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PERSPECTIVE

Head up, stay strong.
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Memorandum Seeks Extension of AIIMS Guwahati Services to Barak Valley



OUR CORRESPONDENT

SILCHAR: A memorandum submitted on August 11, 2023, to the Director of AIIMS Guwahati has renewed focus on the long-standing demand for better healthcare access in the Barak Valley.

The appeal, raised under the banner of "Thousand Sayantans," urged authorities to extend the services of AIIMS Guwahati to Silchar and the wider Barak region in any possible form. The move was aimed at addressing the healthcare gap faced by residents who often have to travel long distances for advanced medical treatment.

In addition to seeking outreach services from Guwahati, the memorandum also reiterated the demand for establishing a full-fledged AIIMS hospital in Barak Valley. The signatories stressed that such steps would significantly improve healthcare infrastructure and reduce the burden on patients.

The group expressed hope for a swift response and implementation from the authorities, stating that improved access to quality healthcare remains a pressing need for the region.

WHO SAID WHAT



Within 3 months of coming back to office, we will implement the Uniform Civil Code in Assam. Our multi pronged approach will also include tough action against Love Jihad, Land Jihad, Encroachments and Infiltration. ~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, CM, Assam

Shah reviews Manipur security, clears Mahila IRB proposal; Centre pushes security-reconciliation strategy



IMPHAL
Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday chaired a high-level security review

meeting with Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in New Delhi, amid persistent concerns over the state's fragile law and order situation.

The meeting held at the Parliament House complex, focused on expediting the peace process and restoring trust among communities in

the violence-hit state, nearly two years after ethnic clashes erupted in May 2023. Sources said the Home Minister emphasised the need to accelerate reconciliation efforts and rebuild inter-community confidence, which continues to remain elusive on the ground. In a key outcome, Shah granted in-principle approval for the ??? of a Mahila India Reserve Battalion (IRB) in Manipur, aimed at strengthening the security apparatus while promoting greater participation of women in policing. The state government has been asked to submit a formal proposal for the same.

The Chief Minister had travelled to the national capital a day earlier, underscoring the urgency of the situation as sporadic tensions persist despite ongoing security operations. Officials indicated that law and order challenges remain a major concern, with limited visible progress in restoring

full normalcy. Compounding the situation are unresolved demands from valley-based civil society groups seeking restoration of free movement along key highways, particularly up to Churachandpur and Moreh. These restrictions continue to highlight the incomplete return to normalcy in the state.

Additionally, emerging tensions in Ukhrul district have raised fresh concerns about stability in the hill regions, further complicating the security landscape.

The review assumes significance as the Centre appears to be pursuing a dual strategy-tightening security enforcement on the ground while simultaneously pushing for reconciliation among affected communities. Observers note that unless tangible progress is made in ensuring free movement and addressing district-level instability, claims of improving normalcy may remain limited in scope.

14% Assam Poll Candidates Face Criminal Cases; ADR Flags 11% with Serious Charges

GUWAHATI
Around 14 per cent of candidates contesting the 2026 Assembly elections in Assam have declared criminal cases against themselves, with 11 per cent facing serious charges, according to an analysis by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The report, based on affidavits filed by all 722 candidates, reveals that 102 contestants have disclosed pending criminal cases, while 82 candidates are facing serious charges, including offences related to violence. Among major political parties, the Indian National Congress has 28 out of 99 candidates (28 per cent) with criminal cases, followed by the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) with 11 out of 30 candidates (37 per cent). In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has 8 out of 90 candidates (9 per cent) declaring such cases.

With regard to serious criminal charges, 20 Congress candidates (20 per cent) and 9 AIUDF candidates (30 per cent) fall in this category, while 8 BJP candidates (9 per cent) have declared serious cases.

A comparison with the 2021 As-

sembly elections shows a marginal decline in the proportion of candidates with criminal cases from 15 per cent (138 out of 941 candidates) in 2021 to 14 per cent in 2026. Similarly, those facing serious charges have reduced slightly from 12 per cent in 2021 to 11 per cent this year. The ADR report also outlines the nature of offences disclosed. Eight candidates have declared cases related to murder, while nine face charges of attempt to murder. Additionally, two candidates have reported cases involving crimes against women.

Eight constituencies have been identified as "red alert" seats, where three or more candidates have declared criminal cases. These include Alagpur-Katlicherra, Sonai, Barhampur, Bijnai, Binnakandi, Bokalkhat, Karimganj South and Goreswar.

The findings come despite directions from the Supreme Court of India mandating political parties to disclose and justify the selection of candidates with criminal backgrounds. ADR noted that between 9 per cent and 37 per cent of candidates across major parties continue to face such cases.

Modi pitches BJP's 'hat-trick' in Assam, unveils welfare roadmap and warns of 'dangerous conspiracy'

DHEMAJI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday struck a confident note on the campaign trail in Assam, asserting that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led NDA is poised for a third consecutive term, while outlining an expansive development and welfare agenda for the state.

Addressing a large rally in Gogamukh in Dhemaji district-his first in Assam since the announcement of Assembly poll dates-Modi declared that a "hat-trick is definite," drawing a parallel between his third visit to the district and the BJP's expected electoral victory.

Referring to the party's Sankalp Patra unveiled in Guwahati by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the Prime Minister described it as a comprehensive roadmap for Assam's future, anchored in infrastructure expansion, employment generation, and welfare delivery.

Among the key promises, Modi highlighted a proposed investment of Rs 5 lakh crore aimed at boosting in-



frrastructure and creating jobs across sectors. He said over 22 lakh families in the state have already received pucca houses under central schemes, with a commitment to extend housing benefits to an additional 15 lakh households.

The Prime Minister also announced plans to expand access to free education, proposing coverage from kindergarten to postgraduate levels for children from economi-

cally weaker sections. Emphasising women-centric initiatives, he said more than three lakh women in Assam have already achieved the status of "lakshpati baideo," with a target to scale this number up to 40 lakh over the next five years.

On agriculture, Modi stated that nearly 20 lakh farmers have received financial assistance amounting to Rs 7,500 crore so far. He promised enhanced annual support of Rs 11,000

or more for small farmers, alongside a dedicated outlay of Rs 18,000 crore to mitigate flood-related losses, a recurring concern in the state.

The manifesto also proposes implementation of a Uniform Civil Code in Assam and outlines measures to protect the rights, culture, and identity of Sixth Schedule and tribal communities.

Highlighting the achievements of the BJP's "double-engine" governance model, Modi said Assam has witnessed significant infrastructure growth and a marked improvement in the security landscape, with many former militants laying down arms. He added that the state is now diversifying beyond its traditional identity. "Earlier, Assam was known globally only for tea. Now, along with tea, it will be known for semiconductor manufacturing," he said, pointing to emerging technological investments.

Opposition targeted over 'divisive politics'

Sharpening his political attack, Modi accused the Indian National Congress of pursuing divisive policies and neglecting public welfare

during its years in power. He flagged what he termed a "dangerous conspiracy," referring to a proposed communal violence law during the UPA era, which he claimed would have undermined the constitutional framework envisioned by B. R. Ambedkar.

He further alleged that Congress policies had enabled illegal infiltration into Assam, adversely impacting indigenous communities. "They want to protect foreigners and reduce locals to a minority," he said, adding that his government remains committed to removing illegal encroachments and safeguarding Assamese identity.

Taking a swipe at the Congress leadership, Modi criticised what he described as a disconnect between its central leadership and grassroots realities. Concluding his address, the Prime Minister urged voters to deliver a decisive mandate for the BJP-led alliance in the upcoming polls, calling for record voter turnout on April 9 and promising accelerated development under continued NDA governance.

Priyanka alleges coercion in welfare schemes, flags tea wages and ST status delay

GUWAHATI

On her second visit to Assam within 39 days, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday mounted a sharp critique of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), alleging misuse of women-centric welfare schemes to compel political participation during the ongoing election campaign. Arriving at Mohanbari Airport in Dibrugarh, Vadra travelled to Nazira in Sivasagar district, where she campaigned in support of Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia. Addressing a public gathering, she claimed that women beneficiaries across the state are being pressured to attend rallies addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Alleging coercion, Vadra said women are being threatened with exclusion from welfare beneficiary lists if they fail to participate in political events. She questioned the ethical use of public welfare schemes, asserting that such programmes are funded by taxpayers and must remain free from political influence. "Welfare schemes are meant for public benefit, not as instruments of pressure. Citizens have a right to access them without conditions," she said, adding that women are being forced to choose between daily responsibilities, work in tea gardens, and attending political rallies.

Turning to economic concerns, Vadra highlighted the condition of tea garden workers, stating that wages have not improved significantly despite earlier promises. She noted that assurances of raising daily wages

to Rs 300-350 remain largely unfulfilled, with workers reporting only marginal increases.

The Congress leader also raised the issue of pending Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for several tribal and Adivasi communities, accusing the government of repeatedly making electoral promises without delivering substantive action. "The delay reflects a lack of intent despite years in power," she said.

Vadra further alleged that fuel prices could rise after the conclusion of elections, suggesting that current pricing is being influenced by electoral considerations. She said the electorate seeks governance free from fear and uncertainty.

In a broader political attack, she criticised the "double-engine government" narrative often invoked by the BJP, alleging that it reflects policy alignment rather than autonomy. She also took a swipe at the Prime Minister, accusing him of compromising national interests in international relations.

Concluding her address, Vadra called on voters to work collectively towards a progressive and corruption-free Assam, invoking the vision of Assamese cultural icon Zubeen Garg for a better future for the next generation.

The BJP has not yet issued an official response to the allegations. Expressing confidence ahead of the Assembly elections, the Defence Minister said the public mood favours the BJP-led alliance. "Looking at the enthusiasm among people, no force can stop the NDA from forming the government again in Assam," he asserted.

"We will put Assam on position to contribute to India's growth...": CM Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma emphasised that after coming to power, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will take Assam to a position where it will contribute to the nation as a contributing factor in its growth trajectory rather than remaining as a dependent State.

Speaking at a press conference, Sarma highlighted that the BJP will bring a Uniform Civil Code in the State without disrupting the rights of the tribal and ethnic communities of Assam. The government will also bring tough legislation against love jihad and land jihad.

"Once we come back to power, without disturbing the rights of the tribal and other ethnic communities of Assam, we will bring a Uniform Civil Code within a period of three months. We are also bringing tough legislation against love jihad and land jihad," he said.

Sarma further noted that the Illegal Immigrants Expulsion Act 1950 will also be enforced, which will authorise the legal expulsion of illegal immigrants within 24 hours. "We will also empower the District Commissioners of Assam to enforce the Illegal Immigrants Expulsion Act 1950, whereby a District Collector or District Magistrate is authorised to evict a foreigner within 24 hours," he said. We will unleash a legal battle against the illegal encroachers in our land. We will secure the last inch of our land from the Bangladeshi infiltrators, he added. Speaking on the employment sector, the Assam Chief Minister stressed that at least 2 lakh job opportunities will be created for the youth. Along with this, the government also aims to ensure an enhancement in monthly reimbursement for women, allocation of shelters to the poorer section of the society, and increase the daily wages of tea garden workers.

Manipur MP Akoijam blames BJP for unrest, warns of 'divisive politics' during Assam campaign



SILCHAR

Manipur Lok Sabha MP Angomcha Bimol Akoijam blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the recent unrest in Manipur, using the issue as a key campaign plank while canvassing for Congress candidate Shanti Kumar Singh in Assam's Lakhimpur constituency. Addressing party workers at the Congress office in Silchar, Akoijam alleged that the prevailing situation in Manipur is a direct outcome of the ruling party's policies. "The incidents that have taken place in Manipur in recent days are due to the BJP," he said, attributing the unrest to what he described as governance failures that foster division.

Emphasising the broader implications of the crisis, the MP said Manipur should be viewed within the national framework. "Manipur is not separate from India; it is an integral part of the

country," he said, warning that instability in the state carries consequences beyond its borders.

Expanding his criticism, Akoijam accused the BJP of deepening social fault lines by categorising communities along tribal and non-tribal lines. He cautioned that Assam, given its diverse demographic composition, could face similar divisions if such political strategies persist.

Positioning the Indian National Congress campaign as a counter to what he termed divisive politics, Akoijam called for unity among voters. "We are all one," he said, urging the electorate to reject narratives that fragment society and instead support Congress candidates in the upcoming Assembly polls.

He also took aim at the BJP's campaign messaging in Assam, dismissing a promotional video circulated by the party as misleading and likening it to an "April Fool's joke," while expressing confidence that voters would see through such efforts.

Turning to governance issues, Akoijam criticised Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging a gap between announcements and implementation. Citing the healthcare sector, he pointed to a shortage of doctors despite claims of large-scale hospital projects, arguing that such promises risk misleading the public.

The BJP has not issued an immediate response to the allegations.



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TURKISH INTELLIGENCE PLOT IN SOUTH ASIA



Serious allegations have emerged suggesting the presence of a covert foreign intelligence operation targeting Bangladesh's former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. According to information obtained from multiple sources, a Bangladeshi national currently residing in India is suspected of working under the direction of National Intelligence Organization, Turkey's powerful intelligence service commonly known as MIT. The allegations, if substantiated, could have significant implications for regional security, diplomatic relations, and the safety of political figures living abroad.

The individual at the centre of the controversy is Md. Zubayeed Jim, a Bangladeshi passport holder who allegedly entered India on a valid visa that expired on January 6, 2025, and has reportedly remained in the country since then without legal status. Sources claim that Jim portrays himself as a "protocol officer" to Sheikh Hasina and even falsely identifies himself as a Major in the Bangladesh Army and a director within Bangladesh's National Security Intelligence. However, according to available information, he was expelled from the Bangladesh Navy during his cadet years and holds no such official credentials.

Investigative sources further claim that contact between Jim and Turkish intelligence was established through his wife, who travelled to Turkey multiple times last year, including a trip in September. During these visits, she was allegedly approached by operatives linked to MIT and tasked with facilitating the flow of sensitive information. Since then, Jim is said to have been engaged in gathering and transmitting confidential details related to Sheikh Hasina—ranging from her private communications and contacts to information regarding her current location in India.

These allegations suggest a broader intelligence objective beyond simple surveillance. According to sources familiar with the matter, one of the alleged missions assigned to Jim involves creating circumstances that could endanger Sheikh Hasina's safety while simultaneously shifting blame onto India for any potential failure in protecting her. If accurate, such a strategy would represent a highly provocative attempt to manipulate regional political narratives and undermine trust between neighbouring countries.

Additional allegations point to a possible nexus involving Bangladeshi Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. Sources claim Jim may have been used as an intermediary in negotiations surrounding a multimillion-dollar telecommunications arrangement with a Chinese technology company. At the same time, the two men are said to have been involved in coordinated campaigns aimed at damaging Sheikh Hasina's public image and creating divisions within the ranks of Bangladesh's ruling political movement.

Beyond intelligence gathering and political intrigue, Jim is also accused of engaging in intimidation tactics against members of the Bangladeshi diaspora. Activists affiliated with the Bangladesh Awami League in countries such as Norway, South Korea, and several European states have reportedly been targeted with disinformation campaigns and attempts to sow distrust among party members. Leaders and activists currently living in India allegedly face even greater pressure, with claims that Jim has attempted to extort money through threats and blackmail. In some cases, sources say he has even confiscated passports and personal documents.

Disinformation appears to be another component of the alleged operation. Several months ago, Jim reportedly circulated an image of an African woman while falsely claiming she was the daughter of Saima Wazed. The claim was widely viewed by those familiar with the situation as a deliberate attempt to damage the reputation of Sheikh Hasina's family. Ironically, sources say Jim has simultaneously attempted to gain the trust of Saima Wazed by presenting himself as someone working closely with her.

In a further development that has raised cybersecurity concerns, Jim is said to be attempting to launch a platform branded as a think tank called "WiseGov". However, cybersecurity specialists warn that the website may function as a phishing mechanism designed to collect sensitive personal data from visitors under the guise of policy research.

If these allegations prove accurate, the case would highlight how intelligence operations increasingly blend espionage, digital manipulation, and diaspora pressure campaigns. For South Asia—already navigating a complex geopolitical landscape—the emergence of such covert activities could deepen mistrust and complicate relations among regional actors. Authorities in the relevant countries may therefore find it necessary to investigate these claims carefully, both to protect individuals at risk and to safeguard the integrity of regional security frameworks.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity; and I'm not sure about the universe."

Albert Einstein

WHEN HORMUZ SNEEZES, INDIA CATCHES A FEVER



MAJ GEN SANJEEV DOGRA (RETD)

There is a strip of water in the Persian Gulf, barely thirty-three kilometers wide at its narrowest, that has the quiet power to make India's finance minister stare at the ceiling at two in the morning. The Strait of Hormuz is not merely a geographical feature. It is a pressure valve for the global economy, and right now, with the Iran war escalating, someone has locked it shut. Brent crude has crossed 104 dollars a barrel. Asia's LNG prices have surged by 143 per cent. Shipping insurance rates have hardened. And somewhere in a Delhi suburb, a family is quietly calculating whether it can still afford the cooking gas cylinder this month.

India imports roughly 85 per cent of its crude oil. That is not a statistic. It is a structural vulnerability wearing a price tag. Every time West Asia catches fire, India pays. Every time a tanker captain recalculates his route, an Indian trucking company rewrites its freight rates. The Iran crisis, in this sense, is not a foreign affair. It has arrived, uninvited, at every Indian kitchen table.

Here is the thing about human beings: we are constitutionally good at adapting. We were not the fastest or strongest, but we had the capacity to look at a changed situation and quietly recalibrate. History is, at its core, the story of inconvenience producing invention. India knows this intimately. In 1991, with foreign exchange reserves covering barely three weeks of imports, the country stared into an economic abyss and leapt into reform. The liberalisation that followed was painful, disorienting, and ultimately transformative. Crisis, in the Indian story, has a peculiar habit of arriving as a threat and departing as a capability.

The most vivid proof of India's adaptive muscle was the pandemic. In March 2020, a country of 1.4 billion people was told, with approximately four hours' notice, to stay indoors. Supply chains snapped. Hospitals improvised. And yet, within months, India had the world's largest vaccine drive underway, administered not by gleaming private hospitals alone but by Anganwadi workers and army nurses in the remotest corners. The jugaad spirit, that distinctly Indian genius for improvisation, ran the country's pandemic response as much as any official policy did. The parallel to the current energy crisis is not forced. Covid-19 disrupted

supply chains globally; the Hormuz crisis disrupts energy supply chains specifically. The pandemic forced India to build domestic vaccine manufacturing it had previously outsourced; the energy crisis is forcing India to develop domestic energy production it has long deferred. The mechanism is identical: acute external pressure accelerating internal capability that comfort had postponed.

India is not powerless here. It is simply required to play its hand with more intelligence. In the short term, the playbook is familiar: diversify crude sources towards Russia, the United States and West Africa; draw down strategic petroleum reserves; use diplomatic balance to maintain access to Gulf supplies; and resist the temptation to subsidise fuel prices in ways that blow a hole in fiscal accounts. Coal, for all its environmental inelegance, will keep the lights on while the world sorts itself out. Pragmatism, not purity, is the short-term virtue.

Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj did not defeat the Mughal and Adilshahi empires by fighting them on their preferred terrain. He adapted his warfare to the hills and the monsoon. Strategic adaptation, in the Indian tradition, is not weakness. It is intelligence wearing the clothes of patience. India's current energy strategy needs exactly this quality. We cannot outmuscle the global oil market. But we can, gradually and deliberately, redesign our economy so that the next Hormuz crisis lands with less force. Every electric bus that displaces diesel demand is a small act of strategic independence. Every gigawatt of solar capacity that reduces thermal dependence is a quiet geopolitical statement. These are not romantic metaphors. They are arithmetic. The medium- and long-term demand structural redesign, and India has, for once, most of the tools it needs already in hand. The country has crossed 267 gigawatts of installed renewable capacity, with solar and wind now accounting for more than half the national grid. But raw capacity is not the same as resilience. A renewable-heavy grid without adequate storage is like a brilliant student who cannot sit exams under pressure. Expanding battery storage, pumped hydro and smart grid infrastructure is therefore not a peripheral task. It is the central one.

Green hydrogen, backed by nearly twenty thousand crore rupees under the National Green

Hydrogen Mission, addresses the sectors that electricity alone cannot reach: steel, fertilisers, shipping and heavy freight. These are the industrial sinews of the economy and they currently run almost entirely on imported fossil fuels. Designated hydrogen hubs at ports like Kandla and Paradip are early chapters in what must become a far longer book. The investment is patient capital, but the payoff is strategic sovereignty in the industries that matter most.

Electric mobility deserves its own mention, because it is the most visible and immediate lever available. India already leads the world in two-wheeler volumes. Accelerating the electrification of that fleet, combined with electric buses on urban routes and electrified freight rail on major corridors, would cut diesel demand in ways that compound over years. The consumer, faced with lower running costs, needs relatively little persuasion. What is needed is charging infrastructure at scale, financing that reaches the middle- and lower-income buyer, and manufacturing capacity that keeps prices honest.

Behind all of this sits a discipline that Indian energy policy has not always maintained: treating the energy transition as a strategic project of the same seriousness as defence modernisation. The funds, the timelines, and the political attention given to security matters must now be extended to energy security. An India that generates its own power, stores it reliably, and moves its goods without perpetual dependence on imported hydrocarbons is an India that no distant strait can hold to ransom. In the near term, India will manage. It always does. Oil prices will be painful, inflation will tick up, the rupee will test the patience of the Reserve Bank, and the Union Budget will carry quiet scars. But the Indian economy will not collapse from an oil shock of this magnitude. It is large enough, diverse enough, and more domestically anchored than it was a decade ago. Some would argue that this moment, with the Strait of Hormuz under pressure, is precisely the right time to undo the Indus Water Treaty and realign it to tackle the energy crisis. Revisiting an arrangement that has long constrained India's ability to fully harness its hydropower potential on the northern rivers could unlock vast, clean, and domestically controlled energy

capacity, turning a geopolitical constraint into a strategic advantage.

The more consequential question is what India does with the lesson. If this crisis, like its predecessors, is filed under managed and moved on, then the next one will find India in roughly the same structural position: deeply exposed, rapidly improvising, and paying a development tax it cannot easily afford. If, however, this crisis accelerates the transition from

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

We are very proud of the efforts of each and every tea garden family. Their hardwork and perseverance have enhanced Assam's pride. ~ Narendra Modi, PM



fossil fuel dependency to domestic clean energy the way 1991 accelerated economic reform, then the present disruption will have been, in retrospect, a gift in disguise. Unwrapped painfully, but a gift nonetheless. India has all the ingredients: sunshine in abundance, wind on the coasts, technical talent, and a democratic mandate from a population tired of paying more for the same liter of petrol every few years. What it needs now is the urgency that only genuine crisis supplies and that, at least, the Strait of Hormuz is providing in generous quantities.

India will bend. India always bends. The question, the only interesting question, is whether this time it bends in a direction that actually changes the shape of the problem, rather than simply absorbing the same shock one more time and returning, exhausted, to where it began. History suggests optimism. Caution suggests urgency. And the petrol pump queue, lengthening quietly every morning, suggests we should probably get on with it.

39% Assam Poll Candidates Crorepatists; BJP Leads with 88%, Congress at 61%: ADR

GUWAHATI

Nearly four in ten candidates contesting the 2026 Assembly elections in Assam have declared assets exceeding Rs 1 crore, highlighting the deepening influence of money power in the state's electoral arena, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

The analysis, based on self-sworn affidavits of all 722 candidates, found that 285 contestants—about 39 per cent—fall in the crorepati category. This marks a notable rise from the 2021 elections, when 28 per cent of candidates had declared assets above Rs 1 crore.

The report also points to



a steady increase in overall wealth among candidates. The average assets per contestant in 2026 stand at Rs 3.25 crore, up from Rs 2.10 crore in 2021. In total, candidates have declared combined assets worth Rs 2,352 crore.

A breakdown of the data reveals a wide financial spectrum among those in the fray. Around 13 per cent of candidates have assets exceeding Rs 5 crore, while 15 per cent fall in the Rs 2 crore to Rs 5 crore range. Another 24 per cent have assets between Rs 50 lakh and Rs 2 crore, and 23 per cent between Rs 10 lakh and Rs 50 lakh. At the lower end, 25 per cent of candidates have declared assets below Rs 10 lakh, underscoring

stark economic disparities.

Wealth concentration is particularly pronounced among major political parties. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has the highest proportion of crorepati candidates, with 79 out of 90 nominees, or 88 per cent, declaring assets above Rs 1 crore. The Indian National Congress follows with 60 out of 99 candidates (61 per cent), while the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) has 16 out of 30 candidates (53 per cent) in the crorepati bracket.

Among individual candidates, Congress nominee Rahul Roy tops the list with declared assets exceeding Rs 261 crore. He is followed by AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, contesting

from Binnakandi, with assets over Rs 226 crore. Congress candidate Jayanta Khaund ranks third, declaring assets of more than Rs 67 crore.

At the opposite end, the report notes that two candidates have declared zero assets, while several others reported holdings worth only a few hundred or thousand rupees, reflecting a sharp economic divide among contestants.

The ADR findings underline a continuing trend in Assam's electoral politics, where financial strength remains a key factor in candidate selection across party lines, raising concerns over the growing nexus between wealth and democratic representation.

Manipur IDPs Return Rs 24 Lakh Housing Aid, Call Relief Package 'Inadequate'

IMPHAL

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Ekou village in Manipur have returned Rs 24 lakh in government assistance, rejecting a housing rehabilitation package they described as insufficient to rebuild their homes.

The displaced residents—currently housed in relief camps at Sajjwa and Sawmbung in Imphal East district—marched to a local government office and handed over the funds to the Sawmbung Junior Block Development Officer (BDO) in protest.

Ekou village, located along the foothills bordering Kangpokpi district, was among the worst-affected areas during the ethnic violence in the state. Most of its residents, primarily from the Meitei community, fled following attacks and have since remained in relief camps.

Under the state's rehabilitation package, affected families are entitled to Rs 3 lakh for rebuilding damaged or destroyed homes. This includes Rs 1.30 lakh under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) and Rs 1.70 lakh from the State Home Department. An initial instalment of Rs 48,000 had been transferred directly to beneficiaries' accounts through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system.

However, residents of Ekou refused to accept the aid, stating that the amount falls short of actual reconstruction costs. One of the displaced persons, Longjam Basanta, said they had earlier urged the Imphal East district administration not to release the funds, alleging that the package did not reflect ground realities.

The protest underscores continuing dissatisfaction among sections of displaced families over rehabilitation measures, even as the government pushes ahead with resettlement efforts.

Officials said that as of January 2026, over 3,700 families comprising around 16,500 displaced persons have been resettled across Manipur. However, residents of Ekou village are yet to return to their homes, highlighting persistent gaps in the rehabilitation process.

BJP Unveils Dima Hasao Manifesto, Focuses on Autonomy, Infrastructure and Inclusive Growth

HAFLONG

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday released its manifesto for Dima Hasao district ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, outlining a roadmap centred on development, greater autonomy, and long-term institutional expansion in the hill region of Assam.

The document was unveiled at the party's election office in Haflong in the presence of Debolal Gorlosa, Chairman Mohet Hojai, BJP district president Dhriti Thaosan, and Haflong LAC candidate Rupali Langthasa, along with members of the manifesto committee.

Party leaders described the manifesto as a "solemn commitment" reflecting public aspirations, emphasising accountability, integrity, and a people-centric governance approach aimed at building a "self-sufficient and developed Dima Hasao."

A key highlight of the document is the push for implementation of Article 244(A), which envisages the creation of an autonomous state within Assam comprising Dima

Hasao and Karbi Anglong. The manifesto also calls for enhanced political representation, including an additional MLA seat and a dedicated Lok Sabha constituency for the district.

On the development front, the BJP has proposed the establishment of major educational and institutional infrastructure, including a medical college, engineering college, and agricultural college, along with the creation of the Assam Hills Tribes Development Corporation. It also outlines plans to bring the Sports Authority of India Special Area Games (SAG) project to the district.

The manifesto further prioritises tourism development, improved water supply systems, and expansion of core infrastructure, positioning these as critical to economic growth in the hill district.

It also references the implementation of provisions under a Memorandum of Settlement with former extremist groups, signalling a continued focus on peace and stability in the region.

Shutdown Paralyzes Ukhrul, Kamjong After Hongbei Killings

IMPHAL

A 48-hour shutdown brought life to a standstill across Manipur's Ukhrul and Kamjong districts on Tuesday, as outrage mounted over the killing of four cadres of the NSCN (Eastern Flank) in Hongbei village earlier this week.

The shutdown, which entered its second day, was observed widely across district headquarters and adjoining areas, severely disrupting normal activity. Markets remained shuttered, roads were a deserted look with minimal vehicular movement, while schools, colleges, and commercial establishments stayed closed.

Despite the widespread disruption, essential services such as healthcare, water supply, and electricity continued to function, officials confirmed.

The protest was called fol-

lowing the March 28 killing of the four cadres, allegedly involving members of the NSCN (IM), an incident that has triggered sharp reactions from civil society groups and student organisations across the region.

Condemning the violence, several organisations described the incident as a "fratricidal act" that has deepened anguish within the community. The Kamjong Katamno Long (KKL) said the killings had intensified public grief and demanded accountability from those responsible.

In a joint statement, the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) along with its frontal bodies - Tangkhul Naga Aze Longphang (TNAL), Tangkhul Students' Union (TSL), Tangkhul Katamno Saklong (TKS), and Tangkhul Mayar Naga Long (TMNL) - called for swift justice and transparency in establishing the circumstances surrounding the

killings.

The organisations also urged the Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland (GPRN) to ensure that justice is delivered without delay and that the bereaved families are provided clear answers.

Echoing similar concerns, the United Naga Council (UNC) said the killings had "saddened and shaken the Naga people at a time when unity is most needed," and pressed for action against those involved.

The All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) also strongly condemned the incident, terming it a grave instance of internal conflict. It called for a "thorough, transparent and impartial inquiry" while urging all sides to exercise restraint, cautioning that retaliatory actions could further deepen divisions.

Authorities, however, maintained that the situation re-

mained under control, with no major untoward incidents reported so far. Security forces have been deployed in sensitive areas, and administrative officials are closely monitoring developments.

Earlier, Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had appealed for calm, particularly among the Tangkhul Naga community, urging cooperation with the administration to restore normalcy. Terming the incident "unfortunate," he had assured on March 29 that the government is treating the matter with seriousness and that "the law will take its own course."

Tensions had escalated in the aftermath of the killings, with reports of an angry mob setting fire to the NSCN-IM's Wung Tangkhul Region Secretariat, underscoring the volatile situation prevailing in the hill districts.

Women Take Centre Stage in Assam Politics; Irani Targets Congress

DHEMAJI

Senior BJP leader Smriti Irani on Tuesday asserted that women in Assam are no longer passive voters but active decision-makers, as she campaigned for the party in Sissiborogon ahead of the Assembly elections. Addressing an election rally in Dhemaji district in support of BJP candidate Jibon Gogoi, Irani highlighted what she described as a shift in the political agency of women over the past decade, crediting them as key drivers of both governance and electoral outcomes. "Earlier it was believed women voted as per their husbands' choices. Today, women are influencing voting decisions within households," she said, underlining their growing participation in the democratic process.



Referring to the proposed 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures, Irani said its implementation would further strengthen women's role in governance. She attributed the move to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Expanding her political pitch, the BJP leader mentioned the upcoming elections as extending beyond state-level concerns. She said the polls would also reflect national priorities, particularly on issues of illegal immigration.

"This election is not just about

electing representatives or forming a government. It is about ensuring that infiltrators are identified and removed," Irani said.

Targeting the opposition Indian National Congress, she accused the party of taking a soft stance on illegal migrants and questioned its opposition to electoral roll revisions in the state.

"When the Election Commission initiated revision of electoral rolls, why did Congress object? The question is whether they stand with citizens or with infiltrators," she

remarked. Irani also invoked the 2004 Dhemaji blast, recalling the loss of civilian lives and describing it as a period of insecurity in the state. Drawing a contrast with the present, she credited both the Centre and the state government for improved law and order. "Today, people can celebrate and express themselves without fear. This reflects the impact of policy decisions taken over the years," she said. Highlighting the government's actions against alleged illegal encroachment, Irani claimed that over 1.65 lakh bighas of land had been cleared, asserting that previous governments had failed to take similar steps.

She further pointed to welfare initiatives targeting farmers and youth, urging voters to support the BJP-led alliance in the upcoming polls.

Meghalaya Unveils Rs 4.61 Cr E-RISE Scheme to Strengthen Eri Silk Value Chain

GUWAHATI

The Meghalaya government has launched a Rs 4.61 crore initiative to boost the eri silk sector, alongside rolling out key infrastructure and education projects aimed at strengthening rural livelihoods and human capital.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma formally unveiled the E-RISE (Eri Rearing, Innovation, Spinning and Empowerment) scheme in Ri-Bhoi district, targeting 1,200 farming households across 22 clusters. The programme is designed to reinforce the entire eri silk value chain—from rearing to yarn production—with a focus on increasing farmer incomes and retaining value addition within the state.

Under the scheme, beneficiaries will receive high-yielding host plants, financial assistance to construct climate-resilient rearing houses, and electric spinning machines to improve productivity. Skill development and training components have also been incorporated to enhance efficiency and output.

Officials said the initiative was conceptualised following feedback from farmers highlighting a gap between the prices of raw cocoons and processed yarn sold outside the state. The

intervention is expected to generate an estimated annual economic value of Rs 9.36 crore—more than double the initial investment.

In addition to the silk sector push, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone for a mini stadium at Patarim in Umsning, part of the state's broader efforts to upgrade sports infrastructure ahead of the National Games 2027.

On the education front, a Rs 1.57 crore programme titled Project ASPIRE was launched in collaboration with NITI Aayog. The initiative aims to provide round-the-clock academic support, career counselling, and preparation for competitive examinations.

Addressing the gathering, Sangma also flagged concerns over a projected annual revenue shortfall of nearly Rs 2,000 crore due to changes in tax devolution under the Union Budget 2026-27. He noted that discussions with the Centre have resulted in compensatory support measures for affected hill states. The event included distribution of assets under the E-RISE scheme and interactions with beneficiaries, marking a step forward in promoting local industry and strengthening rural economic resilience in Meghalaya.

15-Day Theatre Workshop Concludes in Hojai



HOJAI

A 15-day Theatre Workshop-cum-Production organized by the Manipuri Sahitya Parishad, Assam, Hojai District Committee, concluded successfully on Tuesday in

Quest!

Psychology says, the best things in life are usually found when you are not looking for them.

Hojai.

The workshop, held from March 17 to March 31 in collaboration with the Khundongbam Brojendro Cultural Trust, witnessed enthusiastic participation from theatre lovers and aspiring artists.

As part of the closing ceremony, a stage play titled "Refugee" was presented. Written by Khundongbam Brojendro and directed by Loitongbam Dorendra, the play highlighted the struggles, emotions, and identity crises faced by displaced individ-

uals, leaving a strong impact on the audience.

The final performance was staged at Parishad Shanglen, Rampur, Hojai, at 3:30 PM, drawing a large gathering of local residents and theatre enthusiasts.

The event also marked the release of

three plays by the same playwright, translated into Assamese by Usham Kunjabihari.

The workshop provided a significant platform for nurturing young talent, encouraging cultural exchange, and promoting the art of theatre in the region.

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Commercial LPG prices hiked by Rs 195.5 amid West Asia war, no changes in domestic rates



NEW DELHI

Prices of commercial LPG were hiked by Rs 195.50 on Wednesday, on back of surge in global oil prices linked to the widening West Asia conflict. A 19-kg commercial LPG now costs Rs 2,078.50 in Delhi, according to state-owned oil companies. Rates were last increased by Rs 114.5 per 19-kg cylinder on

March 1 Domestic cooking gas LPG rates, which were last hiked by Rs 60 per 14.2-kg cylinder on March 7, remain unchanged. It costs Rs 913 per 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum, and Hindustan Petroleum revise ATF and LPG prices on the first day of every month based on international benchmarks and the

exchange rate.

Global oil prices have shot up almost 50 per cent after the war in West Asia disrupted energy supply chains.

Petrol and diesel prices continue to remain frozen after a Rs 2 per-litre reduction in March last year; petrol currently costs Rs 94.72 per litre in Delhi and diesel Rs 87.62.

Mamata alleges BJP adding illegal voters from other states; Bengal CEO says will probe allegation

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday alleged that the BJP was trying to include illegal voters from Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the electoral rolls of the state to turn the poll outcome in favour of the saffron party.

Addressing an election rally in Paschim Medinipur's Chandrakona, Banerjee also reiterated her plea before the gathering to ignore who the TMC candidates in the state's assembly segments were and consider her as the candidate in all 294 seats.

"I was informed by Abhishek (Banerjee) yesterday that he had to rush to the EC office in Kolkata from the middle of his campaign schedule upon receiving information that about 30,000 forms were submitted in a single day to include fresh voters," the TMC supremo said.

"The BJP is trying to include illegal voters from Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh in the electoral rolls of Bengal. They are planning to transport outstation voters by means of railways, as they did in Bihar, and get them to poll in seats of Asansol and Kharagpur," she alleged.

Banerjee's allegation came on a day the TMC supremo shot a strongly-worded letter to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar stating that the Form 6 applications pertaining to "not genuine residents of Bengal having no legitimate connection to the state", is "illegal, unconstitutional and fundamentally undemocratic, reflecting mala fide intent and ill motive."

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee speaks at an election campaign on Tuesday, March 31, 2026.

If the BJP tries to "squeeze in illegal voters from outside" in Bengal's electoral rolls, people will resist, Banerjee said at her second poll rally of the day in Garbeta.

"It will not get a single vote because the people of Bengal know that the saffron party has implemented this trick in states like Bihar and Maharashtra and got away with it because the opposition



there failed to understand the ploy," she added.

Claiming that the BJP has "no respect" for Bengal and its people, the chief minister accused the party of colluding with the Election Commission and deleting names of women and minorities from the state's electoral rolls in the garb of the SIR exercise.

"It broke my heart to see the pictures of mothers and sisters belonging to Hindu, tribal, Muslim and scheduled caste communities, as well as elderly citizens, standing in queues once again to appeal before tribunals after their names were deleted from the SIR rolls. SIR means 'sarvanash' (devastation)," she said.

Banerjee claimed that it was her legal challenge before the Supreme Court that made the EC add 22 lakh names to the rolls.

On 18 lakhs deletions from supplementary lists, Banerjee alleged, "The BJP and the EC are snatching the citizenship, constitutional and democratic rights of people. We will fight them every inch of the way."

At the Garbeta rally, the CM claimed that the "BJP would have deleted 5 crore names" from Bengal's electoral rolls had her party not fought back.

"Forget who your TMC candidate

is in your respective constituencies, consider me your candidate in all 294 seats of the state," she told the gathering.

"There will be no detention camps and no NRC in Bengal as long as we are in power," Banerjee added.

The TMC chief said that it was time to topple the BJP-led central government, which, she alleged, has politicised all statutory and constitutional bodies of the country, depriving citizens of their recourse to rights and justice.

"We will take Delhi after coming to power in Bengal. BJP has converted all constitutional bodies into their party offices. It's high time we take them back," she said.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal on Tuesday promised to review the CCTV footage of his office after the Trinamool Congress alleged a BJP leader's representative brought a sackful of Form 6 there to enrol residents of other states as voters here.

Form 6 is filed for the inclusion of first-time voters in the electoral rolls or for shifting a voter from one constituency to another.

Addressing the allegations, Agarwal said the poll panel was taking the complaints seriously and would

investigate the matter.

"I will see where the agency has installed CCTV... I will check what is in the footage and then consider the matter further," he told a local TV channel.

The CEO clarified that individuals already on the adjudication list cannot apply through Form 6, which is meant solely for the inclusion of new names.

All requests and complaints have been forwarded to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) for verification, he said.

Agarwal also warned that those applying for inclusion of their names in the voters' list under false pretences would face legal consequences.

Notably, TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee has alleged the BJP had submitted around 30,000 Form 6 to the state chief electoral officer (CEO's) office within a few hours in clear violation of Supreme Court directives.

After meeting the CEO on Monday, Banerjee said, "We have credible information that about 30,000 Form 6s were submitted to the CEO's office in six to seven hours today, in clear violation of Supreme Court directives."

He had claimed the CEO could not provide satisfactory replies and that the TMC would "not take it lying down."

INTERNATIONAL

Trump says Iran war could end in 'two weeks, maybe three,' to address US



WASHINGTON

US President Donald Trump said Tuesday that the war with Iran may be over in two or three weeks and it will be up to other countries to secure the vital Strait of Hormuz oil shipping channel.

The White House announced meanwhile that Trump would give an address to the nation at 9:00 pm Wednesday (0100 GMT Thursday) "to provide an important update on Iran."

In other developments, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the joint campaign against Iran had "changed the face of the Middle East" and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Tehran had the "necessary will" to end the war provided its enemies guaranteed it would not flare up again.

In Lebanon, the health ministry said early Wednesday that seven people were killed in Israeli strikes in south Beirut and a nearby area and the Israeli military said it had struck a senior Hezbollah commander.

Israel's campaign against Iran-backed Hezbollah has left more than 1,200 dead in Lebanon, according to the health ministry, with over a million displaced.

US stocks surged on hopes that a resolution to the month-long war may be in sight and Brent oil futures finished down 3.2 percent at \$103.97 per barrel.

Japan's Nikkei climbed more than three percent at the open Wednesday and South Korea's Kospi was up nearly five percent.

Trump, speaking to reporters in the Oval Office, said the United States would be leaving Iran "very soon," perhaps within "two weeks, maybe three."

"But we're finishing the job," he insisted.

"We want to knock out every single thing they have," Trump said, before adding that "it's possible that we'll make a deal before that."

Trump has zigzagged previously on whether Washington plans to escalate the war that has roiled the world economy - possibly by deploying American

ground forces - or try to end it through negotiations with Tehran.

President Donald Trump answers questions from reporters after signing an executive order in the Oval Office of the White House Tuesday, March 31, 2026, in Washington.

As for Hormuz, which has been blockaded by Iran and through which one-fifth of global oil normally passes, Trump said France, China and other countries that seek passage through the waterway will have to "fend for themselves."

"What happens with the strait we're not going to have anything to do with," he said.

In a Truth Social post earlier Tuesday, Trump lashed out at NATO allies and other countries that have refused to help the United States secure the strait.

"The U.S.A. won't be there to help you anymore, just like you weren't there for us," he wrote. "Iran has been, essentially, decimated. The hard part is done. Go get your own oil!"

Netanyahu, in a televised statement on the eve of the Passover holidays, said Israeli forces "will continue to crush the terror regime" in Tehran.

"We had to act, and we acted," he said. "We have changed the face of the Middle East."

The United States has not said who it is speaking with in Iran, which has denied it is in talks.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Al Jazeera that he still receives messages from US envoy Steve Witkoff, "directly, as before, and this does not mean that we are in negotiations."

Iran's Revolutionary Guards also threatened to retaliate against leading US tech firms such as Google, Meta and Apple from Wednesday if more Iranian leaders were assassinated.

Trump and Netanyahu launched the war on February 28, killing

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and setting off a wave of retaliatory attacks by Tehran across the region.

The Guards charged that 18 companies, including Intel, Tesla and Palantir, were complicit in previous killings and warned they should expect "destruction" if there are any further assassinations.

President Donald Trump answers questions from reporters after signing an executive order in the Oval Office of the White House Tuesday, March 31, 2026, in Washington.

Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth, speaking to reporters early Tuesday after he visited US troops in the Middle East, vowed that "the upcoming days will be decisive."

"Iran knows that, and there's almost nothing they can militarily do about it."

Trump had threatened on Monday that if Iran didn't agree to a deal, US forces would "obliterate" its oil wells, its main Kharg Island export terminal, and possibly water desalination plants.

On Tuesday, heavy strikes hit the central city of Isfahan and Tehran.

Iranian media reported that two steel complexes in the country had been hit.

Iranian state media also reported damage to a Shia religious centre in Zanjan, while the government said airstrikes had hit a plant making cancer drugs, claims AFP could not independently verify.

Tehran residents spoke of trying to cling to some routine.

"When I make it to a cafe table, even for a few minutes, I can almost believe the world hasn't ended," dental assistant Fatemeh, 27, told AFP in Paris via a messaging app.

"And then I go back home, back to the reality of living through war, with all its darkness and weight."

North Korea, Russia news agencies join forces in 'info war' against the West



SEOUL

North Korea's state news agency and Russian counterpart TASS have agreed to counter jointly what they call "disinformation" delivered by their "many enemies", the outlets reported Tuesday, in a further deepening of ties.

Western governments have long accused Russia of spreading false information online as well as in traditional media, and both countries rank near the bottom of the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

North Korea has also sent thousands of troops to support Russia's war against Ukraine as well as munitions, with Moscow providing financial aid, military technology, food and energy to the isolated nuclear-armed nation in return.

"The courage and willingness for self-sacrifice that both soldiers and officers of the Korean People's Army demonstrate today are already

inscribed in modern history," TASS quoted its director general Andrey Kondrashov as saying in Pyongyang.

"Everyone understands that today we are fighting modern Nazism together," Kondrashov said.

The English-language report cited him as adding, without direct quotes, that "many enemies do not like this, and this is why information campaigns had been launched against Russia and North Korea to spread fake news."

The agencies' updated cooperation agreement signed on March 28 covers "joint counteraction to disinformation on both a bilateral and multilateral basis," TASS added.

"The agreement... is based not only on long-term friendship but also takes into account the completely new realities of today's information war that is taking place on our planet," Kondrashov said.

North Korea's foreign minister Choe Son Hui welcomed Kondrashov

and his delegation, KCNA reported on Tuesday. On Sunday it said that the deal covered "exchanges of news articles" and "cooperation", without giving details.

Media watchdog Reporters Without Borders ranked North Korea second last in its 2025 press freedom index - Russia was 171 out of 180 - saying the "regime strictly prohibits independent journalism."

South Korea estimates that around 2,000 North Korean troops, thought primarily to have been deployed in Russia's Kursk region - where Ukraine launched an incursion in 2024 - have been killed.

Russian President Vladimir Putin last visited North Korea in 2024, while Kim Jong Un's most recent trip to Russia is thought to have been the year earlier.

Improved ties have also allowed North Korea to lessen its reliance on its traditional main backer China, analysts say.

Politics of Party Switching in Assam is Unprecedented in India

A New Game of Party Switching Ahead of Elections in Assam



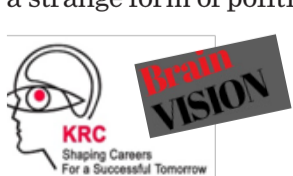
PRADIP DUTTA ROY

This seems like the game of player transfers or jersey changes in football at the national level. Now, a similar kind of jersey-changing game is being seen in politics as well. Overnight party switching and receiving party nomination the very next day has become an unprecedented event in Assam's political history. Some leaders had already switched parties earlier and received nominations as per the assurances given to them. But the incident of switching parties overnight and getting a nomination the next day has surprised many.

MP Pradyut Bordoloi resigned from the Congress one day, joined the BJP the next day, and immediately received the party nomination for the Dispur seat. As if in response, long-time BJP leader Amar Chand Jain was declared the Congress candidate from Katigora. He joined the Congress just a day before the announcement, although discussions had been ongoing for a few days. Many used to criticize Nitish Kumar for party-switching politics, but his JD(U) has only changed alliances a few times for convenience. Nitish himself never left his party nor joined another. However, what Pradyut and Amar Chand have done is truly astonishing.

It appears that the ruling party BJP and the main opposition Congress are now competing to bring defectors into their parties and grant them nominations. Democracy or public service seems secondary here; party politics has become the main focus. Both BJP and Congress seem eager to show that they too can provide tickets to defectors. Neither party wants to fall behind in this competition. That is what it appears to be.

When leaders abandon their principles and suddenly become immersed in the ideology of a party they once despised, it raises doubts about whether they entered politics to serve the public or to serve their own interests. Those who once criticized a party's ideology switch overnight and start praising the same ideology without hesitation. Congress leaders who used to criticize the BJP start criticizing Congress after joining the BJP. What a strange form of politics this is.



Go ghost. Forget attention. Just grow in private.

It raises the question: is the sole aim of political leaders to get elected as public representatives? Because a section of

leaders seems focused on getting elected by any means. Party ideology holds no value for them. In their pursuit of electoral victory, they can switch to any party. It becomes clear that public service is not their primary objective. One can serve the public even without being elected. But politicians obsessed with becoming representatives fail to understand this. They are willing to go against their own party's ideology and join another just to get elected. Such tendencies are evident in several recent incidents.

Every election season, some people switch parties, but they are usually ordinary workers or supporters. Due to dissatisfaction or loss of trust in local leaders, they switch parties. Their decisions are driven by local issues, loss of faith in one leader, or attraction to another. If their chosen leader wins, they feel happy; if not, they feel disappointed. Their personal fate is not tied to the result. They neither gain nor lose materially. Their decisions are emotional. Often, when their illusion about a leader breaks, they switch again. For some, party-switch-

ing during elections is also a way to gain publicity. The only gain is recognition—people come to know their names. Despite no personal benefit, such workers often remain active, and their switching benefits the party.

Workers may switch parties, but when leaders suddenly switch, it becomes surprising. MP Pradyut Bordoloi, a strong Congress leader, suddenly switched to the BJP. He resigned from Congress one day, joined BJP the next, and immediately received nomination for the Dispur seat. On the other hand, BJP leader Amar Chand Jain from Katigora resigned from BJP and joined Congress, and Congress gave him the party ticket.

Amar Chand has practiced saffron politics all his life. His sudden switch has surprised many. His long-standing desire was to become an MLA from Katigora. When BJP did not give him a ticket, he switched camps overnight. Yet, he had criticized Congress all his life. People of Katigora have not forgotten his past actions, including attempts to incite communal tension



over a beef-related issue. Now, after receiving the Congress nomination, he claims he will defeat both Gautam Roy and the current BJP candidate Kamalakhya.

Even within BJP, his past actions show his lack of loyalty. It appears that he used the party as a tool for personal gain. If the party leadership had monitored him properly, his activities would have been noticed earlier. BJP candidate Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha was earlier in Congress and joined BJP recently, though his inclination toward BJP was visible for the past three years. Hence, the contest between them may not be one-sided but competitive.

Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi is a very astute politician. A JNU scholar, he was unable to align with the current state Congress leadership. His ideological differences with state president Gaurav Gogoi became severe. To avoid being politically sidelined, he joined BJP and seems relieved. Whether this move benefits him will be known later. But currently, there seems to be disorder within the Congress in the state. This is evident from resignations of leaders like Bhupen Bora, Kamalakhya, and Shashikanta Das. Several others have also left Congress and joined BJP, some of whom have received nominations.

In India, party-switching has become like a game. We have also seen politics of breaking parties to form new ones. CPI split into CPM and CPI(ML). Similarly, Janata Dal split into JD(U), JD(S), RJD, and Lok Janshakti Party. Congress also split in the past, and leaders like Sharad Pawar, P.A. Sangma, and Tariq Anwar formed NCP. Though NCP still exists, in Meghalaya it transformed into NPP. Pranab Mukherjee once formed a separate party but later returned to Congress. Party-switching has existed for a long time, but getting nomination immediately after switching is a new phenomenon.

If such incidents are widely publicized to keep politics heated, it indirectly harms democracy. There should be balance between democratic values, social responsibility, and public service. Those who can change principles overnight raise questions about their accountability to the people. Many politicians who claim to seek election only for public service are actually driven by self-interest. One can contribute to society without being elected. There are many such examples in Indian politics.

(Opinions are personal)
(Author: Former student leader and advocate at Gauhati High Court)

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