejected a proposed truce in its war with the United States and Israel, state media reported Monday, despite the stark threat by Trump to destroy its vital infrastructure.

"Iran has conveyed to Pakistan its response to the American proposal to end the war," the news agency IRNA said, without revealing what the offer contained.

"In this response -- set out in ten points -- Iran... has rejected a ceasefire and insists on the need for a definitive end to the conflict."

Earlier, White House said that a proposal for a 45-day ceasefire with Iran is being considered, but Trump has not approved it and military operations are

continuing.

President Donald Trump pretends to aim a sniper gun while speaking with reporters in the James Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House, Monday, April 6, 2026, in Washington.

According to US media reports, mediators have put forward a plan for a 45-day ceasefire in the Middle East conflict, which has now been received by Washington.

"This is one of many ideas, and POTUS (Trump) has not signed off on it. Operation Epic Fury continues," a White House official said, according to a report by AFP.

The official further said that Trump will speak more on the conflict at a press conference scheduled for 1:00 pm (1700 GMT).

The development comes after Trump on Monday appeared to extend a deadline for the Islamic Republic to release

its chokehold on the strategic waterway Strait of Hormuz.

Iran had rejected Trump's threats and warned of "more devastating" retaliation if its civilian infrastructure is targeted.

"If attacks on civilian targets are repeated, the next stages of our offensive and retaliatory operations will be much more devastating and widespread," a spokesman for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters said in a statement posted by state broadcaster IRIB on Telegram.

President Donald Trump pretends to aim a sniper gun while speaking with reporters in the James Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House, Monday, April 6, 2026, in Washington.

Jaishankar holds high-level talks with Qatar, UAE, and Iran amid Gulf crisis

The warning came after Trump's social media post on Sunday, threatened to strike Iran if Tehran failed to meet his April 6 deadline to either reach a deal or reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

"Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it... Open the F--- Strait, you crazy b---, or you'll be living in HELL -- JUST WATCH," Trump wrote in a post on his Truth Social platform.

However, in a later post, Trump appeared to extend his deadline by 24 hours. "Tuesday, 8:00 P.M. Eastern Time!" Trump wrote without mentioning Iran or any other details.

Shortly after his Truth Social post on Sunday, Trump gave an interview to Fox News where he said, "If they don't make a deal, and fast, I'm considering blowing everything up and taking over the oil."

The report comes on a day when US-Israeli attacks on Iranian cities have killed over 25 people from Sunday into Monday, while two people were found dead after missile attacks from Iran on Israel's Haifa.

### South Korea president says regrets 'reckless' drones sent to North



SEOUL

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung expressed regret to Pyongyang Monday over drones sent into North Korea earlier this year, actions he called "irresponsible".

Seoul initially denied any official role in the January drone incursion -- with authorities suggesting it was the work of civilians -- but Lee said a probe had revealed government officials had been involved.

The North warned in February of a "terrible response" if it detects more drones crossing the border from the South, prompting Seoul to investigate the claims. Pyongyang said it downed a drone carrying "surveillance equipment" in early January. Photos released by state media showed the wreckage of a winged craft scattered across the ground alongside grey and blue components that allegedly included cameras.

"It has been confirmed that a National Intelligence Service official and an

active-duty soldier were involved," Lee told a cabinet meeting.

"We express regret to the North over the unnecessary military tensions caused by the irresponsible and reckless actions of some individuals."

He added that South Korea's constitution bans private individuals from conducting acts that could "provoke the North".

"Such actions, even when deemed necessary for national strategy, must be approached with extreme caution," he said.

Lee has sought to repair ties with North Korea since taking office last year, criticising his predecessor for allegedly sending drones to scatter propaganda over Pyongyang.

His repeated overtures, however, have gone unanswered by the North.

Former South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol, is standing trial over charges that his administration sent drones into the North to provoke a backlash and create a pretext for declaring military rule.

Yoon was impeached and ousted from office in April last year and has been sentenced to life in prison over his declaration of martial law.

Lee's expression of regret follows North Korean leader Kim Jong Un labelling Seoul as the "most hostile state" in a policy address in March in which he vowed to "thoroughly reject and disregard it".

Kim also reaffirmed his commitment to maintaining the country's nuclear arsenal, describing it as an "irreversible course".

During Yoon's presidency, relations between Seoul and Pyongyang hit rock bottom, with the North sending balloons filled with garbage, including animal manure, in response to propaganda leaflets sent northward by South Korea-based activists, many of them North Korean defectors.

The two Koreas technically remain at war, as the 1950-53 conflict ended in an armistice rather than a peace treaty, and both enforce mandatory military service for men.

# BEYOND THE PERSONAL: RECLAIMING CIVILITY AND SUBSTANCE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE



**T**here are inflection points in public life when political disagreement, instead of sharpening democratic debate, begins to corrode it. The recent controversy surrounding remarks by Pawan Khera directed at Himanta Biswa

Sarma and his wife has emerged as one such moment—not merely for its immediate political fallout, but for what it reveals about the shifting boundaries of political engagement in India.

At its core, democracy depends on scrutiny. Public office-bearers are entrusted with authority and are therefore subject to continuous examination—of their decisions, their affiliations, and their conduct. This scrutiny is not adversarial by design; it is foundational. It enables accountability, informs public opinion, and ensures that power remains answerable to the people. Yet, there exists a distinction—often blurred in contemporary discourse—between legitimate critique of public roles and unwarranted intrusion into private lives.

When political rhetoric crosses from the domain of governance into the realm of the personal, it risks undermining its own purpose. The focus shifts from questions that matter—policy decisions, administrative performance, governance outcomes—to insinuations and character references that offer little by way of public insight. In such moments, the quality of democratic engagement is diminished, replaced by a spectacle that may capture attention but rarely contributes to understanding.

The families of political leaders occupy a uniquely ambiguous position in this landscape. They are visible by association, often appearing in public settings and media narratives, yet they do not wield formal authority. They do not contest elections, frame policy, or exercise executive power. To subject them to political attack—absent a clear and demonstrable link to matters of public accountability—raises difficult ethical questions. It challenges a boundary that, while not always perfectly observed, has long served as a tacit norm within Indian political culture.

That norm is now under strain. The expansion of media platforms, the immediacy of digital communication, and the competitive intensity of electoral politics have all contributed to a sharper, more unfiltered style of engagement. Political language has grown more direct, often more confrontational, and at times less restrained. While this evolution reflects a broader democratisation of expression, it also places greater responsibility on those who occupy influential platforms. Freedom of speech, however expansive, does not absolve public figures of the obligation to exercise judgment.

Words matter—not only for their immediate impact but for the precedents they establish. When senior political actors normalise personal attacks, they set a tone that can cascade through the political ecosystem, shaping the behaviour of supporters, media

narratives, and public expectations. Over time, this can lead to a redefinition of what is considered acceptable discourse, lowering the threshold for

civility and raising the tolerance for intrusion. There is also a pragmatic dimension to consider. Personal attacks, however provocative, are rarely effective instruments of political persuasion. They tend to obscure rather than illuminate, diverting attention from substantive issues that demand scrutiny. In a state like Assam—where governance challenges range from economic development and infrastructure gaps to questions of identity, migration, and social cohesion—the displacement of serious debate by personal controversy represents a significant loss.

The electorate is best served when political contestation centres on competing visions, measurable outcomes, and verifiable claims. When discourse is dominated by personal allegations, it becomes harder for citizens to distinguish between signal and noise. The democratic process, in turn, risks being shaped less by informed choice and more by emotional reaction.

Compounding this concern is the evolving role of technology in political communication. The circulation of manipulated or misleading digital content—including allegations of deepfake material involving individuals such as Kunki Choudhury—points to a parallel transformation in how narratives are constructed and disseminated. These tools amplify the reach of unverified claims, making them more difficult to challenge and even harder to contain once they enter the public domain.

While distinct in form, the use of such technologies shares a common thread with personalised political rhetoric: both blur the line between legitimate critique and distortion. They erode the evidentiary standards that underpin meaningful debate, replacing them with insinuation and perception. In doing so, they weaken the implicit contract between public figures and the public—that disagreements, however sharp, will remain anchored in a shared commitment to fact.

The consequences of this erosion are not immediately visible, but they are profound. Trust, once compromised, is not easily restored. When citizens begin to doubt the authenticity of information or the intent behind political messaging, scepticism can harden into disengagement. The democratic process depends not only on participation but on a baseline level of confidence in the integrity of discourse. Without it, even well-founded arguments struggle to gain traction.

It is important, however, to avoid absolutism. Not all references to individuals connected to those in power are inherently illegitimate. There are circumstances in which scrutiny of such individuals is both necessary and justified—particularly when questions arise regarding influence, financial dealings, or potential conflicts of interest. In such cases, the guiding principle must be relevance: the inquiry must be grounded in demonstrable public interest and supported by verifiable evidence.

Equally critical is the manner in which such scrutiny is conducted. Responsible political engagement requires proportionality, precision, and restraint. Allegations must be framed carefully, avoiding exaggeration or insinuation. Evidence must be presented transparently, allowing for independent verification. Above all, the objective should be to inform, not to inflame.

The response to provocation is another measure of political maturity. Leadership is tested not only in moments of authority but in moments of challenge. The ability

to maintain composure, to resist the pull of escalation, and to redirect attention toward substantive issues reflects a confidence that extends beyond immediate political gain. Restraint, in this context, is not a concession; it is a statement of principle.

For Assam, these considerations carry particular weight. The state's political landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Debates over identity, migration, development, and governance are often deeply felt and intensely contested. In such an environment, the quality of political discourse assumes heightened importance. Clarity, seriousness, and a commitment to fact are not abstract ideals; they are practical necessities. The diversion of attention toward personal controversies, or the proliferation of questionable digital narratives, offers little in the way of constructive engagement. It risks reducing politics to a cycle of reaction and counter-reaction, where the loudest voice prevails over the most reasoned argument. This, in turn, can distort policy priorities, skew media coverage, and ultimately weaken democratic accountability.

At a broader level, the current moment invites reflection on the norms that govern public life. Democracies are sustained not only by formal institutions—legislatures,

courts, electoral systems—but by informal conventions that shape behaviour. Among these is a discipline in disagreement: an understanding that the legitimacy of one's argument is strengthened, not weakened, by adherence to certain boundaries.

This discipline does not preclude robust debate. On the contrary, it enables it. By maintaining a focus on issues rather than individuals, it creates space for meaningful disagreement, allowing competing ideas to be evaluated on their merits. It also fosters a political culture in which disagreement is seen not as a threat but as an essential component of democratic vitality.

Reclaiming this culture requires effort from multiple quarters. Political leaders must lead by example, setting standards that prioritise substance over spectacle. Media organisations must exercise judgment in what they amplify, distinguishing between matters of public interest and those that merely generate attention. Citizens, too, play a role—by demanding accountability not only for decisions but for the quality of discourse itself.

The episode involving Pawan Khera and Himanta Biswa Sarma may fade from immediate headlines, as most controversies do. But the questions it raises will persist. Where should the line between public and private be drawn? What constitutes legitimate scrutiny? How should emerging technologies be governed in the context of political communication? And perhaps most importantly, what kind of political culture does India seek to cultivate? The answers to these questions will not emerge overnight. They will be shaped incrementally, through choices made by individuals and institutions alike. Each instance of restraint, each insistence on evidence, each refusal to engage in personal attack contributes to a recalibration of norms. Conversely, each departure from these principles reinforces a trajectory that is harder to reverse.

In the final analysis, the strength of a democracy lies not in the absence of conflict but in the manner in which conflict is conducted. Politics will always be contentious; it is, by design, a space of competing interests and ideas. But contention need not give way to carelessness. The boundaries that define responsible discourse are not constraints on freedom; they are conditions for its meaningful exercise.

If public life is to retain its credibility, its participants must recognise that not every line that can be crossed should be crossed. The measure of political engagement lies not in its reach, but in its restraint—not in how forcefully it can speak, but in how wisely it chooses its words.

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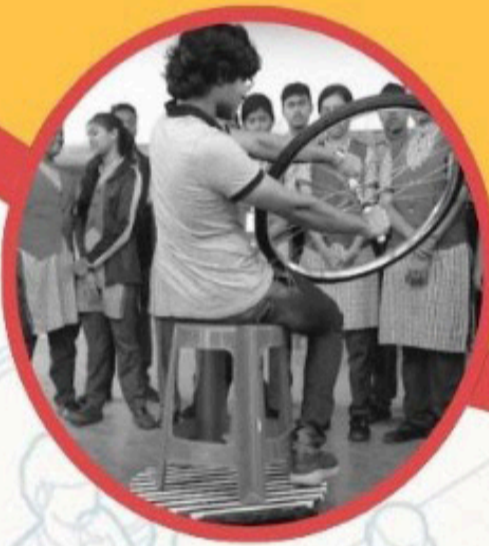
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