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

Assam Sends First Legal Agarwood Export Consignment to Saudi Arabia, UAE

GUWAHATI
Assam has exported its first legally approved consignment of agarwood chips worth Rs 2.35 crore to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, marking a significant development for the state's agro-forest economy and export sector. According to officials and the All Assam Agarwood Planters and Traders Association, the consignment was dispatched from the cargo terminal of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport after securing all necessary statutory clearances.

The shipment comprised 100 kilograms of agarwood chips bound for Saudi Arabia and an additional 12 kilograms destined for the UAE.

Agarwood, popularly known as Oud, is regarded as one of the world's most expensive aromatic raw materials and is extensively used in luxury perfumes, incense, cosmetics and traditional products across Gulf nations, Europe and Southeast Asia.

The association described the export as a landmark achievement, stating that it represents the first legally approved overseas shipment of agarwood chips from Assam and could pave the way for expanded international trade opportunities for the sector.

Chairman of the association Jehirul Islam said the achievement was the result of years of research, plantation development, farmer outreach, policy advocacy and compliance with international export standards.

Officials noted that Assam-grown agarwood enjoys strong demand in global markets due to its superior quality, distinctive aroma and high oil content, factors that provide the state with a competitive edge in the international Oud trade.

WHO SAID WHAT



"It's an honor to be with you, it's an honor to be your friend, and the relationship between China and the USA is going to be better than ever before." - President Donald J. Trump

'Assam's Peda tastes good': CM Sarma takes swipe as Pawan Khera

GUWAHATI

As Congress leader Pawan Khera arrived at the Crime Branch Police Station in Guwahati on Thursday, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma took a swipe at him, saying, "Assam's Peda's taste is good."

The remarks were made by the Chief Minister while visiting the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati and offering prayers to Goddess Kamakhya.

While speaking to reporters, CM Sarma also expressed confidence in the state's growth over the next five years.

CM Sarma said, "I am confident that with the blessings of Mahamaa Maa Kamakhya, our state will go forward in the next 5 years. Assam's Peda's taste is good."

Khera was at the Crime Branch on Thursday in connection with the passport case linked to CM Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sarma.

Earlier in the day, while speaking to reporters outside the police station, Congress leader Khera said



he was cooperating with the probe. "The investigation is underway, and I am cooperating in it," he said. The controversy erupted after Congress leader Pawan Khera, in



an April press conference, alleged that CM Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sarma, holds three passports, from India, the UAE, and Egypt, and owns undisclosed luxury properties

Manipur Govt Assures Continued Educational Support for Displaced Students



IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on May 14 attended a programme at Jubilee Hall of Imphal College where one-time financial assistance was distributed to 754 internally displaced college students under the Chief Minister's College Students Rehabilitation

Scheme (CMCSRS).

The financial assistance was transferred through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system in the presence of senior government officials and dignitaries.

Speaking at the programme, the Chief Minister said the Manipur government remained committed to ensuring that students displaced by

the ongoing crisis in the state do not face disruptions in their education.

"The Government of Manipur remains committed to ensuring uninterrupted education and extending support to displaced students during these challenging times," Khemchand said. He expressed hope that the financial support would motivate affected students to continue pursuing their academic aspirations with confidence and determination despite the hardships caused by the conflict. The Chief Minister's College Students Rehabilitation Scheme was introduced to assist students displaced by the ethnic violence and unrest in Manipur, which has impacted thousands of families and disrupted academic activities across several districts of the state.

The initiative is aimed at helping displaced students continue their higher education by easing financial burdens arising from displacement and instability.

48-HOUR KUKI-ZO SHUTDOWN PARALYSES MANIPUR HILL DISTRICTS

IMPHAL

A 48-hour shutdown called by several Kuki-Zo organisations disrupted normal life across large parts of Manipur's hill districts on Thursday following the killing of three church leaders and injuries to five others in a deadly ambush in Kangpokpi district.

The shutdown affected Kuki-Zo-inhabited areas across the state, with markets, shops, commercial establishments, educational institutions and several government offices remaining closed throughout the day. Vehicular movement was also severely affected, particularly along National Highway-2 passing through Sadar Hills, where civil society groups enforced the bandh while demanding justice for the victims.

The protest shutdown was spearheaded by Kuki Inpi Manipur and supported by several tribal bodies and civil society organisations. The shutdown began at midnight on May 13 and is scheduled to continue until midnight on May 15.

Only emergency and exempted services were allowed to operate in certain areas as security forces remained

deployed at sensitive locations amid fears of further escalation following the attack.

The ambush occurred along the Sapameina-Kotlen stretch in Kangpokpi district when two vehicles carrying church leaders came under attack by armed assailants. The victims were reportedly returning to Kangpokpi after attending a conference organised by the United Thadou Baptist Churches.

Amid the escalating tension, the Joint Tribes Council Manipur issued an urgent public advisory discouraging travel along National Highway-37.

In a statement issued by its General Secretary Dr. Aku Newme, the council urged people to avoid unnecessary travel, especially along the Tungjamaril stretch, until the security situation improves. "The Joint Tribes Council hereby informs the general public that travel along NH-37 is strongly discouraged due to the tense situation prevailing at present," the advisory stated.

Security agencies continue to monitor the situation closely in the conflict-hit hill areas as concerns grow over renewed unrest in the region.

West Bengal Border Fencing Move Big Boost for Northeast Security: Himanta Biswa Sarma



GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma welcomed the West Bengal Cabinet's reported decision to hand over land to the Border Security Force (BSF) for fencing along the India-Bangladesh border, describing it as a major step towards strengthening security in Assam and the Northeast.

Addressing a press conference in Guwahati after chairing the first Cabinet meeting of his second term, Sarma said sealing vulnerable stretches of the international border was critical to curbing infiltration and safeguarding the region. "Our fight against infiltration always faced a problem because there was a huge gap in fencing between Bangladesh and West Bengal," the Chief Minister said.

Sarma noted that organisations and political groups in Assam had long demanded complete sealing of the India-Bangladesh border in the state, but stressed that such efforts would remain ineffective unless similar action was taken in West Bengal, which shares the longest border with Bangladesh among Indian states.

"Yesterday, the West Bengal Cabinet took a very significant decision that within 45 days, land will be handed over to the BSF so that the border

can be completely secured and fencing can be erected along an 800-km stretch. Without Bengal, Northeastern states will always remain insecure from infiltration," he said.

The Chief Minister pointed out that five Indian states - Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and West Bengal - share borders with Bangladesh, with Assam having the shortest stretch and West Bengal the longest.

"This has been our concern for a long time. Without securing the West Bengal border, the entire Northeast will remain vulnerable," Sarma added.

Calling the reported move "heartening news" for the people of the Northeast, the Assam Chief Minister said border management had remained a politically sensitive issue for years and was prominently discussed during the recent West Bengal Assembly election campaign. "I would like to compliment the Bengal Cabinet for this historic decision," he said. The development comes amid renewed focus on border surveillance and national security concerns in eastern and northeastern India, particularly over illegal cross-border infiltration and demographic changes in border states. Earlier this week, West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari, during the first Cabinet meeting after the Assembly elections, reportedly approved the transfer of land to the BSF to facilitate fencing work along the Bangladesh border.

The proposed fencing initiative is expected to strengthen monitoring along vulnerable stretches of the international boundary and improve coordination among border states in the Northeast region.

Manipur Home Minister Promises Swift Action After Twin Ambushes, Says "Some People Don't Want Peace"

IMPHAL

Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam on May 14 assured that those responsible for the recent ambush attacks in the state would be arrested "as soon as possible," while alleging that certain elements were attempting to derail peace efforts in Manipur.

The minister made the remarks during a visit to the mortuary of the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences, where he met family members of the victim killed in the Jombangtek ambush in Noney district.

The attack occurred on May 13 near Jombangtek village when suspected armed militants allegedly opened fire on a vehicle returning from Imphal. One person was killed while two others sustained injuries in the incident. Konhoujam extended condolences to the bereaved family and assured them that the government would make every effort to identify and apprehend those behind the attack. Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the visit, the Home Minister strongly condemned both the Jombangtek attack and the separate ambush in Kangpokpi district that claimed the lives of three members of the Thadou community. He said a high-level security review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh was held on Wednesday with the participation of officials from central armed forces and the Manipur Police to assess the prevailing security situation in the state.

Responding to questions on whether the Jombangtek case would be handed over to the National Investigation Agency, Konhoujam said the government would examine the matter.

The Home Minister also referred to reports that civilians belonging to both the Kuki and Naga communities were allegedly taken hostage following the Kangpokpi attack.

UNC Alleges 20 Civilians Held Hostage After Kangpokpi Ambush; Manipur CM Appeals for Restraint

IMPHAL

The United Naga Council (UNC) alleged that nearly 20 civilians, including Nagas and members of the Gorkha community, were being held hostage in Manipur's Kangpokpi district following the deadly ambush that killed three church leaders earlier in the day.

In a statement, the council claimed that the civilians were allegedly abducted around 10:45 am from Konsakhul village by suspected armed miscreants operating in the Leilon Veiphei area. According to the UNC, at least 15 individuals had been identified so far. The alleged hostages reportedly include residents from Konsakhul village, Maram in Senapati district, Juna village in Kangpokpi district, as well as members of the Gorkha community. The council further stated that a pastor identified as Kenpibou from Juna village and another individual identified as Rev. Manu were also among those allegedly abducted. Describing the incident as "unacceptable," the UNC condemned the targeting of civilians and said hostage-taking violated all norms of a civilised society. The allegations surfaced amid escalating tensions in Kangpokpi district after armed assailants ambushed church leaders belonging to the Thadou Baptist Association earlier on Wednesday.

Among those killed in the ambush was Rev. V. Sitthou, former General Secretary of the Manipur Baptist Convention and President

of the Thadou Baptist Association. The attack left several others injured and triggered protests and shutdowns in parts of Kangpokpi and Churachandpur districts.

Reacting to the violence, Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh condemned the attack, describing it as a "dastardly terror act" aimed at destabilising peace efforts in the state. "The attack on innocent civilians is deeply disturbing and devastating not only for the affected families but for the entire state," the Chief Minister said in a statement. Singh informed that the injured victims had been admitted to Shija Hospitals and Research Institute for treatment. He added that he, along with Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho, Home Minister Govindas Konhoujam and senior officials, visited the injured at the hospital. The Chief Minister announced that the state government would bear all medical expenses of the victims and directed authorities to ensure the best possible treatment for the injured. Stating that Manipur was gradually moving towards normalcy after prolonged ethnic unrest, Singh warned against attempts to derail the peace process through violence and intimidation.

"I appeal to all sections of society to uphold peace, show restraint and refrain from emotional responses," he said, while urging an immediate end to abductions, hostage-taking and intimidation along community lines.

Assam Government Assigns Portfolios to Newly Inducted Cabinet Ministers

GUWAHATI

The Assam government on May 14 officially allocated portfolios to the newly inducted ministers in the BJP-led NDA government headed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The portfolio allocation was approved through an official notification issued with the consent of Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya following the swearing-in of the new council of ministers earlier this week in Guwahati. Senior BJP leader Rammeswar Teli has been entrusted with the departments of Transformation and Development, Labour Welfare, and Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare.

AGP president Atul Bora has been allotted Panchayat and Rural Development, Implementation of Assam Accord, Border Protection and Development, and Excise departments.

Meanwhile, Charan Boro has been assigned the Transport Department along with Welfare of

Bodoland.

Senior BJP leader Ajanta Neog will oversee the Women and Child Development and Tourism departments.

The allocation of portfolios comes shortly after the BJP-led NDA government returned to power in Assam for another term under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The swearing-in ceremony held in Guwahati was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and several senior NDA leaders.

The newly formed government also convened its first cabinet meeting on May 13, during which several policy decisions were taken relating to fuel conservation, environmental sustainability, and administrative reforms.

Chief Minister Sarma, along with five cabinet ministers, participated in the maiden cabinet meeting after the formation of the new government.



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NATIONAL AUSTERITY CALL



Three months into the Iran-USA-Israel war, the world is no longer bracing for impact – it is living through it. What began as a volatile flashpoint in an already fractious region has metastasised into a full-blown global economic crisis. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz – one of the world's most critical maritime corridors – has choked the arteries of global commerce, and there is precious little relief in sight. Alternative markets had initially offered a glimmer of hope. That glimmer has dimmed considerably. Future buying contracts have already absorbed the available output of every viable alternative supplier, leaving latecomers scrambling at exorbitant prices with no guarantee of delivery. The world had collectively placed its faith in a swift resolution. That hope remains stubbornly unfulfilled.

For India, the calculus is particularly unforgiving. The list of imports upon which everyday Indian life depends reads like an inventory of modern civilisation itself – crude oil, LPG, edible oils, fertilisers, industrial raw materials, and an array of goods that underpin both agriculture and manufacturing. Then there is gold. Indians share a cultural and emotional relationship with the precious metal that transcends mere investment logic. Gold is woven into weddings, festivals, and family legacies. Yet each kilogram imported must be paid for in United States dollars, and the surge in gold prices in recent weeks has been nothing short of extraordinary. At a time when foreign exchange must be conserved with the rigour of a wartime treasury, the appetite for gold imports imposes an additional, avoidable burden on national reserves. The rupee, meanwhile, tells its own troubled story. With Indian exports disrupted by the war-shipping lanes compromised, foreign buyers cautious, global demand subdued-foreign exchange earnings have fallen short of projections. The resulting pressure on the rupee against the dollar compounds the impact on every import bill. India's foreign exchange reserves remain adequate for now, but adequacy is not a strategy. Planning for the extreme case is not pessimism; it is prudence.

It is in this context that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for voluntary austerity must be understood – not as political theatre, but as a genuine call to national purpose. His addresses in Telangana and his reiteration in Vadodara carry the weight of a government that recognises the gravity of what lies ahead. The recommendations – work from home wherever feasible, shift to public transport or electric vehicles, curtail unnecessary foreign travel, defer gold purchases, and reduce dependence on imported goods – are not hardships. They are sensible, considered adjustments that, if embraced collectively, can meaningfully reduce the strain on India's balance of payments. The Prime Minister has drawn a pertinent historical parallel. India has faced wars before, and in each instance, citizens rose to the occasion when called upon. That civic spirit must be summoned again. The elections are behind us; the moment for governance, for difficult decisions and honest communication, is now. Oil companies are haemorrhaging losses that are unsustainable in any prolonged scenario. The double burden of dollar-denominated imports and a weakening rupee cannot be absorbed indefinitely.

Voluntary restraint must, however, be complemented by institutional leadership. It is not enough for the Prime Minister alone to set the tone. Members of Parliament and State Legislatures must lead visibly – reducing their own consumption, foregoing unnecessary expenditure, and publicly endorsing austerity measures rather than paying them lip service. Local governments must translate the national message into actionable community programmes: no-vehicle days, restrictions on large functions, and incentives for those who reduce energy consumption. The measures that need consideration are wide-ranging – restrictions on large-scale celebrations, promotion of domestic tourism over international travel, and a rationalisation of consumption patterns across every stratum of society.

The old adage holds with particular force today: every penny saved is a penny earned. India has weathered storms before – colonial exploitation, partition, wars, droughts, and a once-in-a-century pandemic. The West Asia crisis is severe, but it is not insurmountable. What it demands is not sacrifice so much as collective discipline – a willingness, across all sections of society, to shrink the comfort zone just a little, for a period that we must collectively work to shorten. The Prime Minister has offered a roadmap. The nation must now choose to walk it.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Life's tragedy is that we get old too soon and wise too late.

- Benjamin Franklin

THE NEXT GENERATION RISE TO POWER IN TAMIL NADU



ASHOK BHAN

Tamil Nadu is once again at the threshold of a major political transition. The State that produced towering political personalities such as C. N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, J. Jayalalitha and M. G. Ramachandran is witnessing the emergence of a new generation of political leadership. The era of charismatic mass leaders dominating Tamil Nadu politics for decades is gradually giving way to a younger leadership that combines regional identity, welfare politics, media influence, digital outreach and administrative modernity.

The rise of the next generation in Tamil Nadu is not merely a change of faces; it represents a profound transformation in political culture, electoral strategy and governance priorities. The State's politics, deeply rooted in the Dravidian movement, is adapting itself to the aspirations of a younger electorate shaped by technology, urbanisation, education and global exposure. For over half a century, Tamil Nadu politics revolved around two principal Dravidian formations – the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. These parties were built around iconic leaders whose personal charisma often overshadowed institutional politics. However, the passing away of stalwarts such as Karunanidhi and Jayalalitha created a vacuum that inevitably paved the way for generational transition.

The most visible face of this transition today is M. K. Stalin, who has successfully consolidated his authority within the DMK and transformed himself from being perceived as merely the political heir of Karunanidhi into an independent and assertive administrator. Stalin's leadership reflects continuity with the Dravidian legacy while simultaneously projecting a modern governance-oriented image. His emphasis on social welfare, education, health infrastructure and cooperative federalism has appealed to younger voters seeking stability and development alongside regional pride.

Equally significant is the rise of Udhayanidhi Stalin, who symbolises the next layer of generational politics in Tamil Nadu. Though critics describe his ascent as dynastic, supporters argue that he represents the inevitable evolution of Dravidian politics into a younger and more media-savvy form. His role in electoral mobilisation, youth outreach and political communication demonstrates how political leadership in Tamil Nadu is increasingly shaped by cinematic visibility, digital engagement and organisational control.

The AIADMK, after the demise of Jayalalitha, has experienced internal turbulence and factionalism. Yet even within the party there is recognition that survival depends upon nurturing younger leadership capable of reconnecting with the electorate. The party's challenge lies in balancing legacy politics with organisational renewal. Unlike the DMK, which managed a relatively structured succession process, the AIADMK accepted successor with mass appeal comparable to Jayalalitha or MGR.

Another important dimension of Tamil Nadu's next generation politics is the emergence of new political players beyond the traditional Dravidian framework.

Annamalai Kuppusamy has injected unusual energy into the Bharatiya Janata Party in Tamil Nadu. A former police officer with strong communication skills and an aggressive political style, Annamalai represents an attempt to create an alternative political discourse in a State historically resistant to national party dominance. His appeal particularly among sections of urban youth and first-time voters indicates that Tamil Nadu politics may no longer remain entirely bipolar. Similarly, actor-politicians continue to shape public imagination in Tamil Nadu. The influence of cinema on politics in the State remains unparalleled. Figures like Vijay entering the political arena illustrate how celebrity culture continues to intersect with electoral politics. Tamil Nadu has a long tradition where cinematic popularity often translates into political legitimacy. However, the next generation of actor-politicians faces a more informed and demanding electorate that expects not merely charisma but also coherent governance agendas and ideological clarity. The rise of younger leadership in Tamil Nadu is closely linked to demographic change. A significant portion of the State's electorate today consists of young voters who are more aspirational, technologically connected and employment-oriented. While earlier political mobilisation revolved heavily around linguistic identity and social justice narratives, contemporary voters are equally concerned about jobs, entrepreneurship, industrial growth, environmental sustainability and digital opportunities. Tamil Nadu's impressive educational indicators and industrial development have created a politically aware middle class that seeks accountability and administrative efficiency. The younger political leadership has therefore adapted its language and campaign methods accordingly. Social media, data-driven campaigning, direct citizen interaction and issue-based politics are increasingly replacing the older style of personality cult-driven mobilisation. Yet, despite these changes, the ideological roots of Tamil Nadu politics remain firmly connected to the Dravidian movement. Social justice, reservation policies, welfare schemes and federal autonomy continue to dominate political discourse. What is changing is the style of articulation. The next generation leaders seek to present Dravidian politics in a more contemporary framework compatible with economic modernisation and global integration. Women and youth participation are also becoming more visible in Tamil Nadu's evolving political landscape. Though male leadership still dominates party structures, there is increasing emphasis on empowering women through welfare schemes, education and local governance participation. The future political trajectory of Tamil Nadu may witness the rise of more women leaders from within both Dravidian and non-Dravidian formations.

The role of technology in shaping next generation politics cannot be underesti-

ated. Political communication in Tamil Nadu is rapidly shifting from traditional public rallies and party newspapers to digital platforms, online campaigns and instant messaging networks. Younger politicians are more adept at using these tools to influence public opinion and connect directly with voters. This has altered the nature of political engagement by making it faster, more interactive and more personalised.

Another significant aspect of Tamil Nadu's political transition is the gradual decline of unquestioned hero worship. While personality cults remain influential, younger voters increasingly demand tangible governance outcomes. Issues such as unemployment, urban infrastructure, water scarcity, industrial investment and environmental protection are becoming central electoral concerns. Political legitimacy now depends not only upon emotional appeal but also upon administrative delivery.

The next generation rise to power in Tamil Nadu also reflects the broader transformation of Indian politics. Across the country, regional parties are facing the challenge of leadership succession, institutional stability and ideological adaptation. Tamil Nadu, because of its strong regional identity and sophisticated political culture, offers a unique example of how generational transition can occur without completely dismantling established ideological traditions.

Importantly, Tamil Nadu's political evolution remains deeply tied to the idea of federalism. Younger leaders in the State continue to assert regional autonomy and linguistic pride while simultaneously engaging with national political realities. The debate over Centre-State relations, language policy, fiscal federalism and cultural identity remains central to Tamil Nadu's political imagination. The next generation leadership is likely to continue this balancing act between regional assertion and national participation.

Economically, Tamil Nadu stands among India's most industrialised States. The future leadership therefore faces immense expectations regarding economic growth, investment attraction, employment generation and technological innovation. The younger electorate expects Tamil Nadu to emerge not only as a welfare-oriented State but also as a global manufacturing, technology and education hub. This requires political leadership capable of administrative competence and long-term vision.

The rise of next generation politics in Tamil Nadu also has implications for national politics. Regional parties from Tamil Nadu have historically played influential roles in coalition governments at the Centre. As new leaders emerge, they are likely to shape future debates on federalism, secularism, welfare economics and regional autonomy at the national level. Tamil Nadu's political voice, therefore, will continue to remain significant in India's democratic discourse.

At the same time, challenges persist. Dynastic politics remains a contentious issue. Critics argue that leadership succession within major parties often favours family lineage over grassroots merit. Supporters counter that electoral legitimacy ultimately rests with the people and that experienced political families provide continuity and organisational stability. This debate will continue to shape public perceptions of emerging leaders. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu's future politics will depend upon whether the next generation can transcend symbolic politics and address structural issues such as youth unemployment, agrarian distress, urban congestion and environmental degradation. Climate change and water management, particularly inter-State river disputes, are likely to become critical political issues in the coming decades.

In conclusion, the next generation rise to power in Tamil Nadu represents both continuity and change. The Dravidian legacy remains deeply embedded in the State's political consciousness, yet a new style of leadership is unmistakably emerging – younger, technologically savvy, media-oriented and development-focused. Leaders such as M.K. Stalin, Udhayanidhi Stalin, Annamalai and new entrants from cinema and civil society signify the changing contours of Tamil Nadu politics.

The transition underway is not merely generational; it is civilisational in the sense that Tamil Nadu is redefining how regional identity, democratic aspirations and modern governance can coexist in a rapidly changing India. The coming decade will determine whether the new leadership can preserve the social justice foundations of the Dravidian movement while simultaneously meeting the demands of a globally connected and aspirational society. Tamil Nadu, with its rich political heritage and vibrant democratic culture, once again stands poised to shape the future trajectory of Indian regional politics.

Role of Indian National Congress
Rahul Gandhi and the Indian National

Congress continue to play a significant, though carefully calibrated, role in the political landscape of Tamil Nadu. While the Congress no longer commands the independent electoral dominance it once enjoyed during the era of K. Kamaraj, it remains an influential ally within the Dravidian political framework, particularly through its alliance with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Rahul Gandhi's political positioning in Tamil Nadu has been marked by his emphasis on constitutional values, federalism, secularism and social justice – themes that resonate strongly with the ideological foundations of Dravidian politics. His outreach to

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

25 years of Anant Sewa

On this day in 2001, with the blessings of Maa Kamakhya I was elected for the first time as an MLA from the Jalukbari Constituency. Thanks to the continuous blessings of the people of Jalukbari, I am now entering my 25th year as an elected representative. Being able to serve them, has been my greatest honour.

From that day till today - as I begin my second term as Assam's Mukhya Sewak - every step is etched with the sweat, struggles and triumphs of our people. With their blessings and support, I have tried my best to fulfill their aspirations, realise their dreams, make their lives better.

And it shall be my constant endeavour to make the lives of our people better, and contribute to the progress of Maa Bharati, the greatest nation on this Earth.

This milestone feels even more personal as we begin work on NDA 3.0 today, ready to build an Assam which is stronger & prosperous. None of this would be possible without the unwavering support of the people of Jalukbari and the blessings of the people of Assam. On this day, I once again reaffirm my commitment to keep working for Aai Asomi.

~ Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma,
Assam CM



students, youth, women and civil society groups has helped the Congress retain relevance among sections of the urban and educated electorate. Tamil Nadu has also emerged as one of the few southern States where Rahul Gandhi's criticism of centralisation and his advocacy of cooperative federalism have found receptive political ground.

The Congress under Rahul Gandhi has increasingly sought to project itself in Tamil Nadu not as a competing force to the Dravidian parties, but as a national partner committed to protecting linguistic diversity, secular democracy and State autonomy. This strategy has enabled the party to maintain political visibility despite its organisational limitations in the State. The legacy of Congress leaders such as Kamaraj still carries moral and historical weight in Tamil Nadu's political memory, particularly regarding education, rural development and clean public life. Rahul Gandhi has repeatedly invoked these traditions while attempting to rebuild the Congress as a modern democratic platform aligned with regional aspirations. In the evolving next-generation politics of Tamil Nadu, the Congress therefore remains less a dominant electoral force and more an ideological and coalition-based actor contributing to broader opposition unity and constitutional discourse. (The author is a noted Senior Advocate & political Analyst)

Assam Cabinet Clears UCC Draft, Bill to Be Introduced in Assembly on May 26

GUWAHATI

The first Cabinet meeting of the newly elected Assam government on Wednesday approved the draft of the proposed Uniform Civil Code (UCC), paving the way for the legislation to be introduced during the upcoming session of the Assam Legislative Assembly.

Announcing the decision after chairing the Cabinet meeting in Guwahati, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the government would table the UCC bill on the final day of the Assembly session scheduled for May 26.

"The Cabinet has approved the draft of the Uniform Civil Code today and decided to present it on the last day of the Assembly session," Sarma

said.

The Chief Minister said Assam's proposed UCC had been specifically designed to suit the state's unique demographic and cultural realities while ensuring that religious customs and tribal traditions remain untouched.

According to Sarma, the proposed legislation will focus on four key areas - fixing a uniform minimum age for marriage, abolition of polygamy, ensuring inheritance rights for women, and regulating live-in relationships through compulsory registration of marriages and divorces.

"In this way, the UCC will be implemented without any interference in religious affairs and practices," he said.

The Chief Minister further clar-

fied that tribal communities residing in both hill and plain areas of Assam would remain completely exempt from the ambit of the proposed law.

"On the basis of the approved UCC draft, the tribal communities residing in both hills and plains will be exempted from the purview of the UCC," Sarma stated.

He added that all religious rituals, customs and traditional practices followed by different communities in Assam would remain outside the scope of the legislation.

"We have also kept all the religious rituals, traditions and customs practised by the people of Assam outside the scope of the UCC," he said.

Drawing comparisons with other BJP-ruled states, Sarma noted that states such as Uttarakhanda, Goa and

Gujarat had already moved ahead with Uniform Civil Code implementation, while Assam has now formally approved its own framework.

The decision comes ahead of the first session of the newly elected 16th Assam Legislative Assembly, scheduled to be held on May 21, 22, 25 and 26.

Sarma also announced that portfolios for ministers in the new Cabinet would be declared shortly, while additional ministers are expected to take oath during the Assembly session.

Senior BJP MLA Chandra Mohan Patowary has been recommended as the pro tem Speaker for the upcoming Assembly proceedings. Following the swearing-in of MLAs, elections for the Speaker's post will

be held, with the NDA fielding former minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass as its candidate.

The Chief Minister also hinted at a possible expansion of the Assam Cabinet in the first week of June after completion of the Assembly session.

Apart from the UCC decision, the Cabinet approved several other major policy and administrative initiatives.

The BJP's 2026 election manifesto was formally adopted as the guiding framework for governance and policymaking over the next five years.

The Cabinet also constituted a high-level task force under the Assam Chief Secretary to prepare a roadmap for providing two lakh government jobs within five years. The

committee has been asked to submit its report within three months.

Among cultural initiatives, the government approved the concluding ceremony of the birth centenary celebrations of Bhupen Hazarika at Bharat Mandapam on September 8.

The Cabinet further sanctioned a Rs 32 crore proposal for construction of a museum dedicated to Bhupen Hazarika at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra.

According to the government, Rs 13 crore of the project cost will be funded by the North Eastern Council, while the remaining amount will be borne by the Assam government.

Senior advocate Devajit Lon Sainia was also reappointed as the Advocate General of Assam for another five-year term.

Gauhati High Court Judge Recuses From Hearing Shyamkanu Mahanta's Bail Plea

GUWAHATI

The hearing on the bail petition of Shyamkanu Mahanta, one of the prime accused in the case linked to the death of Assamese cultural icon Zubeen Garg, was deferred on Wednesday after a judge of the Gauhati High Court recused himself from hearing the matter. The bail petition, listed as item number five before the bench of Justice Parthivjyoti Saikia, was expected to come up for final hearing during the day. However, Special Public Prosecutor Ziaul Kamar confirmed that the court declined to hear the case and directed that the matter be placed before another appropriate bench.

"The hearing was listed as item number five before the court of Justice Saikia. However, when the case was called, the court informed that it did not wish to take up the matter and recused itself," Kamar said.

He added that no further proceedings related to the bail petition would take place before the same bench after the judge formally expressed unwillingness to hear the matter.

"No other procedure regarding the petition hearing will take place before the same bench as the judge himself stated that he wishes to stay away from the case. There could be personal reasons," the Special Public Prosecutor said.

According to Kamar, the next course of action would now depend on the registry of the Gauhati High Court, which will decide the date and the bench before which the matter will be listed again.

"The registry will decide when the next hearing will take place. Mahanta's advocate may approach the registry as they have come from Kolkata. The matter will be listed once the registry fixes a date, or it may be announced anytime later," he added.

Earlier, a fast-track court in Guwahati had rejected Mahanta's bail plea after hearing arguments from both the prosecution and defence.

Meghalaya BJP Leader A.L. Hek Condemns Killing of Three Civilians in Manipur, Calls It a 'Heinous Terror Act'



SHILLONG.

Senior BJP leader and Pynthorunkhrah MLA A.L. Hek has strongly condemned the killing of three civilians, including church leaders, in an ambush between the Kotlen and Kotzim areas of Kangpokpi district in Manipur, describing the incident as a "heinous terror act."

Reacting sharply to the incident, the veteran legislator said there can be no justification for such brutal violence and asserted that those responsible must be brought to justice without delay.

"Religious leaders have remained a vital source of hope and

strength for communities during prolonged unrest. Targeting innocent civilians, including church leaders, is a deeply disturbing and inhuman act that deserves the strongest condemnation," Hek said.

He said violence only deepens wounds, prolongs suffering, and further weakens the fragile bonds between communities already affected by conflict.

Hek urged the Centre, the Manipur Government, and concerned authorities to act with urgency, wisdom, and fairness to restore peace and public confidence in the region.

Calling for strict action against the perpetrators, he said justice must not only be delivered swiftly but also visibly, so as to reassure affected communities and prevent further escalation of violence.

The killings have once again raised serious concerns over the continuing law and order situation in Manipur, where sporadic violence has continued despite repeated appeals for peace.

Pawan Khera Grilled for Over 10 Hours by Assam Crime Branch in Passport Case

GUWAHATI

Congress leader Pawan Khera was questioned for more than 10 hours by the Assam Police Crime Branch on May 13 in connection with cases filed by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his wife Riniki Bhuyan Sarma over alleged remarks concerning passports and foreign assets.

Khera appeared before the Crime Branch office in Guwahati after being summoned to join the investigation into allegations that he made defamatory and misleading claims against the Chief Minister during the election period. The Congress leader is accused of alleging that Sarma possessed multiple passports and undisclosed foreign properties.

After emerging from the Crime Branch office late in the evening, Khera told reporters that he had cooperated fully with investigators and had been directed to appear again on May 14.

"I am fully cooperating and I have been asked to come again



on May 14 at 9:30 AM and I will come," Khera said.

He also maintained that he was a law-abiding citizen and would continue to assist the investigation process. Earlier in the day, before entering the Crime Branch premises, Khera said he had faith in the legal system and respected the judiciary and due process of law.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the investigation was progressing with-

in the legal framework and asserted that the police would complete the probe within the stipulated timeline. Addressing a press conference, Sarma alleged that Khera had crossed constitutional boundaries by writing to foreign governments seeking action against him. He said the police investigation would not take long and indicated that the chargesheet could be filed soon if cooperation from the accused continued.

"The police investigations will

"If People Stop Calling Me Mama, I Would Probably Die": Himanta Biswa Sarma

GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday spoke about his emotional connection with the people of the state, saying the popular nickname "Mama" holds a deeply personal significance for him.

The remarks came during media interactions following the first Cabinet meeting of the newly sworn-in BJP-led NDA government in Assam.

Responding to a question on his strong public connect and the widespread use of the term "Mama" by supporters and ordinary citizens, Sarma said the bond reflected a relationship that went beyond politics. "If people stop calling me Mama, I would probably die," the Chief Minister said with a smile, underlining the emotional attachment he associates with the nickname.

Sarma further said that despite



holding political office and public responsibilities, retaining one's human values remained most important.

"We may be political leaders, we

may be somebody, father of somebody, leader for somebody, but at the end of the day we are human. As long as we maintain our human character, I think we will be able to

deliver," he said.

Over the years, the "Mama" identity has become closely associated with Sarma's political image in Assam, particularly due to his direct public outreach, welfare-focused governance and regular engagement with citizens across the state.

The comments came a day after Sarma took oath as Chief Minister of Assam for a second consecutive term on May 12.

The swearing-in ceremony, held in Guwahati, was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, senior NDA leaders, Union ministers, chief ministers from several states and other dignitaries.

The BJP-led NDA returned to power in Assam for a third consecutive term after securing a decisive mandate in the 2026 Assembly elections, further strengthening Sarma's position as one of the BJP's key leaders in the Northeast.

Assam University to Publish Documented History of Its Establishment

CALL FOR SUBMISSION OF AUTHENTIC DOCUMENTS BY MAY 31

SILCHAR, MAY 13

The authorities of Assam University have undertaken an initiative to document and publish in book form the authentic history of the movement for establishing a Central University in the Barak Valley. In accordance with a decision of the Executive Council, an advisory committee comprising eminent personalities from the valley has already been constituted under the leadership of Prof. Asoke Kumar Sen. The first meeting of the committee was held on Wednesday at the seminar hall of the university's Administrative Building.

The meeting, presided over by Prof. Ashok Kumar Sen, was attended by Vice-Chancellor Prof. Rajive Mohan Pant, Registrar Dr. Pradosh Kiran Nath, Finance Officer Dr. Shubhadeep Dhar, along with members of the advisory committee and other dignitaries. Delivering the introductory address, Registrar Dr. Nath said that Assam University is not merely an institution of higher education, but the outcome of the Barak Valley people's prolonged struggle, sacrifices, and collective aspirations.

Quest!

When you're alone, you think. When you think, you remember. When you remember, you feel pain. - Psychological Fact



He stated that the university's initiative to publish a fact-based and completely non-political account of the movement is not only the need of the hour but also an effort to present the true history before future generations.

Vice-Chancellor Prof. Pant said that he has been living in the valley for the past four years and has come to realise the richness of its culture and heritage, as well as several historical developments that remain largely unknown outside the Barak Valley. Referring to the movement for establishing Assam University, the Malegarh episode, the Chargola Exodus and other

significant historical events, he highlighted the university's initiative to preserve such histories. He also stressed the importance of organising a seminar on the history of the university's establishment movement.

Among those who spoke at the meeting were ACKHSA founder president and noted lawyer Pradip Duttaroy, senior journalist and editor of Dainik Samayik Prasanga Taimur Raja Choudhury, former principal of Hailakandi S.S. College Hilal Uddin Laskar, noted researcher Sanjib Deb Laskar, former principal of Women's College Dr. Debashree Dutta, former principal of Nehru College Abid Raja Mazumdar, advocate Nazia Yasmin Mazumdar, journalist and writer Bikash Chakraborty, retired professor Biswatosh Chowdhury, Prof. Nani Kumar Singh, Prof. Barunijyoti Choudhury, former AUNTEA president Sagnik Choudhury, Deputy Registrar Dr. Abul Hasan Choudhury, poet Shatadal Acharjee and others.

The speakers observed that the movement for establishing a Central University in the Barak Valley was not merely a demand for an educational institution, but a broader movement reflecting the region's aspirations for education, culture, and identity. They thanked the university authorities for taking up the initiative and emphasised the need for a comprehensive publication documenting the different phases of the movement, its social background, the

role played by students and youth, and the actual circumstances behind the establishment of the university.

The meeting also stressed the importance of collecting information from the manuscripts of late Prof. Subir Kar and journalist Bikash Chakraborty on the history of the establishment movement. Discussions highlighted the educational deprivation faced by the people of the Barak Valley, the limitations in higher education facilities at the time, and the public opinion and mass movements that demanded a Central University. Speakers remarked that the documented history would serve not only as a recollection of the past but also as an important archival record for future generations.

During the meeting, apart from the advisory committee, an editorial board was also constituted. The university appealed to all concerned that anyone possessing authentic documents related to the movement for establishing Assam University should contact advisory committee chairman Prof. Asoke Kumar Sen or chief editors Prof. Biswatosh Chowdhury and Prof. Barunijyoti Choudhury by May 31. The collected documents will be duly acknowledged in the publication.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by the convener of the advisory committee, Dr. Pinak Kanti Roy.

Tripura Youth Congress Demands Probe Into Alleged NEET-UG 2026 Paper Leak

AGARTALA

The Tripura Youth Congress on Wednesday criticised the Central Government over the alleged leak of the NEET-UG 2026 examination paper and demanded a high-level investigation into the controversy.

Addressing a press conference at the Pradesh Congress Bhavan in Agartala, Tripura Youth Congress president Neel Kamal Saha alleged that the incident had severely undermined the credibility of the country's education system and shaken the confidence of lakhs of medical aspirants.

Saha accused the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of failing to protect the integrity of national-level competitive examinations.

He said repeated allegations of question paper leaks reflected serious lapses and negligence in the examination system.

According to Saha, the controversy has caused mental distress and uncertainty among students who had spent years preparing for medical entrance examinations.

The Youth Congress leader also criticised the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, alleging that higher education was gradually becoming inaccessible for economically weaker sections while favouring financially privileged families.

He claimed that increasing commercialisation in the education sector, coupled

with repeated examination irregularities, exposed structural flaws within the current system.

Demanding accountability, the organisation called for the resignation of the Union Education Minister and sought the dismantling of the National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts the NEET examination.

The youth body further demanded that the responsibility of conducting major entrance examinations should be returned to state governments.

The organisation also called for a Supreme Court-monitored impartial investigation into the alleged paper leak to identify all individuals involved, including any possible political links connected to the alleged racket. In addition, the Tripura Youth Congress urged authorities to conduct a fresh examination in a transparent and fair manner without imposing additional financial or psychological burden on students.

The organisation further demanded compensation for economically weaker candidates whose families allegedly borrowed money or mortgaged assets to support their exam preparation.

The alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak controversy has sparked protests and criticism in several parts of the country, with student organisations and opposition parties demanding greater accountability and reforms in the examination system.

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TMC chief Mamata Banerjee appears before Calcutta HC to argue post-poll violence case



KOLKATA

Former West Bengal chief minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee appeared before the Calcutta High Court on Thursday to argue a case in connection with alleged post-poll violence and attacks on party offices.

Banerjee reached the high court in a lawyer's gown, accompanied by senior Trinamool

Congress leaders Chandrima Bhattacharya and Kalyan Banerjee.

The matter pertains to a public interest litigation filed by advocate Shirshanya Bandyopadhyay on behalf of the TMC, alleging attacks on party offices and violence against its workers, following the announcement of the 2026 assembly poll results.

According to the petitioner, several TMC

leaders and workers were allegedly forced to flee their homes after the polls, while many of them were attacked "because of their association with the Trinamool Congress".

The petition was filed in the Calcutta High Court on May 12.

The matter came up for hearing before a division bench comprising Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Parthasarathi Sen.

In a post on X, the TMC said: "Our Hon'ble Chairperson Smt @MamataOfficial personally reached the Calcutta High Court today to argue in a matter concerning the widespread post-poll violence unleashed across Bengal by @BJP4Bengal.

"The former ruling party in West Bengal asserted that once again, Banerjee has shown what 'truly sets her apart'. 'She NEVER abandons the people of Bengal in their hour of need. She NEVER stops fighting for truth, justice, and constitutional values. And time and again, she rises above the politics of hatred with unmatched COMPASSION, COURAGE and CONVICTION.

"Whether confronting the injustice of SIR or standing firm against the unruly conduct of @BJP4India, she continues to prove that there is truly NO LEADER LIKE HER in the country today," the TMC said.

89 killed as storms, rain and lightning batter Uttar Pradesh; CM orders relief and damage survey



PRATAPGARH

At least 89 people were killed after strong winds, heavy rain, hailstorms and lightning battered several districts of Uttar Pradesh, uprooting trees and electric poles and damaging houses, according to the Relief Commissioner's office.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took cognisance of the loss of lives and damage caused by the unseasonal weather on Wednesday and directed officials to ensure that relief reached affected families within 24 hours.

In a post on X on Thursday, the Relief Commissioner's office said, "Due to bad weather on May 13, including storms, rain, hailstorm and lightning, reports of 89 deaths, 53 injured persons, 114 livestock losses and damage to 87 houses have been received in the state, which has been taken cognisance of by

the Hon'ble Chief Minister."

It said the Chief Minister had directed all Divisional Commissioners and District Magistrates to verify the incidents "with full sensitivity" and ensure that financial assistance was distributed to affected families within 24 hours while maintaining direct communication with them and extending all necessary assistance.

The Relief Commissioner's office said the situation was being monitored continuously in coordination with district officials and that necessary funds were being released to districts.

According to a list issued by the Prayagraj district administration, seven deaths were reported in the Handia area, four in Phulpur, three in Sorao, two in Meja and one in Sadar due to the storm and rain.

In Bhadohi, district administration

sources said at least 16 people died in storm-related incidents.

Additional District Magistrate Kunwar Virendra Kumar Maurya said trees and electric poles were uprooted in several areas while many houses were damaged in the storm.

In Fatehpur, Additional District Magistrate Avinash Tripathi said nine people were killed and 16 injured in storm-related incidents in the district.

"Eight people, including five women, died in Khaga tehsil, while a woman died after a wall of a house collapsed in Sadar tehsil," he said.

In Pratapgarh, four people died in separate incidents involving wall and cemented shed collapses and lightning strikes amid strong winds and rain, officials said.

Superintendent of Police Deepak Bhukar said Bhim Yadav (25) died

after he was trapped under the debris of a cemented shed that collapsed in Ojha Ka Purwa village in the Lalganj Kotwali area.

He said Bhusan Pandey (56) died after a wall collapsed in Sari Swami village under the Baghrai police station area.

Mr. Bhukar said Shanti Devi (46) of Narangpur village and Lal Bahadur (44) of Chhatrapur Shivala Raghna village also died in storm-related incidents.

In Kanpur Dehat district, two persons died in rain-related incidents, officials said.

Police sources said a 19-year-old woman, Ruchi, died after being struck by lightning in Bhauthari village under the Rasulabad area while standing under a neem tree with goats during heavy rain.

Several goats also died in the incident.

A 60-year-old man standing nearby was injured, they added.

Additional District Magistrate (Finance and Revenue) Dushyant Kumar said reports regarding human and livestock losses had been sought from local officials and that financial assistance would be provided as per government rules.

In Deoria, Komal Yadav (62), a resident of Bhimpur Gaura village, died after being struck by lightning, district administration sources said.

Two others were injured in the incident.

In another incident, Ramnath Prasad (65), a resident of Neruari village, died in a lightning strike.

In Sonbhadra district, Madhav Singh (38) died after being trapped under a tree uprooted during the storm and rain.

Adityanath directed District Magistrates and officials of various departments to visit the affected areas and provide all possible assistance to victims and their families.

He also instructed officials to remain alert and directed the Revenue and Agriculture Departments, along with insurance companies, to conduct a survey of the damage and submit a report to the government.

INTERNATIONAL

Xi warns Trump Taiwan issue could lead to 'conflict' as US-China summit starts

BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping warned his US counterpart Donald Trump that the issue of Taiwan could push their two countries into "conflict" if mishandled, a stark opening salvo as a superpower summit set to tackle numerous thorny issues began in Beijing Thursday.

Trump had arrived in China with accolades for his host, calling Xi a "great leader" and "friend", as he predicted that their countries would have "a fantastic future together".

But beyond the pomp as he welcomed Trump, Xi used less effusive tones, saying the two sides "should be partners and not rivals" and highlighting the issue of self-ruled democratic Taiwan - which Beijing claims as its territory - straight off the bat.

"The Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-US relations," Xi said, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

"If mishandled, the two nations could collide or even come into conflict, pushing the entire China-US relationship into a highly perilous situation."

The trip to Beijing is the first by a US president in nearly a decade, with the grand reception belying a host of unresolved trade and geopolitical tensions between the two countries.

Xi greeted Trump with a red-carpet welcome at the opulent Great Hall of the People, with military band fanfare, a gun salute and a host of schoolchildren jumping and chanting "welcome!".

Seemingly enjoying the ceremony, Trump said "the relationship between China and the USA is going to be better than ever before".

Xi instead referenced an ancient Greek political theory about the risks of war when a rising power rivals a ruling power, as he questioned if China and the US could find ways to work together as equals instead.

"Can China and the United States



transcend the so-called 'Thucydides Trap' and forge a new paradigm for major-power relations," Xi asked, adding that "cooperation benefits both sides, while confrontation harms both".

There has been plenty of the latter since Trump's last visit in 2017, with the two countries having spent much of 2025 embroiled in a dizzying trade war and at odds on many major global issues.

Taiwan is a longstanding sore point.

The United States recognises only Beijing but under domestic law is required to provide weapons to Taiwan

so that it can defend itself.

China has sworn to take Taiwan and has not ruled out using force, ramping up military pressure around the island in recent years.

Trump said Monday he would speak to Xi about US arms sales to Taiwan, which would be a departure from historic US insistence that it will not consult Beijing on its support for the island.

A new addition to the list of contentious issues, the Iran war, threatens to weaken Trump's position in the talks, having already forced him to postpone

his trip from March.

The US president said he expected a "long talk" with Xi about Iran, which sells most of its US-sanctioned oil to China, but insisted that "I don't think we need any help with Iran" from Beijing.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, and U.S. President Donald Trump meet at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Thursday, May 14, 2026.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, known throughout his career as a fierce opponent of Beijing, struck a somewhat different tone.

"We hope to convince them to play a more active role in getting Iran to walk away from what they are doing now, and trying to do now in the Persian Gulf," Rubio told broadcaster Fox News in an interview aired Wednesday.

Top of Trump's wish list for the summit will be business deals on agriculture, aircraft and other topics.

Elite businessmen in the US leader's delegation, including Nvidia's Jensen Huang and Tesla's Elon Musk, were on the stairs of the Great Hall of the People on Thursday for the welcome ceremony.

Musk told reporters afterwards the meeting had been "wonderful", while Huang said the two presidents "were incredible". The long-simmering trade war between the two countries will also be prominent, after Trump's sweeping tariffs last year triggered tit-for-tat levies that exceeded 100 percent.

Trump and Xi are set to discuss extending a one-year tariff truce, which the two leaders reached during their last meeting in South Korea in October, although a deal is far from certain. China's controls on rare earth exports and AI rivalry are among other topics expected to be taken up by the two heads of state.

Trump will be treated to a state banquet in the evening with Xi, and will also visit the historic Temple of Heaven, a World Heritage site where China's emperors once prayed for good harvest.

US Inflation surges as Iran war drives energy prices sharply higher

WASHINGTON

U.S. consumer prices climbed sharply again last month as the 10-week war with Iran delivered higher gasoline prices and more pain for Americans.

The Labor Department's consumer price index rose 3.8% from April 2025, the biggest jump in three years, and up from a 3.3% year-over-year gain in March. On a month-to-month basis, April prices rose 0.6% from March as gasoline prices rose 5.4%, according to the data released Tuesday. The month-over-month gain was down from a 0.9% increase in overall prices from February to March, when the initial financial shock from the war hit the U.S. economy.

Labor Department figures showed that gasoline prices are up more than 28% compared with a year ago. However, the AAA motor club listed the average regular gallon of gasoline above \$4.50 on Tuesday, about 44% more than it cost last year at this time.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called consumer core prices rose 0.4% last month from March and 2.8% from April 2025, relatively modest readings that suggest the energy price burst has yet to spill over more broadly into prices for other goods. Grocery prices rose 0.7% from March to April as meat prices rose after they had declined slightly in the month before.

Prices are rising at a time when Americans are already frustrated by the high cost of living. Affordability is likely to be a key issue when voters go to

the polls Nov. 3 to determine whether President Donald Trump's Republican Party maintains control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

"Inflation is the key drag on the U.S. economy now," Heather Long, chief economist at Navy Federal Credit Union, wrote. "There is a real financial squeeze underway. For the first time in three years, inflation is eating up all wage gains. This is a setback for middle-class and lower-income households and they know it. They are having to cut back on spending and stretch every dollar."

In April, average hourly wages fell 0.3% from a year earlier after accounting for inflation - the first year-over-year drop in three years.

Inflation had been dropping more or less steadily since peaking with a 9.1% year-over-year spike in June 2022, a surge caused by supply chain bottlenecks at the end of COVID-19 lockdowns and a jolt for energy prices following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. But inflation has remained above the Federal Reserve's 2% target.

Then, the United States and Israel attacked Iran on Feb. 28, and Tehran responded by shutting off access to the Gulf of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes. That has sent oil prices, and most visibly gasoline, racing higher.

The Fed, which had been expected to cut its benchmark interest rate in 2026, has turned cautious as it waits to see how long the conflict lasts and whether higher energy prices spill

over into other products and cause a broader inflationary outbreak.

Trump has lambasted the Fed and its outgoing chair, Jerome Powell, for refusing to slash rates to boost the economy. Kevin Warsh, the president's hand-picked choice to succeed Powell, is expected to be confirmed by the Senate this week; but it's unclear whether Warsh would pursue lower rates given the uncertainties arising from the war - or whether he could persuade his colleagues on the Fed's rate-setting committee to go along if he tried.

Some companies are also starting to feel the pain.

Whirlpool, which makes KitchenAid and Maytag appliances, reported last week that revenue dropped nearly 10% in its most recent quarter and said that the war has caused a "recession-level industry decline" that has undermined consumer confidence.

Grace King of Ames, Iowa, said that higher prices in the food aisle and at the pump are making her cut back on spending for things like clothing. The administrative assistant, 31, used to spend \$200 per month on clothing, mostly on Amazon, but not anymore.

"There's pressure basically everywhere from the groceries that I buy to the gas to fill up the tank," she said. "I've severely cut back on my frill spending."

For example, King noted that while it's only a five-minute drive to work, she makes the trip twice a day. And if she needs to do any big shopping, that's a 40-minute drive to malls in Des Moines, Iowa.

“BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA FOR THE BJP IN WEST BENGAL”



COL (DR.) ASHWANI KUMAR, MID, VSM (RETD).

Will Crime Be Controlled and Can the New Government Meet Public Expectations?

The political map of Eastern India has undergone a dramatic transformation with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) forming its first-ever government in West Bengal. The swearing-in of BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari as Chief Minister marks not merely a change of government, but the possible beginning of a new political and administrative era for one of India's most politically sensitive and strategically important states.

For decades, West Bengal remained outside the BJP's sphere of governance. The state moved from prolonged Left rule to the dominance of the Trinamool Congress under Mamata Banerjee. Now, with BJP securing a commanding majority in the Assembly, the political message from Bengal has echoed across the entire eastern and northeastern region.

This victory is not merely a state-level event. It reflects the wider consolidation of the BJP across Eastern and Northeastern India, Assam, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and now West Bengal.

The emergence of what is now being called a "double-engine sarkar" in Bengal has created enormous expectations among the public. For supporters, it represents political stability, stronger coordination with the Centre and the promise of accelerated development. For critics, however, it raises concerns about political centralisation and the future of opposition politics in the state.

The Bengal Verdict: More Than an Election. The Bengal mandate reflects several layers of public sentiment:

- Fatigue with prolonged political violence,
- Anger over corruption allegations,
- Frustration regarding unemployment,
- Desire for administrative accountability,
- And aspirations for stronger economic growth.

The BJP successfully projected itself as the party capable of delivering governance aligned with the Centre's infrastructure and development agenda. The slogan of "Sonar Bangla" was carefully linked with nationalism, cultural identity and economic revival.

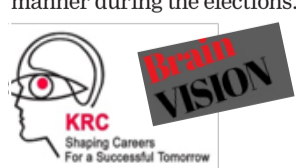
The symbolism during the oath ceremony was politically significant. Cultural depictions of Bengal's heritage, including Dakshineswar Temple, Durga motifs, Chhou performances and references to Rabindranath Tagore, were prominently showcased. BJP attempted to send a clear message that Bengali cultural pride and national political integration can move together.

Can Crime and Political Violence Be Controlled?

The biggest challenge before the new government is whether it can genuinely restore law and order and end Bengal's long-standing culture of political violence. For years, allegations involving:

- Political killings,
- Cadre intimidation,
- Extortion syndicates,
- Corruption,
- Illegal local networks,
- and partisan policing, have dominated Bengal's political discourse.

The BJP repeatedly accused the previous regime of allowing fear-based politics to flourish, while the Trinamool Congress accused central agencies and institutions of acting in a partisan manner during the elections.



Writing down your worries before taking an exam can help combat test anxiety, improve performance and boost your test scores.

Now the BJP can no longer function as an opposition force. Expectations are immediate and extremely high. The people will judge the government on:

- (i) Reduction

in political violence.

- (ii) Safety of political workers irrespective of party affiliation.
- (iii) Women's security.
- (iv) Neutral functioning of police.
- (v) Elimination of extortion networks.
- (vi) Speedy justice and anti-corruption measures.

(vii) Restoration of investor confidence. However, Bengal's political violence is deeply rooted in local structures involving land, trade, labour unions, municipal systems and district-level political influence. Dismantling entrenched systems without creating fresh confrontation will require administrative maturity and political restraint.

If the BJP succeeds in establishing impartial governance, it may permanently reshape Bengal politics. But if one patronage structure merely replaces another, public disappointment may emerge rapidly.

Economic Expectations from the New Government.

The Bengal electorate has also voted with economic aspirations. Despite its rich intellectual, cultural and historical legacy, West Bengal has struggled with:

- (i) Industrial stagnation,
 - (ii) Declining manufacturing,
 - (iii) Migration of skilled youth,
 - (iv) Weak private investment, and unemployment.
- The BJP has promised:
- (i) Industrial revival,
 - (ii) Infrastructure expansion,
 - (iii) IT and logistics growth,
 - (iv) Investment corridors,
 - (v) Tourism development,
 - (vi) Port-led trade, and enhanced connectivity with the North-east.

The strategic importance of Bengal is immense. It serves as India's gateway toward Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Northeastern states. A stable and economically vibrant Bengal could become central to India's Act East Policy and regional trade expansion.

If coordinated properly with the Central government, the state could witness rapid infrastructure development in highways, railways, ports, border trade and urban modernisation.

This is where the "double-engine government" narrative becomes politically crucial. BJP supporters argue that policy coordination between the Centre and the state can reduce administrative friction and accelerate growth.

However, economic revival requires more than political slogans. The real test will be:

- (i) Employment generation,
- (ii) Industrial investment,
- (iii) Improvement in ease of doing business, and reduction of bureaucratic corruption.

Is Mamata Banerjee's Political Era Over?

One of the most important political questions emerging from this election is whether the defeat marks the end of the political dominance of Mamata Banerjee or merely the beginning of a different political role for her.

For over fifteen years, Mamata Banerjee remained the undisputed face of Bengal politics. She defeated the mighty Left Front and established herself as a powerful grassroots leader with strong emotional connect among large sections of society.

Even in defeat, she remains a significant political personality.

Several possibilities now emerge: Will Mamata Banerjee move to the Rajya Sabha and play a larger national opposition role? Will she continue as a street fighter and mobilise public opinion against the BJP government? Will she transform herself into the principal watchdog questioning the new ruling establishment?

Or will the Trinamool Congress witness inter-

nal restructuring and leadership transition? Much will depend on the performance of the BJP government during the coming years.

If the BJP succeeds in: Controlling violence, Ensuring stable governance, Reducing corruption, Improving the economy, and maintaining communal harmony, then it may permanently consolidate itself in Bengal and strengthen its national political position for the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

However, if governance failures emerge, if public expectations remain unmet, or if political tensions increase, opposition forces led by Mamata Banerjee may regain momentum quickly.

Thus, Bengal has now become more than a state political battleground. It has become a national political laboratory whose outcome may influence the future direction of Indian politics before 2029.

BJP's "Jadhu" in Eastern India.

The BJP's rise in Eastern India did not occur overnight. It was built through years of organisational expansion, welfare outreach, ideological messaging and strategic alliances.

The "jadhu" or political magnetism of BJP in the East rests upon several pillars: Strong Leadership.

The popularity of Narendra Modi continues to remain a major electoral factor across the region. Welfare Politics.

Direct benefit schemes, rural housing, electricity, healthcare and food distribution strengthened BJP's support among economically weaker

sections.

National Security Narrative. Issues relating to infiltration, border management and internal security became politically influential in Bengal and Assam.

Organisational Expansion. The BJP invested heavily in both-level structures and grassroots mobilisation across Eastern India.

Cultural Integration. The party increasingly adopted local cultural narratives and regional icons while linking them with broader national identity.

The Northeast became a testing ground for BJP's coalition-building and governance model. Successes in Assam and Tripura provided confidence for expansion into Bengal.

Challenges Before the New Government. Despite the historic mandate, the BJP government faces formidable challenges: Managing a highly polarised political environment,

Balancing aggressive politics with democratic restraint. Reassuring minority communities, Handling bureaucratic resistance, and delivering visible economic results quickly.

The people of Bengal have not voted merely for a political party, they have voted for change, stability and expectation. The coming years will determine whether the promise of "Sonar Bangla" becomes reality or remains a powerful electoral slogan.

The BJP's success in Bengal can redefine Indian politics for the next decade. Its failure, however, may equally become a turning point before the 2029 national elections. The true examination of governance begins after victory not before it. Author's Note.

The author has closely observed the political, security and social dynamics of Eastern and Northeastern India for several decades. Having served in sensitive assignments connected with national security, intelligence and conflict management, the author has also witnessed electoral processes in challenging environments, including local government-related election management exposure in Sri Lanka during 1989 and security-linked democratic processes in Jammu & Kashmir. This article is an analytical assessment of the emerging political landscape in Eastern India, especially West Bengal, based on available reports, political developments, public discourse and open-source information. The intention is to encourage informed democratic discussion on governance, stability, development and national integration.

About the Author
Colonel (Dr.) Ashwani Kumar, M-in-D, VSM (Retd.), writing under the pen name is a veteran military intelligence officer, strategic affairs commentator and author known for his writings on national security, Eastern and Northeastern India, border affairs, governance and socio-political developments.

He has served in challenging operational and intelligence assignments in India and abroad, including appointments connected with Military Intelligence, Cabinet Secretariat and internal security environments. His writings combine field experience, strategic insight and socio-cultural understanding of India's frontier and sensitive regions.

Disclaimer:
This article is an independent analytical opinion piece based on open-source information, publicly available reports and political developments. The views expressed are personal and intended solely for academic, journalistic and democratic discussion purposes.

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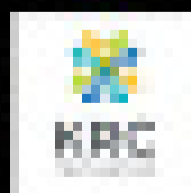


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