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PERSPECTIVE

Dumb people are impressed by complexity. Smart people are impressed by simplicity.

Sarma Credits Pawan Khera Presser for BJP's Assam Win, Mocks 'Peda' Remark

GUWAHATI

Assam caretaker Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on May 5 took a swipe at Congress leader Pawan Khera, claiming that the latter's press conference during the election campaign inadvertently helped the BJP secure a sweeping victory in the state.

Addressing reporters in Guwahati, Sarma struck a sarcastic note, saying he would offer "a lot of peda" to Khera if he is summoned by Assam Police. "When the police call Pawan Khera here, I will feed him a lot of peda and thank him for it," Sarma remarked.

He further asserted that Khera's press interaction had politically benefited the BJP during the Assembly elections. "I think Pawan Khera did a very good thing by holding the press conference as it helped us a lot in our victory. A lot of votes shifted towards us because of that press conference, and even Gaurav Gogoi lost his seat," he added.

The comments came after the BJP-led NDA returned to power in Assam for a third consecutive term with a decisive mandate. The Bharatiya Janata Party alone secured 82 seats in the 126-member Assembly.

In one of the major upsets of the election, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi lost the Jorhat Assembly seat to BJP candidate Hitendra Nath Goswami by a margin of over 23,000 votes, underscoring the scale of the BJP's victory in the state.

WHO SAID WHAT



Keeping with the vision of Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a new chapter begins in West Bengal's destiny.

From today, West Bengal is free from fear and filled with confidence in development. ~ Narendra Modi, PM

NOTA Loses Edge in Assam Polls as Decisive Mandate Marginalises Protest Vote

GUWAHATI

The 'None of the Above' (NOTA) option, once introduced as a tool for voters to register dissent, is steadily losing its practical significance in India's electoral landscape, a trend reflected clearly in the latest Assam Assembly election results.

Data from the recent round of Assembly polls across five states shows that NOTA continues to draw only marginal support. In Assam, it recorded a vote share of 1.29%—the highest among the states under consideration—yet still a small fraction of the total electorate. West Bengal followed with 0.81%, while other states reported even lower figures, underscoring the limited traction of the option.

The pattern aligns with national data compiled by the Election Commission of India. According to its Atlas-2024, NOTA's share in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections declined to 0.99%, its lowest since inception, compared to 1.08% in 2014.

The figures point to a gradual erosion in NOTA's usage over time, even as voter turnout remains robust across elections.



Limited by design
NOTA was introduced in 2013 following a landmark directive by the Supreme Court of India, aimed at strengthening democratic choice by allowing voters to reject all candidates while maintaining ballot secrecy. Prior to this, a similar provision existed under Form 49-O, which re-

quired voters to disclose their identity—discouraging its use.

However, more than a decade later, structural limitations have constrained NOTA's effectiveness. Crucially, even if NOTA secures the highest number of votes in a constituency, it does not trigger re-elections or disqualify candidates. The candidate with the next highest votes is still declared the winner.

This absence of electoral consequence has significantly reduced NOTA's ability to influence outcomes, relegating it largely to a symbolic expression of dissatisfaction.

Symbolic in decisive contests
Political observer Vikas Tripathi said the relevance of NOTA diminishes further in elections marked by clear mandates. "In a fragmented verdict, NOTA could have mattered more. But in a decisive sweep, its impact becomes negligible," he noted.

Assam's 2026 results—indicating a strong mandate in favour of the BJP-led NDA—reinforce this trend. In such scenarios, voter behaviour tends to consolidate

around major parties, leaving limited space for protest votes to alter outcomes.

Voter sentiment and strategic choices
For many voters, NOTA remains a symbolic gesture rather than a tool for change. Guwahati-based voter Dilip Sen described it as "a polite way of saying, I showed up, I did my duty, but I refuse to choose."

Others echoed similar views. Home-maker Ankita Kalita said the option reflects dissatisfaction but lacks practical impact. "It's a protest without consequence," she observed.

Businessperson Rituraj Saikia pointed to a more strategic mindset among voters. "Most people prefer choosing the lesser evil rather than opting for NOTA, because they want their vote to influence the result," he said.

This outcome-oriented voting behaviour is particularly visible in closely contested constituencies, where even dissatisfied voters tend to back a viable candidate instead of casting a non-impactful vote.

A case for reform?

The Assam data highlights a broader electoral reality—participation is increasingly driven by outcomes rather than symbolic expression. While NOTA continues to offer an avenue for dissent, it lacks the institutional backing to translate that dissent into tangible political consequences.

Yet, its presence on the ballot is not entirely without value. It functions as a barometer of voter discontent, however limited, and reinforces the democratic principle of choice—even if that choice is to reject all candidates.

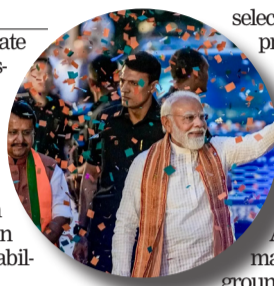
The larger question, however, remains unresolved: can symbolism alone sustain relevance in a highly competitive and polarised electoral system?

As Assam's results demonstrate, the ballot box continues to reward organisation, alliances and winnability over protest. Unless backed by structural reforms that attach consequences to its outcome, NOTA risks remaining what it has increasingly become—a quiet register of dissatisfaction in an otherwise decisive democratic process.

PM Modi Likely at Assam Swearing-In; Date to Depend on Schedule, Says Sarma

GUWAHATI

Riding on a landslide mandate for the BJP-led NDA in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday indicated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to attend the upcoming oath-taking ceremony, with the final date contingent on the Prime Minister's availability.



selection and gubernatorial procedures will follow.

Highlighting the scale of the NDA's victory, Sarma revealed that the alliance's final tally of 102 seats closely matched his own pre-election projections.

According to him, the estimate was based on extensive ground-level feedback gathered during the campaign.

Addressing reporters in Guwahati, Sarma said the state unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party is keen on Modi's presence this time, recalling that the Prime Minister could not attend the 2021 swearing-in due to COVID-19 restrictions. "If his visit is confirmed, the dates will be decided accordingly. That is why we may take two to three more days for discussions," he said.

Sarma added that the formal process of government formation would be overseen by BJP's central leadership, noting that party president Nitin Nabin will appoint observers, after which cabinet

selection and gubernatorial procedures will follow.

"After delimitation, we identified around 103 constituencies where we expected favourable demographics. From the beginning, I assumed Sivasagar would not be ours. Apart from that, there were no other seats within those 103 where we anticipated defeat. That is why the number came to 102," he said.

The Chief Minister further claimed that he had documented this projection in advance and shared it with Union Minister of State Prabir Margherita, who later displayed it publicly. He also noted that senior leader Sarbananda

Sonowal had similarly predicted the alliance would cross the 100-seat mark.

Rejecting suggestions of guesswork, Sarma attributed the accuracy of the forecast to sustained grassroots engagement. "When you travel across constituencies and attend meetings, you can sense from public response whether you are winning or losing. There is no magic in it," he said.

Drawing a contrast with the Opposition, Sarma took a swipe at Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, claiming that limited campaign outreach weakened the party's performance. "Through-out this election, he attended around 30 meetings, whereas we were constantly on the ground," Sarma said, adding that he had personally visited every constituency with party candidates multiple times since August 2025.

With the NDA set to form the government for a third consecutive term, attention has now shifted to leadership formalities and the swearing-in ceremony, which could witness a high-profile if the Prime Minister's visit is finalised.

Assam Govt Formation Begins: Nadda, Saini Named Observers; Sarma Set to Meet Governor to Stake Claim



GUWAHATI

The formation of a new government in Assam formally began on Tuesday after the Bharatiya Janata Party appointed Jagat Prakash Nadda as central observer to oversee the election of the party's legislative leader. Nayab Singh Saini has been named co-observer for the process.

The move follows the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance securing a decisive mandate in the Assam Assembly elections, winning 102 out of 126 seats. The BJP alone accounted for 82 seats, positioning it to form the government for a third consecutive term.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held a strategy meeting at his residence with senior party leaders, including Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia. Leaders from ally Asom Gana Parishad, including Atul Bora and Keshab Mahanta, were also present.

Sources indicated that Sarma is likely to meet Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya later in the

day to submit his resignation and stake claim to form the new government, in line with constitutional procedure.

The timing of the oath-taking ceremony is expected to depend on the availability of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The Assam BJP unit would want him to be present. If his visit is confirmed, the dates will be finalised accordingly. That is why we may take a couple of days to decide," Sarma said on Monday.

Addressing party workers in New Delhi after the BJP crossed the majority mark, Modi described the result as an endorsement of governance and development.

He also referred to Assam's cultural and spiritual significance, mentioning the Brahmaputra River and the Kamakhya Temple.

With the legislative party meeting expected to formalise leadership, the BJP is set to move quickly towards forming the next government in Dispur, marking its third straight term in power.

In West Bengal, the party has appointed Amit Shah as central observer and Mohan Charan Majhi as co-observer for the election of its legislative leader.

In a parallel development, for West Bengal, the BJP has appointed Amit Shah as central observer and Mohan Charan Majhi as co-observer to oversee the election of the party's legislative leader there.

Congress Fails to Secure LoP Status in Assam Despite Alliance Support

GUWAHATI

The Indian National Congress is set to miss out on the post of Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Assam Legislative Assembly after winning only 19 seats in the 2026 Assembly elections—falling short of the mandated threshold for formal recognition.

Although its ally, Rajiv Dal, secured two additional seats, taking the combined opposition tally to 21, existing rules do not allow for the aggregation of alliance numbers when determining LoP eligibility.

The requirement, reiterated earlier by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, stipulates that a single party must independently win at least 24 seats under its own symbol to qualify for the position.

Sarma had clarified the criteria on February 26, adding that beyond the numerical threshold, the party must also secure representation from at least six indigenous constituencies. At the time, he had expressed skepticism over whether the Congress could meet these conditions amid the prevailing political landscape.

He also dismissed appeals from parties such as the Assam Jatiya Parishad and Rajiv Dal to grant LoP status to Congress based on alliance backing. "The rule is clear. Congress must win 24 seats on its own symbol. Only then can they claim the LoP post," Sarma had stated.

With the Congress falling short of the required benchmark, Assam is likely to have an assembly without a formally recognised Leader of the Opposition. This development could impact legislative functioning by limiting the opposition's procedural influence in debates, as well as its role in key committees and oversight mechanisms.

High Women Turnout, Low Representation: Assam Assembly Still Has Only 6 Women MLAs

GUWAHATI

Despite women playing a vital role in shaping the electoral verdict in Assam, their representation in the newly elected Assembly remains strikingly low, with just six women legislators in the 126-member House. The contrast is stark. Women accounted for nearly half of the electorate—49.97 per cent—and recorded a turnout of 86.50 per cent, once again surpassing male voters and underlining their growing influence in the state's electoral politics.

Yet, this surge in participation has not translated into proportional representation in the legislature. Of the six women elected, five belong to the ruling alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party—three from the BJP, and one each from its allies, the Asom Gana Parishad and the Bodoland People's Front.

The Opposition benches feature just one woman MLA, from the Indian National Congress. The elected women legislators include Nilima Devi (Mangaldai), Seweli Mohilary (Kokrajhar), Ajanta Neog (Golaghat), Rupali Langthasa (Haflong), Baby Begum (Dhubri) and Diptimoyee Choudhury (Bongaigaon). Among them, Ajanta Neog stands out as one of Assam's most experienced women politicians, securing her sixth consecutive term from Golaghat with a margin exceeding 43,000 votes. Her continued success, however, remains an exception rather than the norm in a political landscape where women's presence has steadily declined.

Speaking after her victory, Neog acknowledged the weight of expectations following the BJP-led alliance's sweeping mandate. She also attributed the Opposition's poor performance to a disconnect with the electorate.

A broader look at electoral trends reveals a persistent decline in women's representation over the past decade. The Assembly had 14 women MLAs in 2011—its highest ever—accounting for over 11 per cent of the House. This number dropped to eight in 2016 and further to six in 2021. The 2026 tally remains unchanged, highlighting a stagnation in gender representation.

Historically, the numbers are even more telling. Since the formation of the Assembly in 1952, only 77 women have been elected—underscoring the long-standing structural barriers to women's political participation in the state.

Party-level trends offer further insight. Out of 722 candidates in the fray this election, only 59 were women. The BJP fielded six female candidates, while the Congress nominated 14. Analysts note that women candidates are often placed in more challenging constituencies, limiting their chances of electoral success. This disparity is particularly notable given the BJP's emphasis on women-centric welfare schemes, which have helped consolidate strong support among female voters. Initiatives such as direct benefit programmes and livelihood schemes have significantly expanded the party's outreach among women, but this support has not been mirrored in candidate selection or legislative representation.



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MIGRANT WORKERS ARE PAYING PRICE

The US onslaught on Iran, and the resultant closure of the Strait of Hormuz, are having a massive global impact, and the consequences for Indian migrant workers are just one example. In recent weeks, with prices soaring, businesses closing, and fuel reserves rapidly running out, many migrant workers have been fleeing Indian cities and hurrying home to their villages in a desperate attempt to survive.

The current shortage of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders and limited availability of fuel, along with major food price hikes due to the war, has forced many restaurants and other businesses in the big cities like Delhi to close. In fact, many people are increasingly struggling even to cook in their own domiciles due to the lack of cooking fuel, and some are returning home so they can cook on traditional firewood stoves, which is not possible in their cramped city lodgings.

Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has claimed that gas cylinders are still easily available, but this is often not the case. In fact, migrant workers in Delhi are unable to access domestic gas consumer cards, which allow people to book gas cylinders online, demonstrating the direct and disproportionate impact of the crisis on migrants.

The scenes of workers travelling long distances in large numbers, while businesses abruptly close, are reminiscent of the first COVID-19 lockdown six years ago. In March 2020, as various lockdown measures were being imposed across the world, the Indian government swiftly opted for an extreme approach: shutting down transport connections nationally.

Meanwhile, factories and other workplaces were also abruptly being shut down, leaving India's millions of internal migrant workers no choice but to walk thousands of kilometres back to their home villages. Many tragically died of exhaustion or heatstroke along the way.

This experience of migrant workers during the lockdown is captured by Neeraj Ghaywan's 2025 film, Homebound. The final section of the film follows the journey of two workers, childhood friends Shoaib and Chandan, from a rural North Indian village as they attempt to walk home to their village through the scorching sun.

Loosely based on a true story, the film captures the fear of the virus, showing how truck drivers taking people home to their villages would demand individuals leave the truck if they appeared to be sick or coughing. This is the fate of Shoaib and Chandan: after Chandan becomes dizzy on the truck, they are dropped on the side of the road, with no option but to walk the remaining 400 kilometres to their village.

The focus of the current mass migration is different than that of the 2020 lockdown: this time around, food is at the heart of people's decisions to migrate. There may not be the same kind of public health crisis, but millions are facing just as much of a struggle to meet their basic survival needs. Once again, Indian migrant workers are paying the price of a global economic catastrophe—this time, of course, caused by US imperial violence.

While the journey home is the climax of Homebound, the circumstances leading up to this point are equally central. Shoaib is Muslim and Chandan is Dalit; both of their families are poor, struggling, and reliant on the young men acquiring work.

Shoaib's father suffers from serious health problems and can't work, and Chandan's mother faces caste discrimination while toiling as a cook at a local school. These circumstances inform the series of events and choices that culminate in the pair taking jobs in a textile factory in the city, and their eventual return home during the lockdown.

Shoaib and Chandan's stories represent the intersection of caste and religion with class under India's current Hindu supremacist government. Their migration to the city happens relatively late in the film. Throughout the first half, their dreams of moving up within the system and obtaining state jobs are repeatedly crushed by reminders of their outsider status, which come from colleagues, superiors, and the very structures within which they are applying for jobs.

Despite not passing the police entrance exam, which both men take at the beginning of the film, Shoaib does manage to secure a "respectable" job in sales. Chandan's father initially plans to take the textile factory job, while Chandan, having passed the police exam, waits for his appointment letter to no avail. Finally, after becoming disillusioned with the process, he decides to take the factory job in place of his father. Sick of tolerating constant Islamophobia from his colleagues and superiors, Shoaib eventually resigns from his sales job. After showing up at Chandan's house and crying on his shoulder in one of several heartbreaking scenes between the pair, Shoaib joins Chandan working at the textile factory, which is the option of last resort for both of them. The film carefully traces how class, caste, and religious discrimination effectively force the two men into precarious low-wage labor. They have barely started the jobs when the factory shuts down for an indefinite amount of time, once the lockdown is announced.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people.

- Theodore Roosevelt

REWIRING INDIA'S CCTV ECOSYSTEM: A NEEDONOMICS LENS ON SECURITY AND SELF-RELIANCE



PROF MADAN MOHAN GOEL

Propounder Needonomics & Former Vice-Chancellor

The Needonomics School of Thought (NST), a Kurukshetra-based think tank, interprets the recent developments in India's CCTV and surveillance ecosystem as a defining moment of structural transformation. What appears at first glance to be a security-driven regulatory intervention, in reality, is a deeper and more deliberate shift toward ethical governance, technological sovereignty, and economic self-reliance. This transition reflects not only a response to emerging threats but also a conscious reorientation of national priorities in line with need-based and value-driven decision-making.

The trigger for this shift can be traced to alarming developments reported in March, when solar-powered, China-manufactured CCTV systems—affordable, easily accessible through e-commerce platforms, and capable of operating independently via 4G connectivity—were allegedly used in espionage activities in North India by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). These incidents exposed critical vulnerabilities in India's surveillance infrastructure, particularly the risks associated with unregulated imports of smart devices embedded with opaque technologies and external data dependencies.

Such revelations forced policymakers to confront an uncomfortable reality: that convenience and cost-efficiency, when pursued without adequate scrutiny, can compromise national security. Surveillance systems, by their very nature, are custodians of sensitive information. When their integrity is questionable, the risks extend beyond isolated breaches to systemic threats affecting governance, defense preparedness, and citizen privacy.

In response, India undertook a decisive overhaul of its surveillance equipment regulations effective April 1, 2026 introducing stricter certification norms and effectively barring Chinese companies from participating in the domestic CCTV market. While widely perceived as a security-centric move, NST emphasizes that limiting its interpretation to national security alone presents an incomplete picture.

From a Needonomics perspective, this regulatory shift represents a broader and more meaningful transformation—one that integrates security concerns with the principles of Atmanirbharta (self-reliance), ethical consumption, and sustainable economic development. It is not merely about restricting foreign participation but about fostering a resilient and trustworthy domestic ecosystem capable of meeting the nation's surveillance needs without external vulnerabilities.

A key element of this transition is the Ministry of Home Affairs' directive prioritizing Indian suppliers in government procurement processes. This marks a significant departure from earlier practices that often favored low-cost imports over long-term value creation. The new approach signals a strategic shift from price sensitivity

to trust sensitivity—from short-term savings to long-term security and sustainability.

Encouragingly, this policy direction is already yielding tangible outcomes. Indian companies such as CP Plus, Quba, Matrix, and Sparsh have emerged as credible players in the CCTV manufacturing space, demonstrating that domestic enterprises can compete not only on cost but also on quality, reliability, and innovation. By 2025, Indian firms are estimated to command nearly 80 percent of the domestic CCTV market—a milestone that underscores the success of this calibrated policy intervention.

This evolution of the CCTV ecosystem illustrates what NST describes as the "rewiring" of decision-making frameworks. For years, India's surveillance infrastructure remained dependent on imported technologies, particularly from China, raising persistent concerns about data security and potential external control. However, the response was often reactive and fragmented, lacking a coherent long-term vision.

The current shift, in contrast, reflects a more holistic and proactive approach. It recognizes that true security cannot be achieved through restrictions alone but requires the creation of robust domestic capabilities supported by strong regulatory frameworks and ethical governance practices.

Needonomics provides a valuable lens to understand this transformation. At its core, the philosophy advocates disciplined and mindful consumption—choosing what is necessary, appropriate, and aligned with collective well-being rather than being driven by excess, impulse, or superficial cost advantages. Applied to surveillance technologies, this translates into prioritizing systems that are secure, transparent, and accountable within the national ecosystem.



holders, including industry, academia, and civil society, in a collaborative framework.

India's evolving approach to CCTV

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Glad to welcome Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma at my home in Guwahati this evening and congratulate him on the historic Hat-trick for the BJP-led NDA in Assam.

Together, we are firmly resolved to build a stronger, safe, secure, self-reliant and Viksit Assam for the future.

~ Sarbananda Sonowal, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping & Waterways



regulation thus represents more than a policy adjustment; it signifies a paradigm shift. It marks the transition from reactive security measures to proactive ecosystem building, from dependence to self-reliance, and from cost-centric thinking to value-centric governance.

As the country navigates the complexities of an increasingly digital and interconnected world, such shifts will become essential across multiple sectors. The challenge is not limited to protecting physical borders but extends to securing digital infrastructures that underpin modern life.

In this journey, the principles of Needonomics offer a guiding compass. They remind us that sustainable progress lies in aligning choices with genuine needs, ethical considerations, and long-term well-being. By embracing this approach, India can not only strengthen its surveillance ecosystem but also set a precedent for responsible and resilient technological development.

Ultimately, the rewiring of India's CCTV ecosystem is not just about surveillance—it is about vision that integrates security with self-reliance, technology with trust, and policy with purpose. It is a step toward building a nation that is not only protected but also prepared, not only efficient but also enlightened.

NDA Surges Past Majority in Assam; Himanta Biswa Sarma Credits 'Wholehearted' Mandate

GUWAHATI

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) crossed the majority mark in the 126-member Assam Assembly on Monday, leading in 102 seats as counting progressed, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma thanking voters and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the outcome.

"On behalf of the BJP, I thank the people of Assam. I also thank PM Modi for supporting Assam for the last 10 years. I hope that Assam will lead in all sectors in the coming days," Sarma said, expressing confidence in the state's development trajectory. Referring to state BJP president Dilip Saikia, he added, "Saikia means over a hundred. The people of Assam have voted for us wholeheartedly."

The BJP registered a notable rise in vote share, securing 38.59% in 2026 compared to 33.6% in 2016—an increase of

nearly five percentage points. Analysts attribute this to consolidation across key constituencies and effective conversion of votes into seats.

The Indian National Congress, however, saw its vote share dip slightly to 29.26%, down from 30% in 2021. A significant portion of its leading candidates—18 out of 19—belong to the Muslim community, reflecting the party's current electoral base in the state.

The All India United Democratic Front, led by Badruddin Ajmal, recorded a sharp decline. Its vote share dropped to 5.29%, with only two leads, compared to 9.4% in 2016. Political observers point to delimitation changes as a key factor affecting the party's performance.

Sarma retained the Jalukbari seat with a commanding margin, polling 1,12,186 votes and defeating his Congress

rival by over 80,000 votes, reinforcing his dominance in the constituency.

One of the most significant upsets came from Jorhat, where Gaurav Gogoi lost to BJP's Hitendra Nath Goswami by 23,182 votes. Goswami secured 69,439 votes against Gogoi's 46,257, marking a setback for the Gogoi family's long-standing influence in Upper Assam.

The results indicate a continued shift towards bipolarity in Assam's political landscape, with the BJP and Congress emerging as the principal contenders. Regional parties appear to be losing ground, struggling to translate their vote bases into meaningful seat shares.

As the NDA looks set to form the next government, the verdict underscores a consolidation of support in favour of the ruling alliance, even as it raises fresh questions about the future trajectory of

opposition and regional forces in the state. Manipur Weighs Expert Panel to Examine Roadmap Amid Immigration Concerns

Imphal, May 4: A proposal to constitute an expert panel to examine the roadmap for updating or freshly implementing the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Manipur has been put forward, amid growing debate over demographic changes and illegal immigration in the state.

The suggestion was made by demographer RK Narendra Singh during a one-day academic programme held at Manipur University on Monday. The event, jointly organised by the All Manipur Students' Union and the Manipur University Students' Union, focused on the theme "Updating the National Register of Citizens (NRC): Collective Mobilisation and Demographic Governance in Manipur".

Addressing participants as a resource person, Singh highlighted concerns over illegal immigration, pointing to what he described as demographic imbalances and the rapid expansion of settlements in certain parts of the state. He argued that either updating the NRC or initiating a fresh exercise was necessary in view of its long-term implications.

Singh also referred to the Centre's plan to conduct the Census in 2027, describing it as crucial for policymaking, welfare delivery and delimitation. However, he cautioned that census data alone would not be sufficient for implementing an NRC exercise, stressing the need for a specialised panel to examine historical records and determine whether the NRC should be updated from the 1951 register or conducted anew.

He further called for strengthening

the Manipur State Population Commission and making it fully functional to address demographic challenges at what he termed a critical juncture.

Speaking at the programme, Bruce Pebam said student organisations had consistently raised the issue of illegal immigration and organised periodic mobilisations. He noted that the discussion aimed to chart a future course for NRC implementation, a demand that has gained traction among sections of indigenous communities.

The event saw participation from academics, students and media representatives, reflecting the growing attention on the NRC issue in Manipur. Calls for updating the register ahead of the next Census have intensified in recent months, with protests and campaigns emerging across the state.

'Not Just Electoral, But Political Fight': CPI(M) Downplays Dharmanagar Bypoll Loss in Tripura

AGARTALA

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) has described its defeat in the Dharmanagar by-election in Tripura as part of a broader "political fight," asserting that the contest was aimed at sending a message rather than securing a win.

Reacting to the results, Leader of the Opposition and state committee secretary Jitendra Chaudhury said the party had not approached the bypoll as a conventional electoral battle. "This is not just an electoral fight, but a political fight. We have seen this election as a political struggle," he said.

The by-election was won by Jahar Chakraborty of the Bharatiya Janata Party, who secured 24,291 votes. CPI(M) candidate Amitabh Datta polled 6,001 votes, while Chayan Bhattacharjee of the Indian National Congress received 5,936 votes. Chaudhury acknowledged that the CPI(M) did not expect to win the Dharmanagar seat but emphasised that contesting the election independently was a strategic decision taken in view of the prevailing political situation. The party had previously allied with Congress during the 2023 Assembly elections but chose to go solo in the bypoll. Criticising the ruling BJP, Chaudhury alleged that despite its electoral victory, the party's governance over the past eight years has led to a decline in Dharmanagar, one of Tripura's key urban centres and a major commercial hub. He said the CPI(M) had hoped that public sentiment over local issues would reflect in the outcome.

The CPI(M) leader also indicated that the results might have been different had the party contested in alliance with Congress. "The numbers suggest that if we had fought together, the combined vote share could have increased, and there might have been a chance of victory," he said.

Nagaland Governor Calls for Wider Welfare Access, Reviews State's Monsoon Preparedness

KOHIMA

Nand Kishore Yadav on Tuesday emphasised the need to expand access to welfare schemes across Nagaland, proposing decentralised outreach through block and village-level camps to facilitate the issuance of disability certificates.

The suggestion, aimed at easing access to government entitlements for persons with disabilities, was made during a review meeting with the state's Social Welfare Department at Lok Bhavan. Officials said the initiative would involve coordination with the Health and Family Welfare Department to ensure smoother certification processes at the grassroots level.

During the meeting, Director Tosheli Zhimomi presented updates on key welfare programmes, including flagship schemes under the Ministry of Women and Child Development such as Saksham Anganwadi & Poshan 2.0, Mission Vatsalya, and Mission Shakti. These initiatives focus on improving nutri-

tion, strengthening child protection systems, and advancing women's empowerment.

The review also covered programmes for senior citizens and persons with disabilities implemented under various central ministries. Progress in child protection mechanisms, including Child Welfare Committees and Juvenile Justice Boards, was assessed during the discussions.

While acknowledging ongoing efforts, the Governor stressed the importance of stronger implementation, enhanced public awareness, and better inter-departmental coordination to ensure that benefits reach intended beneficiaries more effectively.

In a separate high-level meeting, Yadav reviewed Nagaland's preparedness ahead of the monsoon season, with officials outlining potential risks such as flash floods, landslides, and erratic rainfall patterns. Despite concerns linked to El Niño conditions, the state is expected to receive normal to above-normal rainfall this year.

Koridang Bypoll: BJP's Daochier Imchen Wins, Becomes Nagaland's Youngest MLA

KOHIMA

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Daochier Imchen secured a decisive victory in the Koridang Assembly by-election in Nagaland, defeating his nearest rival by 3,123 votes, according to official results announced on Monday.

Imchen polled 7,317 votes, comfortably ahead of Independent candidate Toshikaba, who secured 4,194 votes. Another Independent contender, Imtiwapang, finished third with 3,633 votes, while National People's Party (NPP) nominee I Abenjang garnered 3,219 votes. Congress candidate T Chalukumba Ao trailed with 144 votes, and NOTA accounted for 48 votes.

At 35, Imchen now becomes the youngest member of the 14th Nagaland Legislative Assembly. His victory was marked by consistent leads across key polling areas, particularly in Mangmetong and Longkhum, which proved decisive in shaping the final outcome.



The by-election was necessitated following the demise of his father, Imkong L Imchen, a five-time legislator from the Koridang constituency. Political observers view the result as a continuation of the Imchen family's longstanding influence in the seat, located in Mokokchung district.

In his first remarks after the victory, Imchen expressed grat-

itude to voters, stating that the mandate reflected collective trust.

"This victory belongs to every voter. I pledge to serve with integrity, accountability, and commitment to fulfilling the aspirations of the constituency," he said.

Imchen was the consensus candidate of the ruling People's Democratic Alliance (PDA), led by the Naga Peoples' Front. Chief

Minister Neiphui Rio congratulated the newly elected legislator, describing the result as an endorsement of the alliance's governance and development agenda. He also acknowledged the role of party workers in securing the victory.

The bypoll result comes amid recent political realignments in the state, including the merger of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) with the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) in May 2025, followed by the NDPP's merger with the NPF in October the same year. Following these developments, the current strength of the Nagaland Assembly stands at: NPF 34, BJP 12, NPP 5, Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) 2, Republican Party of India (Athawale) 2, Janata Dal (United) 1, and Independents 4.

The Koridang bypoll result further consolidates the position of the ruling alliance, even as it underscores the continued relevance of local political legacies in shaping electoral outcomes in Nagaland.

BJP Retains Dharmanagar with Massive Margin; Manik Saha Hails 'Strong Public Mandate'

AGARTALA

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) retained the Dharmanagar Assembly seat in Tripura with a commanding victory, as its candidate Jahar Chakraborty won the by-election by a margin of nearly 18,000 votes.

According to official figures, Chakraborty secured 24,291 votes, comfortably defeating his nearest rivals in the contest. CPI(M) candidate Amitabh Datta polled 6,001 votes, while Congress nominee Chayan Bhattacharjee received 5,936 votes.

The bypoll in Dharmanagar, located in North Tripura district, was held on April 9 following the demise of sitting BJP MLA and former Speaker Biswabandhu Sen. Counting of votes was conducted on Monday under tight security arrangements.



Expressing gratitude after his victory, Chakraborty thanked voters for reaffirming their support for the BJP. "In 2018, in 2023, and now in this by-election, the people have once

again voted in favour of the BJP. I thank the voters of Dharmanagar for their trust," he said, adding that development would remain the party's top priority.

Highlighting the constituency's importance, he said Dharmanagar-Tripura's second-largest city would be developed into a modern urban centre through sustained infrastructure and civic initiatives.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha congratulated the winning candidate and thanked the electorate for what he described as a decisive mandate.

"I express my sincere gratitude to the people of Dharmanagar for ensuring the victory of the BJP candidate with a huge margin. Your support has made us more responsible," Saha said, reiterating the government's commitment to development, peace and progress in the region.

The emphatic win reinforces the BJP's organisational strength in Tripura and ensures the party retains its hold over a key urban constituency in the state.

'Three Gogois' unite in Assam but fail to make electoral impact Congress leader Jitendra Singh resigns as Assam in-charge after party's crushing defeat

GUWAHATI

The coming together of the "3 Gogois" had gained a lot of traction in Assam's public sphere this election, but it failed to prevent the inevitable.

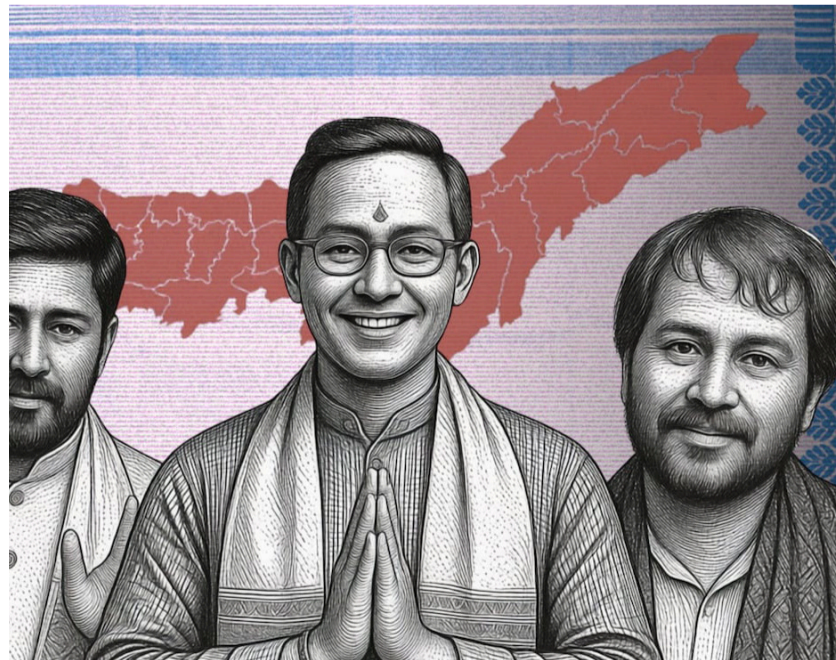
Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi, Rajior Dal president Akhil Gogoi, and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Lurinjyoti Gogoi, who all belong to the Ahom community, united ahead of the polls, with their sights particularly set on Upper Assam.

Upper Assam, when combined with Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Biswanath districts of northern Assam, has 36 of the state's 126 Assembly constituencies. The Congress-led six-party opposition front had banked heavily on the region, considering its large Ahom population.

However, not just the Ahoms, but even non-Ahom voters rejected these opposition parties. They could win barely two seats in the region — one by Rajior Dal and another by Congress. Akhil managed to retain his Sivasagar seat, but Gaurav and Lurinjyoti lost from Jorhat and Khowang seats respectively.

Ahead of the elections, Upper Assam witnessed separate mega rallies organised by communities, including the Ahoms, demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Realising that the demand might affect the BJP's poll prospects, the state government constituted a group of ministers (GoM) to look into the issue. The



GoM, in due course, recommended ST status for six communities, including the Ahoms. The matter is now with the central government. The recommendation eased visible anger, not just among the Ahoms but also among the five other communities, including the Tea Tribes, which have a sizeable number of voters in Upper Assam.

Rajior Dal and AJP are nascent political parties born out of the anti-Citizenship (Amendment) Act agitation. When they went to the polls, they had just one MLA in Akhil. Both lack not only leaders

but also a grassroots base. Therefore, the poor performance in the elections is not surprising. As for the Congress, critics say that Gaurav is not accessible. One of the main reasons behind his defeat is believed to be his detachment from the public. He allegedly spent very little time in Jorhat in the past two years since his election to the Lok Sabha from this parliamentary constituency.

Senior Congress leader Jitendra Singh on Monday tendered his resignation as the party's general secretary in charge of Assam with immediate effect,

taking responsibility for the outcome of the assembly polls in which his party suffered a crushing defeat.

In his resignation letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Singh said it is in the best interest of the organization that he steps aside to allow for fresh leadership and renewed direction.

"I write to tender my resignation as General Secretary In-Charge of Assam with immediate effect. The recent election results have been deeply disappointing, and I take full responsibility for my role in the outcome," Singh said.

"Despite our best efforts, we were unable to meet the expectations of the people of Assam whom we sought to serve. It is in the best interest of the organization that I step aside to allow for fresh leadership and renewed direction," he said.

Singh said he is grateful for the opportunity to have served and for the trust placed in him during his tenure. "I thank the people of Assam, as well as the Congress workers and leaders of Assam, for the love and respect they have shown me." "I remain committed to the values and vision of the Congress party and will continue to support the party's efforts in any capacity deemed appropriate," he added. The ruling NDA is set to form the government in Assam for the third time in a row after securing a two-thirds majority, with the alliance winning 102 seats in the 126-member assembly on Monday.

While the BJP won 82 seats, its allies — the Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) and the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) — bagged 10 constituencies each.

The Congress won just 19 seats and in a major blow, its state president Gaurav Gogoi lost in Jorhat to veteran politician and sitting BJP MLA Hitendranath Goswami by 23,181 votes.

Congress Finished in Assam, Has Become 'Muslim League': AIUDF Chief Badruddin Ajmal



GUWAHATI

Badruddin Ajmal, president of the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the Indian National Congress, claiming the party has lost its political relevance in Assam and alleging that it has transformed into an entity resembling the "Muslim League." Reacting to the evolving political scenario in the state following the Assembly elections, Ajmal said, "Congress has been finished in Assam. Congress has become the Muslim League," in a pointed remark underscoring intensifying political rhetoric in the state. The AIUDF chief's comments come even as he staged a personal political comeback, winning the newly created Binnakandi Assembly constituency in Hojai district. Ajmal secured victory over Rejaul Karim Chowdhury of the Assam Jatiya Parishad by a margin of 35,380 votes. He polled 1,19,721 votes against Chowdhury's 84,341, despite the latter enjoying backing from a broader opposition bloc. The ruling alliance's candidate, Shahab Uddin Majumdar of the Asom Gana Pari-

shad, finished a distant third with 20,955 votes. Ajmal's victory marks his return to state-level politics after a setback in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, where he lost the Dhubri parliamentary seat to Congress leader Rakibul Hussain. Prior to that defeat, Ajmal had represented Dhubri in Parliament for three consecutive terms. Despite Ajmal's individual success, the AIUDF recorded its poorest performance in the Assembly elections, managing to secure only two seats—significantly diminishing its legislative footprint. Ajmal entered electoral politics in 2006 after founding the AIUDF a year earlier, winning from South Salmara in his debut Assembly contest. The party has since maintained a presence in Assam's political landscape, often positioning itself as a voice for sections of Bengali-speaking Muslim communities. The Binnakandi constituency, where Ajmal registered his latest win, was carved out during the 2023 delimitation exercise, and his victory provides the AIUDF with a foothold in the newly formed seat even as its overall influence in the state appears to have waned.

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Rahul Gandhi alleges Assam, Bengal polls were 'stolen' by BJP with EC support; backs Mamata's charge

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday alleged that the assembly elections in Assam and West Bengal were "stolen" by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with the support of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

He said he agreed with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, claiming that "more than 100 seats were stolen" in the state.

"Assam and Bengal are clear cases of the election being stolen by the BJP with the support of the EC. We agree with Mamata ji. More than 100 seats were stolen in Bengal," Gandhi posted on X.

The Congress leader further alleged that similar patterns had been seen in earlier elections, citing Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, and the 2024 general election.

His remarks came after Mamata Banerjee also made strong allegations against the Election Commission, saying the BJP had "looted more than 100 seats" and calling the EC "the BJP's commission." She described the outcome as an "immoral" and "illegal" victory and accused the poll body, central forces, and top government leadership of wrongdoing.

"BJP looted more than 100 seats. The Election Commission is the BJP's



commission. I complained to the CO and also Manoj Agrawal, but they are not doing anything. Do you think this is a victory? It is an immoral victory, not a moral victory.

Whatever the Election Commission has done, along with the Central Forces and the PM & Home Minister, is totally illegal. It is loot, loot, loot. We will bounce back," Banerjee told reporters.

The comments came even as trends showed a clear BJP majority in West Bengal, marking a major political shift in the state as Trinamool Congress's long rule appeared set to end.

BJP candidate Suwendu Adhikari also registered a significant lead

in key constituencies, including Bhabanipur and Nandigram. In Bhabanipur, Election Commission figures after final counting showed Adhikari defeating Mamata Banerjee by 15,105 votes.

He also won Nandigram, securing 1,27,301 votes after the final round of counting, according to ECI data.

In the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections, the Trinamool Congress had won 213 of 294 seats with around 48 per cent vote share, while the BJP had emerged as the principal opposition with 77 seats and about 38 per cent votes. The Left-Congress alliance had failed to win any seats.

KOLKATA

In a landmark political shift, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Monday stormed to power in West Bengal with 206 seats in the 294-member Assembly, crossing a two-thirds majority and ending the Trinamool Congress' (TMC) 15-year rule in the state. The result marks the BJP's first-ever formation of government in West Bengal and signals a decisive realignment of the state's political and ideological centre.

The mandate acquired added political symbolism with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee losing the Bhabanipur seat to BJP's Suwendu Adhikari by 15,105 votes after 20 rounds of counting. The defeat came despite Banerjee initially leading by a wide margin, before Adhikari staged a late surge that mirrored his 2021 Nandigram victory over her. Adhikari, once a close aide of Banerjee, has now defeated her twice in high-profile contests and emerges as a central face of the BJP's leadership in Bengal, with other names such as Samik Bhattacharya, Sukanta Majumdar and Swapan Dasgupta also in circulation for the top post.

According to Election Commission data, the BJP crossed the halfway mark of 148 seats well before mid-counting and steadily expanded its lead to 206 seats, while the TMC finished with 80 seats and led in one. The scale of the victory reflected a statewide sweep, cutting across north Bengal, Janglemahal, border districts, industrial belts and urban centres, including gains in constituencies such as Dinhat, Gosaba, Baghmundi, Bankura, Binpur, Nayagram, Asansol Dakshin, Durgapur Purba, Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Monteswar, Bhatar and Medinipur.

BJP's Bengal tsunami: 206 seats, Mamata Banerjee's Bhabanipur defeat, and the fall of a 15-year TMC fortress



The BJP's vote share rose sharply to around 45 per cent from 38 per cent in 2021, while the TMC's declined to nearly 40.94 per cent from 48 per cent, indicating both consolidation of anti-incumbency sentiment and erosion of the ruling party's base across segments. In 177 constituencies where past victory margins were smaller than voter deletions, the BJP not only held ground but converted those openings into wins, pointing to a deeper structural shift rather than a temporary swing.

The setback for the TMC was severe across organisational levels, with at least 20 ministers losing, including Bratya Basu, Manas Ranjan Bhunia, Shashi Panja and Chandrima Bhattacharya. Senior leaders also suffered defeats in key constituencies, including Sabang and Dinhat, while even Kolkata saw reversals with BJP candidates defeating sitting ministers. The party's traditional strengths, welfare

delivery, booth-level mobilisation and centralised leadership under Banerjee, appeared weakened across both rural and urban belts.

At Bhabanipur, the contest unfolded as a high-stakes political battle with symbolic weight, as Banerjee's initial lead of over 17,000 votes steadily eroded before Adhikari overtook her in the final rounds. The constituency, long considered her political stronghold and administrative base, had earlier restored her to the Assembly after her Nandigram defeat, making this loss particularly significant for the TMC leadership.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailed the result, saying the "Lotus blooms in West Bengal," and credited the mandate to the BJP's focus on development and public outreach. The campaign was spearheaded by Modi as the central face, while Union Home Minister Amit Shah managed strategy, organisational expansion, booth-level networks

and candidate selection, building on the party's steady rise from a marginal presence in 2011 to 77 seats in 2021.

The election also triggered sharp political reactions. Mamata Banerjee called the verdict "immoral" and alleged that "more than 100 seats were looted," claiming irregularities at counting centres and lapses by the Election Commission. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi echoed similar allegations, calling the election "stolen" and citing West Bengal and Assam along with other recent polls as part of what he described as a repeated pattern of electoral manipulation. The BJP rejected the allegations.

Beyond West Bengal, the result fits into a broader national political moment in which regional dominance is being reshaped, with the BJP consolidating its position in eastern India. The outcome also reflects the party's long-term strategy since its 2019 breakthrough in the state, when it moved from single-digit vote share in earlier years to a major opposition force. For the TMC, the defeat marks a structural rupture after 15 years in power, pushing it into opposition for the first time since its rise under Mamata Banerjee. Anti-incumbency, allegations of corruption, governance fatigue and organisational strain under internal leadership dynamics have converged into a decisive electoral setback. With this verdict, West Bengal transitions into a new political phase. The BJP has moved from challenger to ruler, the TMC from dominance to rebuilding, and the state itself from a long era of single-party control to a sharply competitive bipolar landscape, marking not just a change of government, but a fundamental reordering of its political order.

INTERNATIONAL

UAE accuses Iran of drone attack on ADNOC tanker in Strait of Hormuz



ABU DHABI

The United Arab Emirates on Monday strongly condemned the targeting of a tanker affiliated with Abu Dhabi's state oil firm, ADNOC, while it was passing through the Strait of Hormuz, calling it an "Iranian terrorist attack."

The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the tanker was targeted by two Iranian drones as it transited the strait, adding that no injuries were reported. The ministry further stated that targeting commercial shipping and using the Strait of Hormuz "as a tool of economic coercion or blackmail represents acts of piracy by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps."

Anwar Gargash, an adviser to the UAE president, said in a post on X: "These attacks confirm that the Iranian threat to the security and stability of the region is ongoing and cannot be ignored." The statement from Abu Dhabi comes amid heightened tensions in the key waterway.

This incident comes after the Strait of Hormuz emerged as a major

flashpoint in the tensions between the US and Iran following US President Donald Trump ordering an operation: "Project Freedom" under which the US forces will escort merchant vessels through the strategic corridor using missile destroyers and over 100 aircraft.

Iran's foreign ministry on Monday declared it is prepared to "respond to US threats" in the Strait of Hormuz, as the strategic waterway has become the latest flashpoint in the escalating standoff between Tehran and Washington triggered by Trump's announcement of "Project Freedom."

Foreign ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei, in a statement carried by the semi-official Mehr news agency, described Iran as the strait's "guardian and protector," making clear that any ship seeking safe passage must coordinate with Iranian authorities.

"Ships and shipping companies well know that ensuring their security requires coordination with the competent authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said. He added

that there was no reason for law-abiding nations to follow what he called "illegal actions" by the United States.

Asserting its control over the vital artery of global trade, Iran announced a new map of the Strait of Hormuz. Iran redefined the control zone in the Strait of Hormuz, stretching from the south of Mount Mobarak in Iran to the south of Fujairah in the UAE, and from the west of Qeshm Island in Iran to Umm al-Quwain in the UAE.

While acknowledging that diplomatic talks and exchange of proposals are going on between Tehran and Washington, Baghaei confirmed that Iran had received a US counterproposal, delivered through Pakistan, aimed at ending the war.

He, meanwhile, declined to divulge the details, saying the matter remains under review. He noted that Washington's habit of making "excessive and unreasonable demands" made the proposal difficult to assess.

He also pushed back on media reports about nuclear negotiations, calling them "mostly speculation."

Iran, he emphasised, is currently focused on one thing, and that is a complete cessation of hostilities. The direction of talks may take us beyond that, he said, and will be determined later.

Meanwhile, the IRGC's tone on the ground was considerably less diplomatic due to the threats from the US military of Hormuz action. Spokesman Sardar Mohebbi warned that any vessel failing to comply with Tehran's transit protocols would be "forcefully stopped."

He said ships that coordinate with the IRGC Navy and follow designated routes would "face serious risks," but that any movement outside those parameters would "face serious risks." He urged all shipping companies and transport insurers to take the IRGC's announcements seriously.

Taking the concerns of the countries, whose vessels have been stranded in Hormuz, under consideration, the US-led Joint Maritime Information Centre has advised ships to cross the Strait of Hormuz in Oman's territorial waters, saying it set up an "enhanced security area."

It's unclear whether any vessels are attempting to cross Hormuz, or whether shipping companies and their insurers will feel comfortable taking the risk, given Iran has fired on ships in the waterway and vowed to keep doing so. The United States Central Command (CENTCOM) said that two US-flagged merchant vessels have transited through the Strait of Hormuz since the launch of Project Freedom.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency called President Trump's "Project Freedom" to get commercial vessels moving in the strait "delirium."

Russia declares truce in Ukraine to mark Victory Day; Kyiv says it will cease fire two days earlier



MOSCOW

Russia's Defence Ministry declared a unilateral ceasefire in Ukraine for Friday and Saturday to mark the 81st anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, but it threatened to strike back at Kyiv if it tries to disrupt the Victory Day festivities.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in response said his country would observe a truce beginning at 12 am on Wednesday and respond in kind to Russia's actions from that moment on. He did not put an end date on the truce.

The announcements on Monday come as Russia prepares to celebrate its most important secular holiday with a traditional military parade on Moscow's Red Square pared down due to what officials say are concerns over possible Ukrainian attacks. Ukraine has been launching drone attacks deep inside Russia to counter its more than 4-year-old invasion.

They also follow a familiar pattern of previous attempts

to secure ceasefires — most recently around Orthodox Easter — that had little to no impact.

The Defence Ministry said if Ukraine attempts to disrupt Saturday's celebrations, Russia will carry out a "massive missile strike on the center of Kyiv." It warned the civilian population there and employees of foreign diplomatic missions of "the need to leave the city promptly."

Zelenskyy responded by saying that while Kyiv has not received any official requests for a truce, in the time left until midnight on Wednesday "it is realistic to ensure" that a ceasefire takes effect. He urged the Kremlin "to take real steps to end their war, especially since Russia's Defence Ministry believes it cannot hold a parade in Moscow without Ukraine's goodwill."

For years, the Kremlin has used the pomp-filled Victory Day parade to showcase its military might and global clout, and it has been a source of patriotic pride.

But this year, the parade in the Russian capital will take

place without tanks, missiles and other military equipment for the first time in nearly two decades. Some of the smaller parades that are held elsewhere across the country have also been pared down or even canceled for security reasons.

Speaking at a summit with European leaders in Armenia on Monday, Zelenskyy said that the Russian authorities "fear drones may buzz over Red Square" on May 9. "This is telling. It shows they are not strong now, so we must keep up the pressure through sanctions on them," he said.

World War II remains a rare point of consensus in Russia's divisive history under Communist rule. The Soviet Union lost 27 million people in what it called the Great Patriotic War in 1941-45, an enormous sacrifice that left a deep scar in the national psyche.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has ruled Russia for over 25 years, has turned Victory Day into a key pillar of his tenure and has tried to use it to justify the war in Ukraine.

Last year's parade on the 80th anniversary drew the most global leaders to Moscow in a decade, including high-profile guests like Chinese President Xi Jinping, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico. Putin had declared a unilateral 72-hour ceasefire starting May 7, 2025, and authorities blocked cellphone internet in Moscow for several days to avert Ukrainian drone attacks. Last week, Putin floated the idea of a ceasefire for Victory Day this year, too, in a phone conversation with US President Donald Trump.

Russian media reported Monday that the country's cellphone operators have begun to warn their customers of cellphone internet restrictions in Moscow and St. Petersburg in the coming days.

Bengal's Political Reset: How Oversight, Polarisation and Public Anger Unseated TMC



The 2026 West Bengal Assembly election result is being read not merely as a routine anti-incumbency verdict but as a structural political shift—one that has upended the dominance of the All India Trinamool Congress and enabled the Bharatiya Janata Party to script its first full-scale breakthrough in the state.

While the headline outcome—a two-thirds majority for the BJP in the 294-member Assembly and a dramatic fall of the TMC to under 100 seats—has stunned observers, a closer examination suggests the result was less sudden than it appeared. Multiple underlying currents, from electoral roll revisions to governance fatigue and a recalibrated election machinery, converged to reshape Bengal's political terrain.

Electoral Reset: The Impact of SIR
At the heart of the transformation was the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, overseen by the Election Commission of India. Designed to cleanse voter lists, the exercise removed lakhs of entries categorised as duplicates, deceased, or shifted voters.

However, the more consequential shift came with the inclusion of "logical discrepancies," which placed a large number of voters under scrutiny. With tribunals unable to process all cases before polling, an estimated 27 lakh names did not make it to the final rolls. Given that the overall vote margin between the two principal camps remained within a comparable range, this revision significantly altered electoral arithmetic in several constituencies.

The result was not merely a cleaner roll but a redefined voter base—one that appeared to favour the BJP in closely contested regions.

The Weight of 15 Years: Governance Fatigue Sets In

After a decade and a half in power under Mamata Banerjee, the TMC faced the classic burden of incumbency. But what amplified voter fatigue was the perception that governance issues were neither addressed swiftly nor convincingly. The teacher recruitment controversy emerged as a flashpoint. Allegations of irregularities and the prolonged suspension of hiring processes left thousands of aspirants in limbo. Reports that nearly 26,000 teachers faced potential job losses further deepened public resentment.

Industrial stagnation added to the discontent. Despite high-profile investment summits, tangible outcomes remained limited, fuelling criticism over employment generation. Infrastructure gaps and concerns over the quality of public services reinforced a narrative that the state had plateaued under prolonged one-party dominance.

At the grassroots level, allegations of corruption—often framed around "cut money" practices and syndicate networks—became politically potent. The perception that the party apparatus had penetrated everyday civic life, from local governance to cultural events like Kolkata's Durga Puja committees, contributed to a sense of over-centralisation.

Flashpoints That Shifted Sentiment
Public anger crystallised around specific incidents that carried symbolic weight. The protests following the RG Kar case, which saw widespread demonstrations across Kolkata, marked a turning point in urban sentiment. The emotional resonance of the victim's family, particularly among women voters, found political expression when the BJP fielded a candidate linked to the case—transforming outrage into electoral capital.

Even seemingly unrelated episodes, such as the chaotic management of global football icon Lionel Messi's visit to Kolkata, fed into a broader narrative of administrative lapses and elite capture. Visuals of political figures dominating public events while ordinary fans were left sidelined reinforced perceptions of disconnect between leadership and citizens.

The cumulative effect was



visible in urban constituencies, particularly among the bhadralok middle class, where several high-profile TMC leaders lost long-held bastions.

Polarisation and Consolidation
Electoral dynamics in West Bengal have long been shaped by demographic considerations, particularly the role of minority voters. However, in 2026, the BJP appears to have successfully expanded its base through counter-polarisation.

Districts such as Malda, Murshidabad and North Dinajpur—traditionally seen as challenging terrain for the BJP due to high minority populations—witnessed consolidation of Hindu votes. This trend, visible since the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, intensified in 2026.

Communal flashpoints, including incidents that triggered displacement and fear among communities, played a role in shaping voter behaviour. The BJP's messaging capitalised on these anxieties, while statements from sections of the TMC leadership were perceived by critics as reinforcing polarisation.

In urban pockets with a history of migration from East Pakistan and Bangladesh, the BJP made notable inroads, signalling a broader shift in identity politics within the state.

Reinventing the Electoral Process
Equally significant was the transformation in election management. The Election Commission adopted an unusually stringent approach to curb violence and malpractice—issues that had marred previous elections in the state.

A heavy deployment of central forces ensured extensive coverage across rural and urban constituencies. More crucially, administrative reshuffles were implemented at multiple levels, extending beyond senior to include local functionaries such as block development officers and police station heads.

This disrupted entrenched local networks often accused of influencing electoral outcomes. For opposition supporters, particularly in rural Bengal, the perception of a level playing field appears to have boosted turnout and confidence.

The Commission's willingness to order re-polls in areas flagged for irregularities further underscored its assertive stance, signalling a departure from past practices.

Collapse of a Political Ecosystem
The TMC's electoral setback also reflects the

weakening of a broader ecosystem it had built over years—one that combined organisational strength, cultural influence and administrative reach.

With the party now pushed to the opposition benches, this ecosystem faces stress. Reports of post-election reprisals against cadres indicate the volatility of a transition in a state where political control often extends beyond formal institutions.

At the same time, the re-emergence of the Left and the Congress, though modest in seat share, introduces a new competitive dynamic within the opposition space. The recovery of even a handful of constituencies by these parties suggests that anti-TMC sentiment was not monopolised by the BJP alone.

A New Political Order
For Mamata Banerjee and her party, the immediate challenge lies in organisational survival and recalibration. The loss of power not only affects legislative influence but also constrains access to resources and administrative leverage. The BJP, on the other hand, now faces the test of governance in a politically complex state where expectations are high and scrutiny will be intense.

The 2026 verdict underscores a broader lesson in democratic politics: dominance, however entrenched, is rarely permanent. Structural shifts—whether in voter rolls, institutional oversight or public sentiment—can converge rapidly to alter outcomes.

What unfolded in West Bengal was not a single wave but the intersection of multiple undercurrents. For years, they ran parallel, often underestimated. In 2026, they aligned—and in doing so, they redrew the political map of the state.

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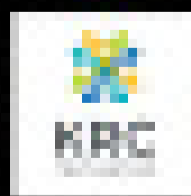


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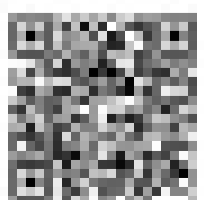


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