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PERSPECTIVE

Man shall not live by bread alone

Manipur Cabinet clears 70-bed dialysis centre, revised compensation for transmission land

IMPHAL

The Manipur Cabinet has approved the establishment of a 70-bed State Dialysis Centre at the State TB Hospital in Keirao to expand access to specialised dialysis services in the state.

The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Gyunmang Khemchand Singh on Wednesday. Government spokesperson Dr Sapam Ranjan announced the decisions after the meeting.

The proposed dialysis centre will function under the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) and cater to patients requiring regular dialysis, the spokesperson said.

According to Ranjan, the centre will operate under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), while beneficiaries covered under the Chief Minister-gi Hakshelgi Tengbang (CMHT) scheme will receive treatment free of cost.

The government said the facility was being planned in view of the growing demand for dialysis services in the state. Although dialysis facilities are currently available at government hospitals, existing capacity is inadequate to meet the requirement, Ranjan said.

Officials, engineers and members of the medical team have already inspected the proposed site and completed a preliminary assessment for setting up the centre.

In another decision, the Cabinet approved compensation for landowners affected by power transmission lines in line with the revised Right of Way (RoW) compensation framework of the Government of India.

WHO SAID WHAT



“Force cannot be the final arbiter of whose lives, rights and future matter.”
“I will continue to stand up for the values of the UN Charter. And I will never ever give up.” ~ Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations

It is the presence of restraint of power

STAY ENRICHED

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Assam Cabinet announces Puja relief: Rs.1,500 Orunodoi aid, 20% tea bonus

Additional public holiday declared on October 17 as Assam prepares for Durga Puja

GUWAHATI

The Assam Cabinet on Thursday approved a package of measures ahead of Durga Puja, including a one-time increase in financial assistance for Orunodoi beneficiaries, a 20 per cent bonus for Assam Tea Corporation Limited (ATCL) workers and an additional public holiday during the festive period.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting, said beneficiaries under the Orunodoi scheme would receive ₹1,500 in October as a special Puja-month payment.

Sarma said the enhanced amount was a one-time measure for October and was announced keeping Durga Puja in mind. He also indicated that a similar special assistance



could be considered around Bihu next year.

The Cabinet also approved a 20 per cent bonus for workers of ATCL tea gardens ahead of the festival.

According to Sarma, 548 of Assam's 807 tea gardens had already announced a 20 per cent bonus for workers, while discussions were continuing in the remaining 259 gardens.

“Today, ATCL has also announced a 20% bonus. Discussions are still underway in the remaining 259 gardens, and I believe they will also announce the 20% bonus,” the Chief Minister said.

The bonus issue has also led to protests at Harmutty Tea Garden in Lakhimpur district, where workers have been demanding a 20 per cent bonus from the management of Go-

odricke Group Limited.

Hundreds of workers demonstrated at the tea garden on Thursday, alleging that the management had sanctioned a 15 per cent bonus.

A protesting worker said employees were seeking the higher bonus citing an improvement in the garden's financial position.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet decided to declare October 17 an additional public holiday during the Durga Puja period.

Sarma said the existing Puja holiday schedule already included Sundays, prompting the government to add October 17 as an extra holiday. The decision is expected to provide an additional day off during the festive period as Assam prepares for Durga Puja celebrations.

Silchar Durga Puja to honour 100 girls, put women’s dignity at centre



SILCHAR

Moving beyond the usual focus on elaborate pandals and illumination, a new Durga Puja in Silchar is seeking to place women's dignity, family values and cultural awareness at the heart of the celebrations.

Sanskriti Chetana Nyas, which is organising its first community Durga Puja this year, will honour 100 young girls through a special ‘Xata Kumari Puja’, treating them as representations of feminine divinity. Their parents will also be felicitated as part of the programme.

The organisers said the initiative is intended to connect the worship of Goddess Durga with respect for women in everyday life. They said religious observances should also encourage society to reflect on how women and girls are treated beyond the confines of the puja venue.

Newly married couples will also be part of a special programme highlighting mutual respect, responsibility and harmony in family life.

The puja venue at Town Club field will be designed as a cultural space rather than relying solely on decorative themes. Bamboo, stone and other materials will be used to showcase elements of India's diverse artistic and architectural traditions.

Local artistes, craftspeople and performers will contribute to the presentation, which organisers said would bring together art, history, music and spirituality.

“Our objective is to present Durga Puja before society in an ideal form by following spiritual traditions and Sattik practices. The celebration will also carry messages about civic responsibility, cultural values and environmental protection,” said Prof Niranjana Roy, president of Sanskriti Chetana Nyas. The celebrations will begin on Mahalaya with a ceremonial torch-lighting programme. The initiative was formally launched on July 14 with the formation of a 75-member committee. A 30-member executive committee is overseeing preparations for the puja.

Upper Assam reports 23,157 cancer cases, 7,073 deaths over five years

DIBRUGARH

Upper Assam recorded 23,157 cancer cases and 7,073 cancer deaths across nine districts between 2019 and 2023, according to a five-year report released by the Population Based Cancer Registry (PBCR), Dibrugarh.

The report, released at Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH), covers Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Golaghat, Jorhat, Majuli, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji—an area accounting for nearly a quarter of Assam's population. The study is expected to provide a regional baseline for cancer prevention, control and research.

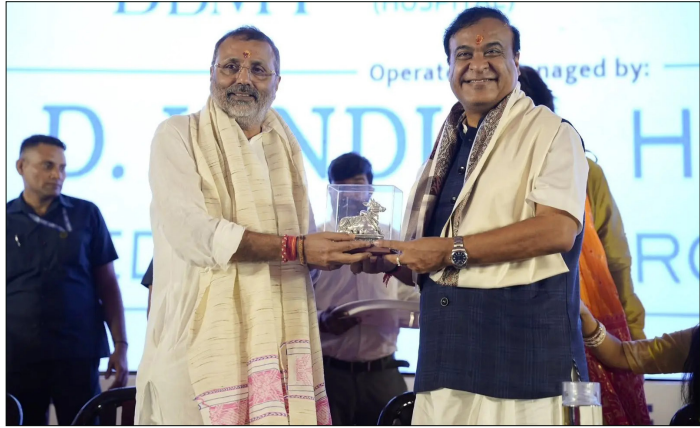
Of the total cases, 11,781 were among men (50.9%) and 11,376 among women (49.1%). Jorhat recorded the highest age-adjusted cancer incidence rate among men at 86.4 per 100,000, while Dibrugarh reported the highest rate among women at 79.8 per 100,000. Tinsukia had the lowest incidence rates for both men and women. The report estimated the cumulative risk of developing cancer before the age of 75 at one in 13 for men and one in 15 for women. A significant share of the disease burden was concentrated among people aged 35 to 64, who accounted for 65.8% of all cases.

Tobacco-related cancers accounted for 64.5% of male cases and 39.9% of female cases, underscoring the continuing impact of tobacco use in the region.

Among men, oesophageal cancer was the most common cancer, accounting for 16% of cases, and also the leading cause of cancer deaths at 19%. Among women, breast cancer was the most prevalent, accounting for 23.8% of cases and 23.5% of deaths.

Childhood cancers among those aged 0 to 19 years accounted for about 1.25% of all cases, with leukaemia emerging as the leading cancer among both boys and girls.

Assam plans 4,000 MBBS seats by 2031 as medical education expands



GUWAHATI

Assam plans to increase its annual MBBS intake to 4,000 seats by 2031 as the state expands its medical education infrastructure, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday.

Sarma made the announcement while speaking at the inauguration of the 750-bed Baba Baidyanath Medical Trust Hospital in Deoghar, Jharkhand.

The Chief Minister said Assam currently has 16 medical colleges and produces around 2,200 doctors a year, a sharp increase from the roughly 350 doctors produced annually earlier.

He said the state government has a long-term vision of establishing 32 more medical colleges, in addition to AIIMS and the ESIC Medical College already functioning in Assam.

“Of these, 16 have already been established,” Sarma said, referring to the government's expansion of medical education infra-

structure.

Sarma said Assam's medical education capacity had remained limited for decades. The state's first medical college was established in the 1950s, followed by the second in the 1960s and the third in the 1970s. Despite a population of around 3.5 crore, Assam had only three medical colleges for several decades and produced about 300 doctors annually, contributing to a shortage of medical professionals, he said.

The government now plans to further increase MBBS seats while also creating employment opportunities for the additional doctors being trained in the state. Sarma referred to the latest State Budget, which provides for two doctors at each of Assam's 5,000 sub-health centres.

The expansion, he said, is aimed at strengthening the state's medical education ecosystem while improving the availability of trained healthcare professionals across Assam.

Bay of Bengal depression to bring more rain across Northeast India; heavy showers likely

GUWAHATI

Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland face heavier rain, while Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh are also likely to see showers and thunderstorms

A deep depression over the Bay of Bengal is set to influence weather conditions across Northeast India, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting rain, thunderstorms and lightning across several states over the next few days.

The system was located about 60 km southeast of Kalingapatnam in Andhra Pradesh at 8.30 am on Wednesday and was moving west-northwestwards towards the North Andhra Pradesh-South Odisha coast. It was expected to cross the coast near Kalingapatnam by Wednesday night.

Although the system is making landfall along the eastern coast, its associated weather conditions are expected to bring increased moisture and rainfall over parts of the Northeast.

Rain across the Northeast

On Thursday, moderate rainfall is like-



ly at many places over Assam and Nagaland, while Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram may receive light to moderate rain at a few places.

The weather is expected to become more active in parts of the region on Friday. The IMD has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places over Assam and Meghalaya, along with thunderstorms and lightning at isolated locations across several Northeastern states.

Nagaland is also likely to receive isolated heavy rainfall on Friday.

The continuing wet spell could bring localised waterlogging and flooding in vulnerable areas. In the hill states, including Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, intense rainfall may increase the risk of landslides and mudslides.

Poor visibility, slippery roads and temporary disruption to transport and power supply are also possible during periods of heavy rain.

Assam records heavy rainfall

Assam has already recorded significant rainfall in several locations. Samaguri received the highest rainfall in the

24 hours ending at 8.30 am on Wednesday, recording 14 cm.

Shillongani and ZRS Shillongani recorded 11 cm each, while Dharamtul and Biswanath College of Agriculture at Biswanath Chariali received 8 cm.

The IMD has forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in East Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.

Northeast remains under wet-weather watch

The IMD expects rainfall activity to continue across parts of Northeast India during the subsequent forecast period, with Assam and Meghalaya likely to remain among the wetter areas.

The regional weather pattern is also being closely watched in the hill states, where heavy rain can quickly affect roads and settlements because of the terrain.

The IMD has advised people in vulnerable and hilly areas to remain alert, avoid unnecessary travel during intense rainfall and stay away from unstable slopes and riverbanks. Residents have also been urged to follow lightning safety precautions and monitor official weather warnings as conditions evolve.



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WINGS
OF SELF-
RELIANCE

The recent handover ceremony at HAL was more than a routine induction event, as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Civil Aviation Minister K. Rammohan Naidu jointly presided over the delivery of LCA Tejas FOC trainers, HTT-40 basic trainers, and Dhruv NG helicopters. It was a symbolic milestone in India's long, often doubted journey towards defence self-reliance, one that should be read not as an isolated achievement but as evidence of a structural shift in how India arms and equips itself.

For most of independent India's history, the Air Force flew on borrowed wings. MiGs and Sukhois from the Soviet Union/Russia, Jaguars, Mirages and Rafale from France-each acquisition came with a familiar set of costs. There was the financial burden, measured in billions of scarce foreign exchange. But there was also a subtler, more corrosive cost: strategic dependence. A fighter jet is not a one-time purchase. It requires decades of spares, upgrades, and munitions integration, all controlled by the exporting nation. When geopolitical winds shift - and they shift often and unpredictably - a supplier's priorities can change overnight, leaving the buyer's air force grounded or hobbled at the worst possible moment. Modern combat aircraft are, in essence, flying computers; their capabilities live in software, in what engineers call source code. No vendor parts with that code easily, which means that even a fully "owned" imported aircraft can remain, in a meaningful sense, someone else's machine.

This is precisely the vulnerability that indigenous programmes like Tejas, the HTT-40, and Dhruv NG are designed to close. The Tejas story is instructive precisely because it was so difficult. Ridiculed for years as a programme perpetually behind schedule, the Light Combat Aircraft nonetheless forced Indian scientists and engineers at HAL and DRDO to master technologies - relaxed static stability, quadruplex fly-by-wire controls, integrated digital avionics, advanced composite airframes - that only a handful of nations possess. The aircraft now being delivered as a 4.5-generation twin-seat trainer, capable of full fighter operations, is proof that the capability is not theoretical. It exists, it flies, and it belongs to India. The HTT-40 addresses a different but equally urgent need: training the next generation of pilots on an indigenously designed turboprop platform. Delays in trainer aircraft procurement have historically forced the IAF to stretch ageing fleets well past their prime. A steady, domestically controlled supply line of 70 HTT-40 aircraft removes one more point of external dependency from pilot training.

Dhruv NG extends this self-reliance beyond the battlefield into civil aviation. Its induction into Pawan Hans's fleet signals that indigenous rotary-wing technology has matured enough to meet certified civilian safety standards - crashworthy seats, self-sealing tanks, twin-engine redundancy - while serving tourism, medical evacuation, and connectivity needs in India's most difficult terrain. A capability built for military requirements is now doing double duty for the civilian economy, which is exactly the kind of spillover that self-reliance programmes are meant to produce.

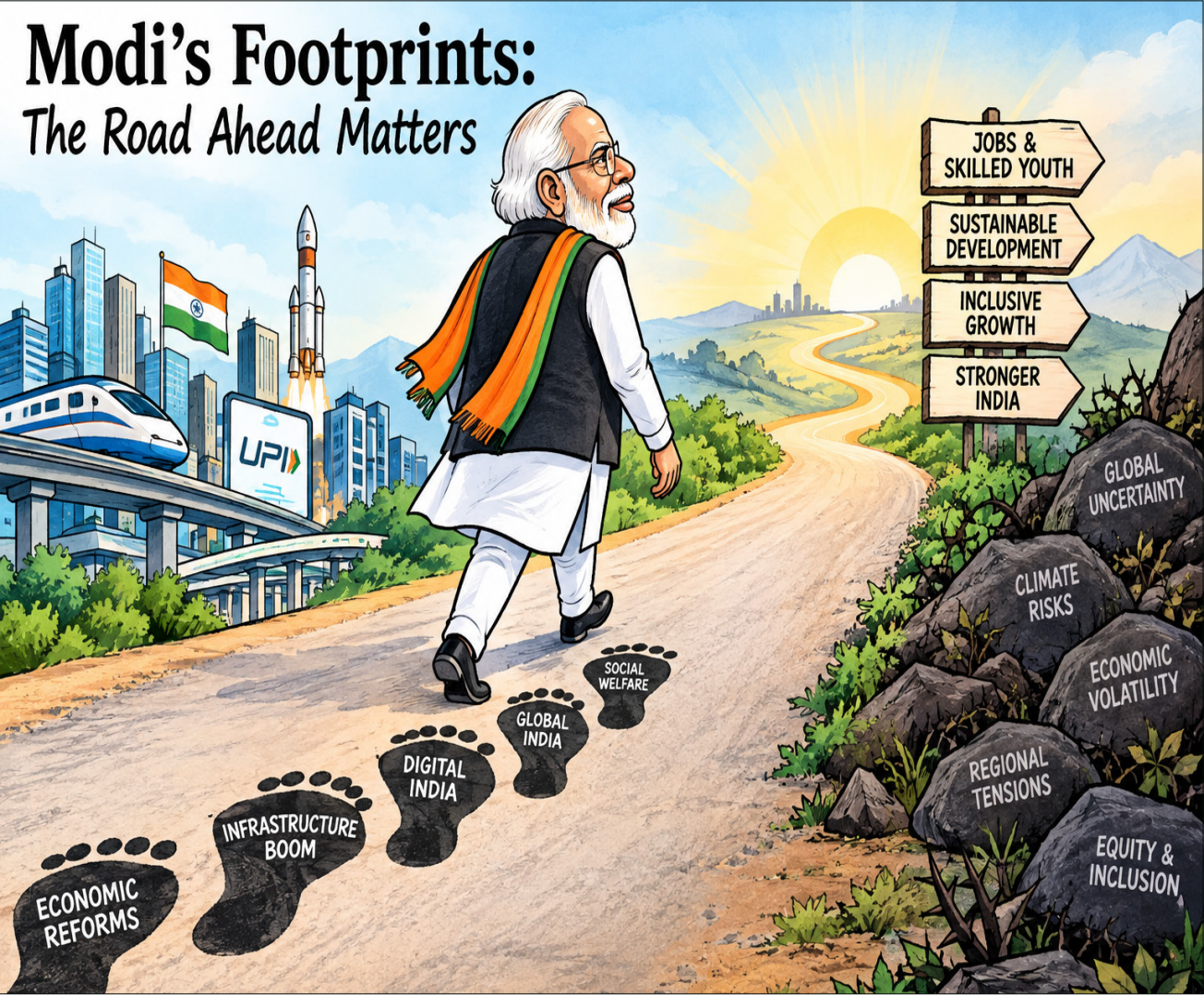
None of this is to suggest the journey is complete or without friction. Delivery schedules remain the programme's Achilles heel; Tejas deliveries to the IAF have lagged behind commitments, and that shortfall has real consequences for squadron readiness at a time when regional threats are not waiting patiently. These delays must be treated as engineering and production-management problems to be solved urgently, not as inevitable features of indigenous programmes to be shrugged off.

Yet the larger trajectory is unmistakable. India has moved from importing nearly 70 per cent of its defence requirements to manufacturing roughly 65 per cent domestically, with production crossing Rs 1.5 lakh crore and exports way above Rs 25,000 crore - a transformation from net importer to a credible exporter in barely a decade. Indigenous missile systems, air-defence domes, drones, and now fighter and trainer aircraft are converging into a genuinely comprehensive self-reliance architecture. The upcoming AMCA programme, with its dedicated integration and flight-testing centre at Puttaparthi, suggests this momentum is not plateauing but accelerating. What the Tejas, HTT-40, and Dhruv NG collectively represent, then, is not merely three aircraft programmes reaching a delivery milestone. They represent a nation choosing, deliberately and at considerable cost and delay, to own its sky rather than rent it. That is a strategic asset no import deal, however favourable its terms, could ever provide.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

“The greatest need of our time is to clean out the enormous mass of mental and emotional rubbish that clutters our minds” - Thomas Merton

MODI’S FOOTPRINTS:
THE ROAD AHEAD
MATTERS



DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

The 76th birthday of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, one of the ruling party's most prominent figures, was marked with considerable fanfare. Having achieved the distinction of becoming India's longest-serving prime minister, he received congratulatory messages from leaders across Asia, Europe and Africa, with many describing the occasion as a reflection of the trust and confidence placed in him by voters. Yet beyond the celebrations and tributes, questions are being raised about the model of governance and its handling of socio-economic concerns, including unemployment, inflation, economic insecurity among minorities, and changing conditions among tribals, Dalits and other disadvantaged sections of society.

Meanwhile, the BJP has left no stone unturned in highlighting the Prime Minister's importance to India's development and underscoring the achievements of his tenure. Reports suggest that recent discontent among young people and students has raised questions about the government's handling of the education sector and could affect its public image. There have also been reports suggesting some decline in the Prime Minister's popularity, although the recent BRICS summit and India's diplomatic engagement on the international stage may have given the government an opportunity to reinforce his image as a statesman of global stature.

While the present government has projected stability and development as the central objectives of governance, contrasting them with what it describes as an era of instability, scandals and misgovernance under the Congress, these claims require closer scrutiny. The Prime Minister had pledged to accelerate decision-making and presented the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat', an aspiration shared by citizens across the country. Although several major changes have been introduced, studies of the economy have also raised concerns about growing inequality and disparities in income between

urban and rural India, as well as between the formal and informal sectors. The Opposition attributes these trends to what it describes as 'pro-rich' policies designed to serve the interests of wealthier and upper-middle-class sections.

From the shortage of jobs to the slow pace of reforms, questions are being raised about India's ability to realise its full economic potential. At the same time, the country's pluralistic social fabric has come under strain amid concerns over majoritarian politics and increasing polarisation. Allegations of institutional bias have also grown. Although Modi has established the image of a shrewd politician who places national interest at the centre of his political narrative, questions remain about the depth of his government's grassroots engagement with the disadvantaged and the poor. Moreover, linking the women's reservation legislation to delimitation has generated controversy, with the Opposition staging protests during the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

One may recall the remarks of a former US trade representative who wrote in his memoirs that "only two businessmen ran the country", while others put the number at seven. Whatever the exact figure, the perception has persisted that a small group with powerful business interests exercised disproportionate influence over the government and benefited significantly from the way capitalism operated in India. Meanwhile, although there have been recent efforts to learn lessons from the West Asian conflict and expand oil and gas exploration, relatively little appears to have been done to expand higher education in the country's backward districts, promote labour-intensive manufacturing, or make public institutions more efficient and impartial.

There is also continuing uncertainty over whether Indian diplomacy under Modi has retained the strategic autonomy that has traditionally characterised New Delhi's foreign policy. While India has sought to build new partnerships, particularly

in Africa and the Global South, some older relationships have also come under strain. Relations with the United States have brought significant strategic and economic engagement, but critics argue that New Delhi has not always been able to translate this into proportionate gains. Meanwhile, ties with China remain complex, marked by unresolved strategic differences as well as continuing economic interdependence.

The Modi government has strengthened India's geopolitical position while maintaining strategic autonomy and deepening relationships across the geopolitical spectrum. India's emergence as a genuine manufacturing alternative to China remains one of the country's major challenges. Another is the development of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, and its application across Indian industry. Climate resilience, too, needs to become a central pillar of development policy.

The real question is not whether India has become a large economy, but whether its resilience can pave the way for genuine and broad-based development.

In contrast to the growing footprint of Modi's governance in states such as Bengal, Odisha and the Northeast, the Opposition and the Congress have failed to capitalise on the government's shortcomings on the economic front. Neither Modi's majoritarian and, to some extent, centralised approach nor policies seen as urban- and industry-oriented have been effectively challenged by the Congress. The party has failed to build a mass movement against these trends or mobilise intellectuals and academics around them.

Political analysts believe that the lack of support for, or initiative from, the Congress may be among the reasons why public opposition to the BJP's perceived shortcomings on the economic front has failed to materialise. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that Rahul Gandhi has made serious efforts to connect with ordinary people, particularly through the

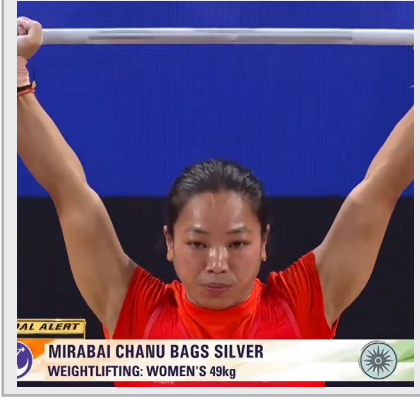
Bharat Jodo Yatra and during student and youth movements. However, the party's inability to consolidate the gains from these important initiatives remains a significant political development.

Meanwhile, it is widely acknowledged that the Opposition has failed to develop a political framework capable of articulating a clear anti-BJP

DIGITAL WAR OF WORDS

Heartiest congratulations to @mirabai_chanu on winning the Silver Medal in the Women's 49 kg Weightlifting event at #AsianGames2026 in Japan, with a remarkable total lift of 198 kg. A proud moment for Manipur and India.

~ Khemchand Yumnam, CM, Manipur



position. The political consensus required for the Opposition to effectively challenge the policies of the NDA government has not materialised. Some analysts have argued that the Congress and its allies need to strengthen their base in the northern and western states, and that Kerala and Karnataka alone will not be sufficient.

The emerging political situation presents new dimensions. In the eastern region, the Hindutva factor has helped the BJP and is likely to remain significant in the future.

The promotion of Modi's version of nationalism has strengthened the party, although it is also true that the RJD and Samajwadi Party in the northern states, as well as the Dravidian parties in Tamil Nadu, rely heavily on social justice while maintaining their own frameworks for defining nationalism.

The challenge posed by the Congress and the broader Opposition to NDA policies has so far failed to make significant progress. Although some analysts point to indications of a possible decline in Modi's popularity, the RSS-BJP combine continues to draw political strength from its assertive nationalism. For the Opposition to mount a more effective challenge, it would need to focus more clearly on pressing socio-economic issues as well as the aspirations and concerns of Generation Z. Any future strategy would also need to address the rural population and people at the grassroots who are struggling with questions of livelihood and survival.

For the moment, however, it appears difficult for the fragmented INDIA bloc to mount a significant challenge to Modi.

Manipur violence: Lineman shot dead, 24 houses torched in fresh hill attacks

IMPHAL
Incidents reported in Tamenglong and Kangpokpi as security forces investigate amid renewed tensions in Naga-Kuki areas

Fresh violence was reported in Manipur's hill districts on Wednesday, with a 36-year-old electricity lineman shot dead while repairing a power line in Tamenglong district and at least 24 houses allegedly set ablaze in two Naga villages in Kangpokpi district.

The first incident was reported at around 4 am at Lasan village under Tamei police station in Tamenglong, officials said. The victim was identified as Paojangam Chongloi of Wakotphai village.

Chongloi was reportedly working on a 33 KV power line when he was shot. A village authority has approached the police seeking registration of a Zero FIR and



an investigation into the killing.

The complaint alleged that cadres of NSCN-IM, along with volunteers from Langka village, were involved in the attack. The allegation has not been independently established and the identity of those responsible remains under investigation.

The officer-in-charge of Tamei police station said his team could not immediately reach the location. Kangpokpi police were subsequently requested to conduct a spot investigation and take necessary legal action.

Two Naga villages reportedly attacked

Hours after the killing, reports emerged of attacks and arson in two Naga villages in Kangpokpi district.

Houses in Makui Khuman and Makui Thanamba/Chamruoiu villages, under Chalwa police station, were reportedly set ablaze at around 5 am. The settlements are located about 15 km northeast of the police station.

A resident of Makui Khuman, speaking on condition of anonymity, alleged that armed men attacked the two villages and set houses on fire.

The two villages are around 23 km apart and had approximately 12 households each, according to the resident.

The residents had reportedly been displaced earlier following clashes between Kuki and Naga groups and were staying at Makui Khunjaao, around 12 km away.

"When we reached our village, all the houses of both villages, 24 in total, had

been reduced to ashes," the resident said.

The resident also claimed that security personnel were not deployed in the villages when the incident took place.

The Makui Village Authority has sought intervention from the Centre and the Manipur government, alleging that several Naga villages along the Kangpokpi-Senapati border came under attack and arson early Wednesday.

It has sought immediate security deployment, assessment of the damage and rehabilitation for affected families.

Reports of attacks and arson have also emerged from other Naga settlements along the Noney-Kangpokpi-Senapati belt. The extent of the damage is still being assessed.

Fresh attacks add to tensions

The latest incidents come days after the alleged killing of 17-year-old Naga boy Nk Wiphenbou in an ambush in Tamen-

glong district on Monday. According to reports, the teenager was travelling towards Tamei to purchase essential items when he was attacked.

The incidents have added to tensions between Naga and Kuki communities in parts of Tamenglong, Kangpokpi and adjoining hill districts.

Separately, Kuki community representatives have condemned the killing of Chongloi and called for an impartial investigation. The Kuki Civic Action Committee alleged that the incident was part of a series of attacks affecting settlements along the Imphal-Tamenglong road.

The identities and affiliations of those responsible for the latest attacks have not been independently established.

Police and security agencies are investigating the incidents as authorities monitor the situation in the affected areas.

UDP suspends three Meghalaya MLAs after BJP switch

GUWAHATI
Metbah Lyngdoh says Kyrmen Shylla, Ollan Singh Suin and Matthew Beyondstar Kurbah did not respond to show-cause notices within the stipulated time

The United Democratic Party (UDP) on Wednesday suspended three of its Meghalaya MLAs after they joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) along with five other party legislators, marking a significant shift in the state's political equations.

UDP president Metbah Lyngdoh said the party suspended Kyrmen Shylla, Ollan Singh Suin and Matthew Beyondstar Kurbah after they failed to respond to show-cause notices issued to them.

According to Lyngdoh, the three legislators had been given an opportunity to appear before the UDP State Parliamentary Board or submit their responses in writing. However, none of them responded within the stipulated period.

"Therefore, the party, with one voice, has taken a decision to place the three honourable members, who are members of the UDP, elected members of the UDP, under suspension until further orders," Lyngdoh said.

He added that the suspension orders had been formally communicated to the three MLAs.

Shylla, Suin and Kurbah were among eight UDP legislators who formally joined the BJP on Wednesday. The other five are Lakhmen Rymbui, Balajied Kubar Synrem, Synshar Kubar Roy Lyngdoh Thabak, Pius Marwein and Mayralborn Syiem. The mass switch has altered the composition of the Meghalaya Assembly and comes amid a broader realignment of political parties in the state.

Asked about the UDP's next course of action, Lyngdoh said the party would communicate its decisions separately.

"Other matters, the party, how it will move forward, we will inform you accordingly," he said.

Assam BJP chief claims Rakibul remarks could push minority votes towards BJP

GUWAHATI
Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia on September 23 claimed that criticism of the party's Nagaon Lok Sabha bypoll candidate Debashish Sharma by Congress MP Rakibul Hussain could benefit the BJP, alleging that around 10,000 minority votes could shift towards the party.

Saikia made the remarks while addressing a BJP workers' convention at Juria in Nagaon's Rupohihat, where the party discussed its campaign strategy ahead of the October 6 bypoll.

"Whenever Rakibul Hussain says something against BJP candidate Debashish Sharma, around 10,000 votes from the minority community automatically move towards the BJP," Saikia said.

The BJP state president was speaking to around 500 party workers from different organisational mandals in Rupohihat. The meeting focused on campaign

planning and mobilisation in support of Sharma.

Other BJP leaders at the meeting expressed confidence that the party would benefit from support for the state government's development initiatives.

Barhampur MLA Jitu Goswami, Nagaon district BJP president Subarna Singh, BJP leader Suresh Bora and several district-level office-bearers attended the meeting.

The Nagaon Lok Sabha seat fell vacant after former Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi won the Dispur Assembly constituency in the 2026 state elections.

The BJP has fielded former Nagaon district commissioner Debashish Sharma, who took voluntary retirement from the IAS on September 3 and joined the party five days later.

Congress has nominated former Batadroba MLA Sibamoni Bora, while AIUDF chief Badrudin Ajmal is also contesting the bypoll.

Manipur steps up crackdown on illegal adoptions, urges families to follow legal process



IMPHAL
Manipur is stepping up efforts to prevent illegal child adoptions and encourage families to follow the prescribed legal process, with officials stressing that greater public awareness is essential to protect children from exploitation.

Director of Social Welfare Abdul Hakim said lack of awareness about legal procedures continues to prompt some families to bypass the prescribed system.

Hakim was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a one-day awareness programme on legal adoption organised by the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) in association with the Social Welfare Department at Hotel Imphal.

The programme brought together Anganwadi workers, ASHA workers, police personnel and other stakeholders involved in child protection and welfare.

Hakim said the state government had taken several measures to prevent illegal adoptions and facilitate lawful procedures. State Adoption Resource Agencies (SARAs) have been established across Manipur's districts to assist families with adoption-related

processes.

The state has 91 Child Care Institutions, each with a designated cradle point, he said. Cradle points have also been established at district hospitals, Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences and the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences to provide a safe mechanism for the surrender of children. Anganwadi and ASHA workers have also received training to spread awareness about legal adoption procedures, Hakim said.

Despite these measures, he said, cases of people attempting to adopt children outside the legal framework continue to be reported. According to Hakim, 10 children have been legally adopted in Manipur so far this year.

"Children are the future pillars of the country," Hakim said, stressing that every child has the right to a safe and dignified life and protection from exploitation.

He called for closer coordination among government depart-

ments, police and frontline workers to ensure that all adoptions are conducted through the legal system. CARA senior professional Upasana Chakma said the authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Women and Child Development and functions under Section 68 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.

CARA is responsible for regulating, monitoring and facilitating the adoption of children in India. Chakma said the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2022, and the Adoption Regulations, 2022, provide the legal framework for the adoption of orphaned, abandoned and surrendered children, as well as adoptions involving relatives and stepchildren.

She urged prospective adoptive parents to follow the prescribed procedures, saying this was necessary to safeguard children's rights and ensure their protection throughout the adoption process.

Arunachal Cabinet sets up panel to oversee Upper Siang project survey amid protests



ITANAGAR
The Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet has approved the formation of an empowered high-level committee to oversee and coordinate the pre-feasibility report (PFR) survey and related activities for the proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) in Siang and Upper Siang districts.

The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pema Khandu. The government said the committee would work to ensure that the survey process is transparent, peaceful and people-centric.

The panel will be headed by Rural Development and Panchayati

Raj Minister Ojing Tasing. Chief Minister's Advisor and Tuting-Yingkiong MLA Alo Libang and Geku-Mariyang MLA Oni Panyang will serve as members.

The Cabinet noted that the SUMP was declared a National Project by the Centre in 2008. It said the proposed project could contribute to water and energy security, help moderate floods in the Siang-Brahmaputra basin, create employment and support long-term socio-economic development in the region.

The Cabinet also took note of concerns raised by sections of the population in Siang and Upper Siang over what it described as misinformation and disinformation surrounding the project. At the same time, it stressed that the PFR survey must involve meaningful and continuous engagement with residents of the two districts.

The government said the concerns, welfare and aspirations of project-affected families and local communities would remain central to the process. It also said development efforts would have to take into account local traditions and community interests.

The Cabinet expressed hope that continued dialogue would enable the survey to proceed peacefully.

The decision comes amid protests by sections of villagers and community organisations in the Siang region against the proposed project and ongoing PFR-related activities.

Residents of Komkar and neighbouring areas recently protested against proposed PFR activities at Ugeng, one of the identified dam sites. Villagers raised concerns over drilling, land and livelihood issues and the manner in which agreements related to the survey were reached.

Manipur entrepreneur calls for greater focus on skill training amid job concerns



IMPHAL
Babina Group chairman Thangjam Dhabali Singh says skill-based education can expand employment opportunities for young people

Amid concerns over unemployment in Manipur, entrepreneur and Babina Group of Companies chairman and managing director Thangjam Dhabali Singh has urged young people to pursue skill-based training alongside formal education.

Singh made the remarks at a certificate and appointment letter distribution ceremony for the ninth batch of a professional security training programme at the Home Land Academy, Assam Rifles Sanjeevani Complex, North AOC, Imphal.

The trainees underwent training at the Home Academy of Tactical Security and Fire Safety under an initiative of the Inspector General Assam Rifles (South).

Addressing the gathering as chief guest, Singh said Manipur was facing a serious employment challenge. He claimed that around five lakh educated youths were seeking

jobs, while the state's capacity to provide government employment was limited to around one lakh.

Against this backdrop, he stressed the need for greater emphasis on entrepreneurship and skill development.

"Every youth should try to excel in at least one skill that can generate income," Singh said, adding that academic qualifications alone may not be enough to address the employment challenge.

Citing countries such as Japan, South Korea and the United States, Singh said vocational and skill-based training could contribute to creating employment opportunities.

He also referred to the Indian government's increasing focus on skill development and encouraged young people in Manipur to make use of available training programmes and opportunities.

Singh praised the Homeland Academy for providing professional security training, saying such programmes could help young people acquire practical skills and improve their employment prospects.

Jadumoni Dutta wins National Award for Assamese film Juiphool

GUWAHATI
Assamese filmmaker Jadumoni Dutta has received the Rajat Kamal for Best Assamese Film for Juiphool, with President Droupadi Murmu presenting the award at the 72nd National Film Awards ceremony in Ekta Nagar, Gujarat.

The honour marks Dutta's second National Award in the category. His 2011 film Jetuka Pator Dore had earlier won the Rajat Kamal for Best Assamese Film.

For Dutta, the recognition also comes with a renewed sense of responsibility towards Assamese cinema.

"My first film to bag the Rajat Kamal for Best Assamese Film was Jetuka Pator Dore. The second is for Juiphool. Our responsibility and duty has increased and broadened after winning the national award," he said after the ceremony.

Released in 2024, Juiphool is set against the backdrop of the conflict-affected Assam-Nagaland border and centres on an unlikely friendship between two women from communities divided by years of tension.

The film follows Lakhimi, a pregnant Assamese widow from Naragao, and Rengma, a Naga woman who has suffered repeated miscarriages. Their friendship gradually draws suspicion in the village, where everyday life has been shaped by insecurity and recurring border violence.

An Assamese folk tale, Tula Aru Teja,

1 Film Awards 2024



runs alongside the central narrative through Gita and her mother, who are also affected by violence linked to the border conflict. Dutta said the commercial sustainability of filmmaking remained important to his approach, arguing that financial viability allows filmmakers to continue producing new work.

"Since the beginning of my journey in filmmaking, which started with a commercial film, I have prioritised the commercial

angle because it sustains the industry," he said. He has also worked on films including Pani (2014), alongside Jetuka Pator Dore and Juiphool.

Dutta said pre-production was already under way for his next film, which he plans to begin shooting around November or December. The project will be produced through a joint effort involving Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The filmmaker also acknowledged the

recognition as a responsibility to continue exploring stories rooted in the region.

Following the ceremony, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma congratulated Dutta and producers Rita Dutta and Nandini Sharma, describing the award as recognition of Assam's contribution to cinematic storytelling.

The National Film Awards for films released in 2024 were formally presented at Tuesday's ceremony.

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At least nine killed, 20 rescued as sleeper bus catches fire on Yamuna Expressway

GREATER NOIDA

At least nine passengers were killed after a sleeper bus carrying around 35 people caught fire on the Yamuna Expressway in Greater Noida late Wednesday night, the police said.

The police added 20 passengers were rescued safely.

According to the police sources, the accident happened at around 11 pm when the bus was near Jewar, Gautam Buddh Nagar district.

Chief Fire Officer Pradeep Kumar told , the bus, bearing registration number BR32PA8647, was travelling from Kashmere Gate in New Delhi towards Mahoba when it caught fire near the 33-km milestone.

The fire quickly engulfed the bus, forcing several passengers to escape through the windows.

Following a distress call, fire tenders were rushed to the spot. Police and fire personnel worked through the night to bring the blaze under control and rescue passengers.

More than 20 passengers were rescued safely, Kumar said. However, when police and fire personnel entered the smoke-filled bus, they found nine people dead inside. The victims appeared to have died from burns or suffocation, he added.

Preliminary inquiry suggests that a spark or blast in the bus's air-conditioning system may have ignited engine lubricant oil, causing the fire to spread rapidly, according to the fire officer.

Police are now working to establish the identities of the nine deceased.

The bus driver and conductor have been arrested, while



No matter how much power we gain, service will remain our path: PM Modi



NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday reiterated his government's commitment to the seva (service) of 'janta-janardan' (the public), saying that his guiding principle throughout his public life, from his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat to his current role as Prime Minister, has been to serve the people and the nation.

Addressing a virtual interaction with 'Seva-Yatris' travelling from Vadnagar to Varanasi, Modi said his life had been guided by the blessings of the people and that his central mantra had always been public service.

He emphasised that when decisions are taken in the spirit of 'Seva Bhav', the principle of 'Nagrik Devo Bhav', placing citizens at the heart of policies and governance, naturally follows.

Modi said that throughout his public life, he had remained committed to the

journey from 'Jan Seva' (public service) to 'Desh Seva' (service to the nation), dedicating himself to serving both the people and the country.

At a time when political differences over several issues have intensified, with the Opposition and the ruling dispensation frequently at loggerheads from Parliament to the panchayat level, Modi stressed the need to keep the larger objective of nation-building in focus.

"Politics has its place, elections have their own place, and the governance system has its own place. But we are the people who have set out for nation-building. We are the people who have set out with the resolve for a Viksit Bharat," he said.

He also underlined the importance of youth in India's journey towards becoming a developed nation by 2047.

"We must take forward the crucial role of youth power in building a

developed Bharat by 2047 with utmost strength," he asserted.

Focusing on the younger generation, Modi described today's youth as both the "creators" and the beneficiaries of a developed India.

He said fulfilling this responsibility would require young people to understand the country at the grass-roots level, experience its diversity and interact with people from different fields and social backgrounds.

"To fulfil this responsibility, India needs to know and understand the ground reality, experience every nuance of the country, meet people from different fields and social classes, become familiar with their dreams, understand their aspirations and know their views," he told those participating in the Yatra from Vadnagar to Varanasi.

Highlighting various government schemes aimed at delivering services

to citizens, Modi cited initiatives such as PM-KISAN and the PM-Surya Ghar Yojana, saying that their last-mile delivery reflected the importance of service as a driving force.

"Whether it is PM-KISAN or the PM-Surya Ghar Yojana, countless such schemes are recognised for their last-mile delivery, and service is the biggest driving force," he said.

Elaborating further on the importance of 'Seva Bhav' (the spirit of service), Modi said it was this spirit of service that enabled government initiatives to reach people and contribute to the country's development.

"When the spirit of service acts, over four crore poor people get permanent homes," he said, adding, "Only when there is a spirit of service does a mother, who spends her life in smoke, get liberation from smoke through the Ujjwala scheme."

He said that when the spirit of service is reflected in policymaking and governance, public services can become a major force behind the nation's progress.

Encouraging the youths taking part in the Yatra, Modi said their energy, enthusiasm and exposure to different parts of the country would add further momentum to India's journey towards becoming a developed nation.

The Prime Minister also recalled his own experiences of undertaking yatras while working at the organisational level. He said travelling himself had helped him understand the challenges involved in such journeys.

"I had the experience of travelling on a yatra. But when I undertook a journey myself, I realised how many challenges and difficulties one has to face. Yet, all of you have carried this work forward with great dedication," Modi said.

The Prime Minister also encouraged the participants to contribute to environmental conservation by promoting plantation and water conservation as part of their broader commitment to nation-building.

The Seva Sankalp Yatra, being undertaken by youth from several states, began in Vadnagar, Gujarat, and is headed towards Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The initiative is being held to mark Modi's 76th birthday and 25 years as an elected representative. The participants are currently in Madhya Pradesh's Dewas district.

INTERNATIONAL

Russia uses citizens of India, 46 other countries in its war against Ukraine: Zelenskyy tells UN



UNITED NATIONS

Russia uses citizens of India and over 40 other countries to fight in its war against Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the UN General Assembly, urging the countries to not let Russian President Vladimir Putin "drag you into this war."

"...And right now, I want to speak not to Europe. I want to speak to those countries whose people Russia may try to use in another absolutely brutal campaign," Zelenskyy said Wednesday in his address at the General Debate of the 81st session of the UN General Assembly.

He said Ukraine gets prisoners of war hailing from several nations, not just from North Korea.

"We know that Russia uses citizens of 47 countries in its war. In this war, Ghana, Nepal, Tajikistan, India, Yemen, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Belarus, Sudan, South Africa, and many, many others. And from time to time, we receive requests to send particular POWs (Prisoners of War) back home," Zelenskyy said.

He said Ukraine knows that people from other countries fighting in the war are dying on the battlefield.

"We also see people dying on the battlefield, who are not Russians,

people from your countries, 47 countries, who ended up in Russia through deception and tricks."

Appealing directly to every representative of the 47 countries, he said, "You know what Russia is doing with your people, your citizens. Take care of them and do not let them end up on another front. Do not let (Russian President Vladimir) Putin drag you into this war. Do not let Russia put out its fires, cover up its shame, and pay for its madness with the lives of your people. Limit his room to act. Limit his money. Limit his war."

India warns US sanctions on Russian energy buyers could affect

ties, global markets

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri had said earlier this month that the issue of Indian citizens being recruited into the Russian armed forces has been discussed between India and Russia "at various levels on various occasions".

"At last count, we had information about 227 Indian nationals who had been recruited into the Russian army," Misri had said.

"Out of that, we have information that 139 of our nationals have been discharged from the army. And unfortunately, of course, we have information also about 51 people who have perished so far."

Zelenskyy expressed gratitude to every country that stands with Ukraine and helps its people and urged nations to limit trade with Russia, as that will impact Moscow's revenue sources to fuel the war.

"Sanctions, support packages, our joint weapon production - all of these matter. All of this makes us stronger. When someone gives Russia more money through trade, they give this war more time. That is exactly why we insist on limiting trade with the aggressor, and why we are burning Russia's revenues ourselves," he said.

Zelenskyy added that the world has seen more than once how the abuse of the veto at the UN weakens the world and pushes peace further away.

"When Russia has money, it always says no to diplomacy, and this is also a kind of veto on peace...And when someone in the world weakens sanctions against Russian oligarchs, it may make life more comfortable for rich Russians, but it also gives the war more time, more time for Putin to send poor people into the kill zone. So Russia's revenues must remain a target. Russia's budget deficit is now bigger than in any other year, and most Russian regions are already bankrupt," he said.

China, US should be 'partners rather than rivals', says Xi Jinping

BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping urged cooperation with the United States, Beijing's state media reported, hours after being greeted in Washington on Wednesday evening local time by President Donald Trump.

"Our two countries should be partners rather than rivals," Xi said in written remarks published by state news agency Xinhua, adding that "the Chinese and US peoples have enjoyed long-standing friendly exchanges, and our interests are deeply intertwined".

The comments came ahead of closely watched talks between Trump

and Xi, who shook hands on a red carpet after the Chinese leader's arrival in the US capital.

Thorny discussion topics are expected to include trade, technological competition -- particularly in artificial intelligence -- and Beijing's diplomatic and economic support for Tehran. Xi said that he was looking "forward to in-depth exchanges with President Trump on major issues concerning our bilateral relations and the global situation," Xinhua reported.

The countries should "work towards each other to foster a stable relationship characterised by cooperation as the mainstay, competition with-

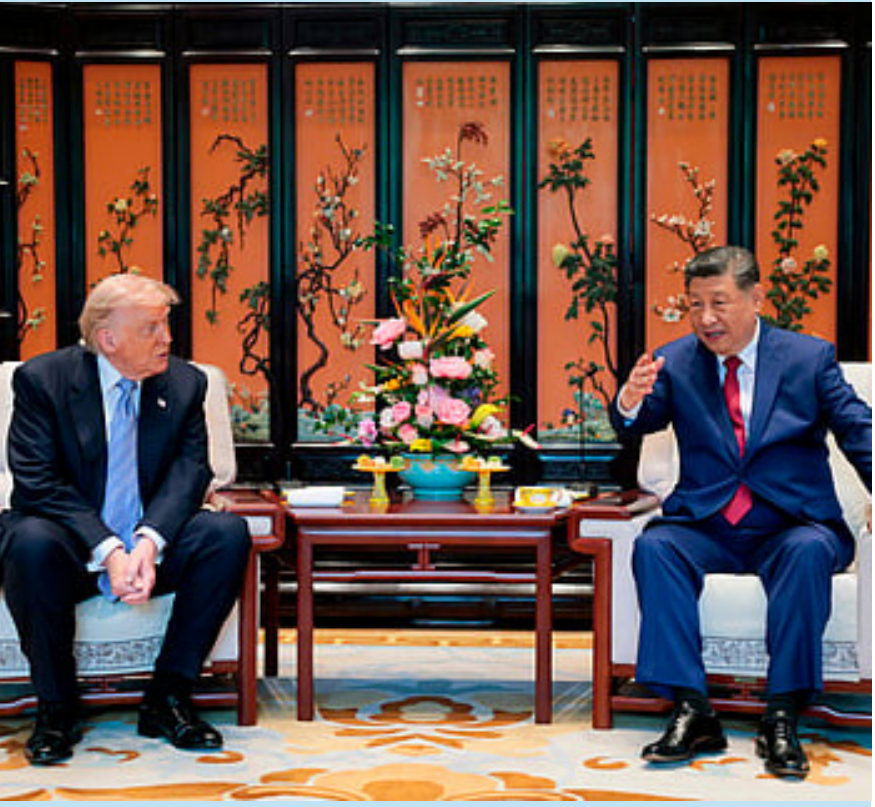
in bounds, manageable differences and peaceful prospects," Xi said.

And in a nod to Trump's signature political slogan, he said that "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the goal of making America great again can fully go hand in hand".

He said the two sides should "chart a correct path for two major powers" to get along, Xinhua reported.

"I am confident we can achieve this," said Xi.

"I believe that with the joint efforts of both sides, this visit will yield fruitful results, enhance the well-being of our two peoples and bring new hope for world peace," he added.



Nagaon bypoll: A three-way contest that has put Assam's changing politics under the spotlight

The Nagaon Lok Sabha by-election has grown into one of Assam's most closely watched political contests, with the BJP, Congress and AIUDF fighting for a seat whose political character has changed considerably since the last general election.

Polling is scheduled for October 6, with counting on October 9. What began as a largely BJP-Congress contest took a different turn after AIUDF chief and Binnakandi MLA Badruddin Ajmal decided to enter the race himself. The subsequent withdrawal of the Trinamool Congress candidate has now left 15 candidates in the fray, though the contest is principally centred on BJP nominee Debashish Sharma, Congress candidate Sibamoni Bora and Ajmal.

The bypoll was necessitated by the resignation of former Congress MP Pradyut Bordoloi, who left the Lok Sabha ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly election, joined the BJP and subsequently won the Dispur Assembly seat. His departure opened a parliamentary seat that Congress had held in the 2019 and 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The election is consequently being watched not merely as a contest for a vacant parliamentary seat but also as an early political test after Assam's 2026 Assembly election, in which the BJP-led alliance won a substantial majority.

A seat with a new political map

One of the most important factors in the Nagaon contest is the change in the constituency's boundaries following the delimitation exercise.

The present Nagaon parliamentary constituency comprises eight Assembly segments, including Jagiroad, Morigaon, Laharighat, Raha, Nagaon-Batadraba, Dhing, Rupohihat and Samaguri. The delimitation exercise moved several areas that were earlier part of Nagaon to the Kaziranga parliamentary constituency and brought Dhing, Rupohihat and Samaguri into Nagaon.

That change has altered the constituency's electoral composition and has also made the contest more politically sensitive.

The new configuration has increased the importance of minority-dominated areas, particularly Dhing, Rupohihat and Samaguri. Estimates of the minority share vary depending on the methodology and source, so demographic figures should be treated as estimates rather than direct indicators of voting behaviour. What is clear, however, is that parties are devoting considerable attention to these areas during the campaign.

The changed map also means that comparisons with earlier Nagaon elections have to be made carefully. The constituency being contested in 2026 is not identical to the seat that existed before delimitation.

BJP's bet on a former bureaucrat

The BJP has chosen former IAS officer Debashish Sharma as its candidate.

Sharma's candidature has attracted particular attention because he entered electoral politics immediately after serving as Nagaon Deputy Commissioner. He took voluntary retirement from the IAS on September 3, joined the BJP on September 8 and was subsequently named the party's candidate for the October 6 bypoll.

His campaign is therefore built around a relatively unusual transition—from district administration to electoral politics in the same region where he had served as a senior government official.

The BJP has acknowledged that Nagaon has historically been a difficult constituency for the party. Party leaders, however, are presenting the bypoll as an opportunity to expand the BJP's parliamentary footprint in an area where Congress has traditionally been a significant force.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has also publicly attached wider political significance to a possible BJP victory in Nagaon, arguing that the party's performance there would be an indicator of its expanding support base. Such statements are part of the BJP's campaign narrative rather than an independent assessment of the eventual result.

The BJP has also sought to highlight support for Sharma among different sections of the electorate. On September 23, Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia claimed that remarks by Congress MP Rakibul Hussain could result in some minority voters shifting towards the BJP. That was a political claim made during campaigning and does not constitute an independently measured estimate of voter movement.

Congress turns to Sibamoni Bora

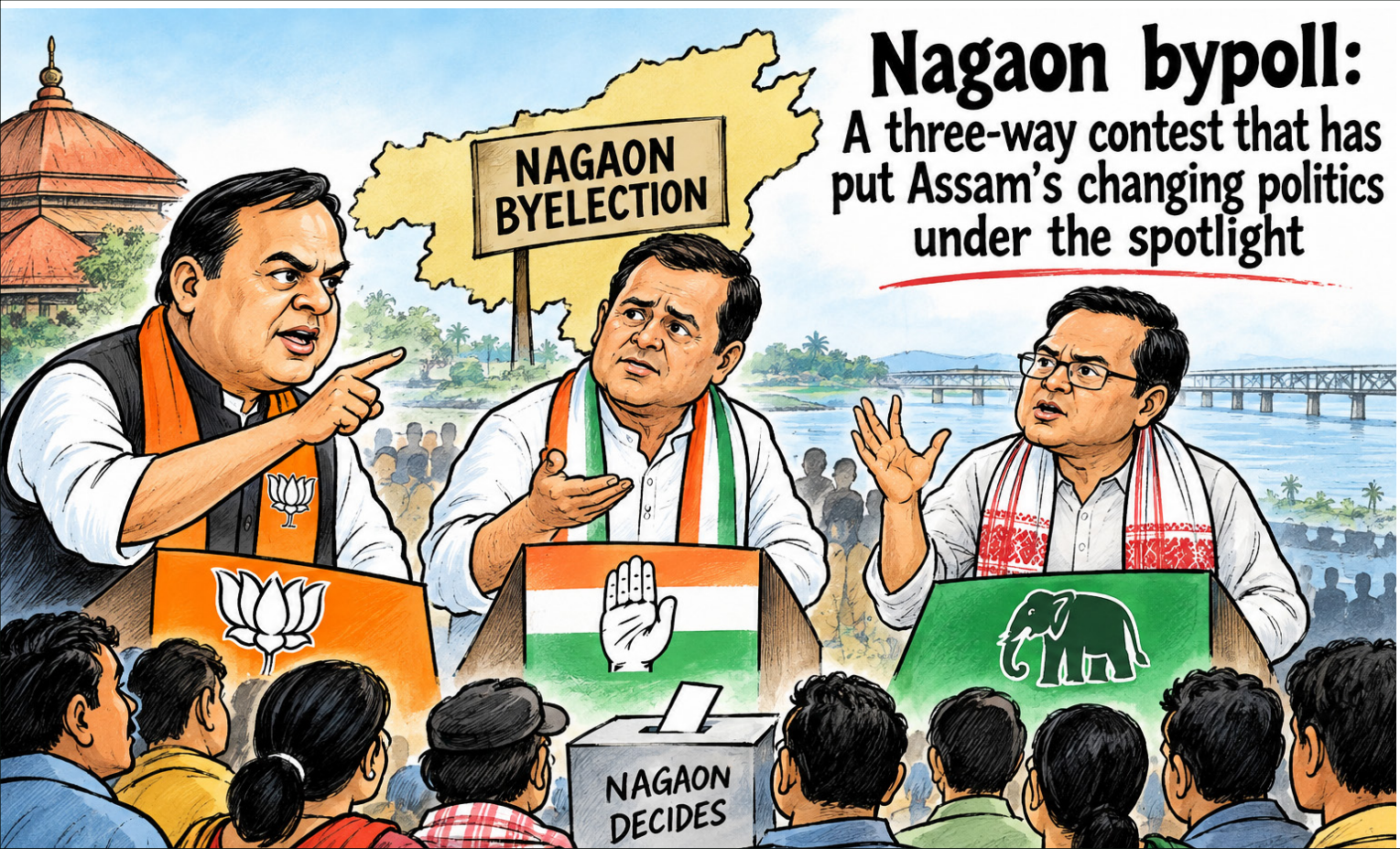
Congress has fielded Sibamoni Bora, a former Batadrava MLA and former Assam Police Service officer.

Bora brings electoral experience from the region. She won the Batadrava Assembly seat in the 2021 election, defeating BJP's Angoorlata Deka. The subsequent delimitation changed the Assembly map, with the former Batadrava constituency no longer existing in its earlier form.

Her candidature has allowed Congress to present the bypoll as a contest involving a candidate with established political roots in the area rather than a newcomer to electoral politics.

Congress leaders have also sought to make the election a referendum of sorts on the performance of the BJP-led government, while the BJP has framed the contest as part of its effort to consolidate the gains made in Assam's recent Assembly election.

The party's campaign has been led by senior state leaders, including Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president and Jorhat MP



Gaurav Gogoi and Nagaon MP Rakibul Hussain.

For Congress, the constituency carries particular importance because Bordoloi had retained the seat for the party in the 2024 Lok Sabha election before resigning.

Ajmal changes the equation

The entry of Badruddin Ajmal has been the most significant development in the campaign.

Ajmal is a three-term former Lok Sabha member from Dhubri and currently represents Binnakandi in the Assam Assembly. His decision to contest Nagaon has transformed what was initially expected to be a BJP-Congress contest into a triangular fight.

The AIUDF leader has mounted an aggressive campaign, directly attacking both the BJP and Congress.

At campaign meetings in Nagaon, Ajmal has sought to portray AIUDF as an independent political force rather than a secondary player. On September 24, he again stepped up his criticism of the BJP and its candidate while addressing a campaign meeting in Dhing.

Ajmal's presence has simultaneously triggered a debate over the division of votes among parties seeking support from sections of the same electorate.

Congress leaders have alleged that the AIUDF's candidature could benefit the BJP by dividing opposition votes. AIUDF has rejected such characterisations and is campaigning independently.

Rajior Dal president Akhil Gogoi has also called for a "tactical understanding" between Congress and AIUDF, reflecting concerns within sections of the opposition over the possibility of a divided vote.

The issue is politically significant, but the eventual effect of vote division cannot be determined before the ballots are counted.

TMC's exit adds another twist

The contest underwent another change when the Trinamool Congress withdrew its candidate Abdul Salam.

Salam, an academic and retired vice-principal of Dhing College, had filed his nomination papers, but TMC later decided to withdraw from the bypoll after the Election Commission temporarily froze the party's name and election symbol for the contest. The party's withdrawal reduced the number of candidates from the 18 whose nominations had survived scrutiny to 15.

The episode illustrates how quickly the electoral field has changed since nominations opened.

Initially, 25 candidates submitted nomination papers. Following scrutiny, 18 were found valid, and three—including the TMC nominee—later withdrew. The final field therefore contains 15 candidates.

For the principal contenders, the withdrawal removes one more opposition voice from the ballot, although its precise electoral effect will only become clear after voting.

The minority vote debate

Few issues have generated as much political discussion around the Nagaon bypoll as the minority electorate.

The post-delimitation constituency has a substantially larger minority presence than the earlier Nagaon seat. Political parties have consequently devoted significant attention to areas such as Dhing, Rupohihat and Samaguri.

But the assumption that voters from any particular community will vote as a single bloc can obscure the complexity of electoral behaviour. Local issues, candidate identity, party organisation, development concerns and individual political preferences can all influence voting decisions.

The campaign rhetoric has nevertheless increasingly focused on the question of whether opposition votes will consolidate behind one candidate or be divided between Congress and AIUDF.

That debate has become particularly sharp in the final phase of campaigning. Both Congress and AIUDF have sought to establish their independent political claims, while the BJP has

attempted to expand its support beyond its traditional voter base.

More than a by-election

The significance of Nagaon extends beyond the constituency itself.

For the BJP, the contest is an opportunity to demonstrate that its organisational and electoral expansion in Assam can translate into parliamentary gains in a constituency that has historically been difficult for the party.

For Congress, the bypoll is an opportunity to defend a seat it held in the last two Lok Sabha elections and to demonstrate that it can retain support despite the BJP's strong performance in the 2026 Assembly election.

For AIUDF, Ajmal's personal candidature is an attempt to re-establish the party's relevance in central Assam and to demonstrate that it remains capable of directly contesting a high-profile parliamentary seat.

The election is also unfolding against the backdrop of a weakened opposition landscape. Congress and Rajior Dal have separated politically, while AIUDF is contesting independently. The absence of a common opposition candidate has consequently become one of the defining features of the campaign.

What voters will decide

The remaining days of the campaign are likely to revolve around local development, representation, identity, governance, the record of the BJP-led state government and the contrasting political claims of the three principal candidates.

The BJP is seeking to turn administrative experience and the party's current political strength into a parliamentary breakthrough. Congress is relying on its historical presence in the constituency and Bora's regional political experience. AIUDF is banking on Ajmal's established political network and direct appeal to voters.

The result, however, will depend on how voters respond to these competing appeals rather than on the claims made by the parties during the campaign. With polling set for October 6 and counting scheduled for October 9, Nagaon is poised to provide one of the clearest electoral snapshots of Assam's rapidly changing political landscape after the 2026 Assembly election.

More importantly, the contest will offer a window into how the electorate responds to a newly delimited Nagaon, a three-cornered principal contest and an opposition landscape that is no longer as straightforward as it was during the previous Lok Sabha election.

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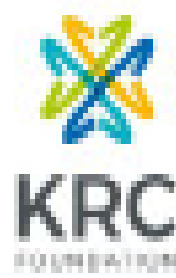
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