

Nitin Nabin from Bihar, Rahul Sinha from Bengal: BJP's 1st list of 9 candidates for RS

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday released its list of nine names, including its national president Nitin Nabin, for the biennial elections to the Council of States, Rajya Sabha.

The party has announced the names of Nitin Nabin and Shivesh Kumar from Bihar, Terash Gowalla and Jogen Mohan from Assam, Laxmi Verma from Chhattisgarh, Sanjay Bhatia from Haryana, Manmohan Samal and Sujeet Kumar from Odisha and Rahul Sinha from West Bengal.

Earlier, on February 18, the Election Commission of India (ECI) declared the schedule for the biennial elections to the Council of States, Rajya Sabha, to fill 37 seats falling vacant from 10 states.

According to the Commission, polling will be conducted on March 16 between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and the counting of votes will take place the same day at 5:00 p.m.

The terms of 37 members of the Council of States, elected from 10 states, are set to conclude in April 2026.

In view of the impending vacancies, the Commission



has laid out a detailed timetable for the electoral process.

The notification for the elections will be issued on February 26. The last date for filing nominations has been fixed as March 5, while scrutiny of nomination papers will be undertaken on March 6.

Candidates will have the option to withdraw their nominations until March 9. The Commission has specified that only inte-

grated violet sketch pens of pre-determined specifications, supplied by the Returning Officer, will be allowed for marking preferences on ballot papers.

It clarified that no other writing instrument will be permitted for the purpose.

To ensure that the elections are conducted in a transparent and impartial manner, observers will be deployed to oversee the entire process.

The members whose

terms are ending represent Maharashtra, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Telangana.

The Commission stressed the need for strict compliance with all election-related guidelines and emphasised that the entire process would be completed within the prescribed timeline to safeguard the integrity of the Rajya Sabha elections.

Flights from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to India Resume

DUBAI: Flight operations from Dubai and Abu Dhabi to India resumed last night. In a major relief to thousands of Indians stranded in the UAE due to conflict in the West Asian region, flights to Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru took off after days of suspension.

Dubai Media Office said in a social media post that the Dubai Airports confirmed a limited resumption of flight operations last evening, with a small number of flights permitted to operate from Dubai International (DXB) and Dubai World Central - Al Maktoum International (DWC). Travellers have been advised not to proceed to DXB or DWC unless they have been contacted directly by their airline with a confirmed departure time.

Election Commission published final voter list of West Bengal

KOLKATA: In compliance with the Supreme Court's directives, the Election Commission has published the final voter list of West Bengal, following the Special Intensive Revision. According to the list, the total number of voters stands at 6 crore 44 lakh 52 thousand 609. Additionally, the list notes that the names of 60 lakh 6 thousand 675 voters are under adjudication.

Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal said that at the time of the draft publication, the total number of voters was 7 crore 8 lakh 16 thousand 630. Through additions and deletions during the Special Intensive Revision, another 5 lakh 46 thousand 53 names have been removed from the final list. In the draft list itself, more than 58 lakh 20 thousand names were excluded. Altogether, 63



lakh 66 thousand 952 names have been removed from the state's voter list so far. The Chief Electoral Officer said after hearings, the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) scrutinised all documents and removed the names of the concerned voters. However, if any name is mistakenly deleted, there is a process to reinstate it. Concerned voters can submit claims and objections

within the next 15 days. The final list has been displayed at all polling stations and is available at the offices of the EROs and AEROs for public access. Copies have already been provided to recognised political parties. Additionally, voters can check their names in the list using their EPIC number through the websites of the Election Commission and the CEO of the state, as well as via the ECI Net app.

Ammy Virk expresses emotional distress as wife, daughter stranded in UAE

PUNJAB: Punjabi singer-actor Ammy Virk on Monday expressed emotional distress as his wife and six-year-old daughter are stranded in the United Arab Emirates amid escalating tension there after the Israel-US attack on Iran. Following this, the Aam Aadmi Party's Punjab general secretary Baltej Pannu contacted Virk and assured that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann is personally monitoring the matter.

In an Instagram post, the 'Nikka Zaildar' actor said it is "impossible not to feel emotional and tense."

"The situation in the UAE has been weighing heavily on my heart. My wife and my six-year-old daughter are there, and as a husband and father, it's impossible not to feel emotional and tense during times like this," Virk said in the post.

"Papa, I will hide under my bed if something happens. I'm a strong girl, Papa don't worry" is not what a father wants to hear. Every news update feels personal. No matter how strong we try to be in public life, at the end of the day, we are family people," wrote the Punjabi actor, who also featured in Bollywood movies such as '83' and 'Bad Newz'.

Virk prayed for the safety of those

stranded in the affected countries. "I know there are so many other families going through the same fear and anxiety. My prayers are not just for my loved ones, but for every single person affected," he wrote.

Virk also acknowledged and appreciated efforts of the UAE government.

"From what I'm being told, they are working tirelessly to ensure that people remain safe and supported during this time. For that, I am truly grateful. Let's continue to pray for the peace, stability and well-being of everyone there. May this phase pass soon, and may all families feel secure and protected," he wrote.

Following Virk's post, AAP general secretary Baltej Pannu contacted the Punjabi actor over phone and inquired about the whereabouts of his family in the UAE.

Pannu assured Virk that the Punjab government stands firmly with them in this time of crisis.

Mann will soon take up the matter with the Central government and make every possible political and diplomatic effort to ensure the safety of Virk's family, he said.

The AAP leader said the government is making all efforts to ensure the safety of its citizens stranded

abroad.

Expressing concerns over the ongoing crisis in the Gulf countries, he said, "We pray to God for the war to end soon and for peace to be restored." He said the Punjab government is committed to the safety of its citizens and will work with the Centre to find an immediate resolution to the matter.

Several people from Punjab, especially tourists, are stranded in the affected countries.

A newly wed couple from Sardoolgarh in Punjab's Mansa was also stuck in Dubai. His family back home appealed to the Centre to help evacuate them as early as possible.

Several international flights have been cancelled in view of the escalating Middle-East conflict. As a result, several Indians are stranded in Dubai and Sharjah. Chief Minister Mann on Monday announced a round-the-clock helpline number to assist Punjabis stranded in the affected countries, assuring them all possible help.

Punjab NRI Affairs minister Dr Ravjot Singh on Sunday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, seeking an urgent meeting regarding the evacuation of stranded people in the affected countries.

Heatwave continues in AP, Telangana with ising Temperatures and dry weather

TELANGANA: The Telugu states Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are experiencing intense heat, with daytime temperatures rising significantly. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are currently recording temperatures around 34 degrees Celsius. The Meteorological Department has indicated that temperatures are likely to increase further in the coming days. In addition, there is a possibility of almost dry weather with fog appearing at one or two locations, according to the Amaravati Meteorological Center.

A trough extending from North Odisha to South Chhattisgarh and Vidarbha at a height of 0.9 km above mean sea level is influencing the weather. Yesterday, a north-south wind disturbance from northwest Tamil Nadu to Marathwada, which extended from surface circulation over the Gulf of Mannar and neighbouring regions to Tamil Nadu and interior Karnataka, has now spread further. In North Coast Andhra



Pradesh and Yanam, north-westerly winds are prevailing, while South Coast Andhra Pradesh and Rayalseema are experiencing south/southwesterly winds in the lower troposphere. The weather forecast for the next three days indicates dry conditions across the state, with fog expected at one or two places on Tues-

day. Similar dry weather is predicted for Wednesday and Thursday, with fog possibly occurring at a few locations.

In Telangana, the Hyderabad Meteorological Centre has stated that a north-south wind disturbance persists, extending from the Gulf of Mannar to interior Karnataka and

Marathwada at 0.9 km altitude. Another trough from North Odisha to South Chhattisgarh and Vidarbha is also present. The forecast for Telangana indicates dry weather over the next three days, with maximum temperatures expected to rise gradually by two to three degrees in some areas during this period.

How Bengal SIR may have put BJP's Matua vote-bank at risk

NEW DELHI: The publication of the final voter rolls in West Bengal after the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has introduced a new layer of political uncertainty in parts of the state that once appeared electorally secure for the BJP. A close examination of the legislative assembly segments recording the highest numbers of deletions or names placed under scrutiny reveals a pattern with significant political implications.

Among the 10 assembly constituencies with the highest figures of deletions, nine were won by the BJP in the 2021 assembly polls: Dabgram-Fulbari (16,491), Bagda (15,303), Santipur (8,048), Bongaon Uttar (7,926), Ranaghat Dakshin (7,126), Ranaghat Uttar Purba (6,404), Ranaghat Uttar Paschim (6,704), Chakdaha (5,864) and Sili-guri (5,240).

These seats had formed a crucial part of the BJP's breakthrough in southern Bengal and the Nadia-North 24 Parganas belt. Only Habra (5,587) was retained by the Trinamool Congress (TMC), with Jyotipriya Mullick emerging victorious.

Since then, the BJP's hold over this cluster had already weakened. Bagda and Santipur were lost

to the TMC in subsequent by-elections while Mukut Mani Adhikari, who won Ranaghat Dakshin on a BJP ticket, crossed over to the ruling party.

Despite these reverses, the region has continued to be viewed as a BJP stronghold, reinforced by its performance in the parliamentary polls in 2024. In that election, the BJP secured effective leads in almost all of these assembly segments, including Habra. This showing appeared to stabilise concerns arising from the post-2021 defections and by-election losses. This very apparent stability now stands in contrast to the uncertainty created by the final voter list.

The political sensitivity of the SIR exercise lies in the social composition of these constituencies. At least seven of the 10 assembly segments are dominated by or heavily influenced by the Matua community, which over the past decade has emerged as one of the BJP's most dependable vote-banks in Bengal. The party's rise in this belt since 2014 has been closely linked to Matua consolidation, shaped by promises of citizenship, legal recognition and cultural inclusion.

Administrative scrutiny of voter rolls, however,

has reopened longstanding anxieties within the community. Matua households are often characterised by inter-district mobility, legacy documentation gaps and refugee histories that predate consistent electoral registration. These factors make them disproportionately vulnerable to deletions, objections and verification-related exclusions during roll revisions.

In constituencies such as Bagda, Bongaon Uttar, the three Ranaghat segments and Chakdaha, even a limited disruption in Matua voter participation could carry outsized political consequences. BJP victories in 2021 in several of these seats were not landslides but rested on near-total consolidation of Matua votes. The party lacks a secondary social coalition of comparable strength in these areas, making any erosion within this base electorally costly.

Recognising the growing unease, leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari attempted to reassure the Matua community. On March 1, Adhikari stated that Matua voters had no reason to fear deletion from the electoral rolls. He urged those without formal citizenship documentation to apply under the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA), arguing that citizenship would naturally resolve questions surrounding voter eligibility.

Adhikari said that around 91,000 applications had already been received under the CAA and claimed that, barring a few hundred cases, nearly all would be cleared. Once citizenship was granted, he said, the applicants would automatically become eligible for voting rights. The remarks were aimed at calming anxieties but also underscored the extent to which the BJP's political strategy in this belt remained tied to citizenship-related assurances.

For the TMC, the unfolding situation presents a strategic opening. With deeper control over local administrative networks and stronger booth-level organisation, the ruling party is better positioned to navigate voter verification processes and convert administrative uncertainty into political messaging. The Trinamool's ability to retain Habra and reclaim Bagda and Santipur after 2021 has already demonstrated the value of organisational depth in moments of electoral flux.

Beyond numbers, the SIR process poses a narrative challenge for the BJP.

BJP awaits Delhi nod on Shillong LS bypoll candidate, says Hek

DELHI: Senior BJP leader and Pynthorumkhrah legislator AL Hek on Tuesday said any decision to contest the Shillong Lok Sabha byelection rests with the central leadership, and the state unit would "follow whatever the central leadership is giving us instruction."

"We will be informed about the byelection," Hek told reporters when asked whether the Meghalaya BJP would press Delhi to fight the seat. He confirmed internal talks were under way.

"From the party point of view, we are also discussing this to set up or not to set up the candidate for the Shillong MP byelection. We have so many candi-

dates but now we have not decided on whether to contest."

He said the state chief would soon convene a meeting.

"Very soon we will sit. We have informed to the respected president of BJP Meghalaya to call a meeting to discuss about this byelection."

Asked about backing the NPP, Hek ruled out support for another party and said, "If we have to contest we will have our own candidate. We will not be supporting any candidate (of other political parties)."

"We will go whatever the central leadership will give the instruction but BJP Meghalaya will contest on our own," he added.

BJP names Vinod Tawde as Rajya Sabha candidate from Maharashtra

MUMBAI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has announced that its National General Secretary, Vinod Tawde, will contest the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections from Maharashtra. Tawde, who currently serves as the BJP in-charge for Bihar, is set to vie for one of the seven seats in Maharashtra, whose Rajya Sabha terms are set to expire in April.

Earlier, the BJP announced a total of nine candidates for the Rajya Sabha polls across various states.

From Bihar, the party has fielded National President Nitin Nabin and Shivesh Kumar. In Assam, Terash Gowalla and Jogen Mohan have been nominated, while

Laxmi Verma will contest from Chhattisgarh. Haryana's candidate is Sanjay Bhatia. In Odisha, the party has nominated State unit chief Manmohan Samal along with Sujeet Kumar. The Rajya Sabha elections are scheduled to be held on March 16.

Vinod Tawde is a prominent Indian politician from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and a long-time member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Beginning his political journey as a full-time worker of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), Tawde has played an active role in strengthening the BJP's organisational structure.

Man gets life term in 2021 murder case

KURNOOL: The Principal District Court, Kurnool, on Monday awarded life imprisonment to the accused in a murder case registered in February 2021. Delivering the verdict, Principal District Judge Kabarthi held the accused guilty of murdering Vaddypati Venkateshwarlu of Shareen Nagar, Kurnool city, and of attempting to murder his wife, the complainant in the case. The prosecution stated that the accused, Daggupati Raju of Indireswaram village in Atmakur mandal, Nandyal district, committed the crime due to personal animosity. Raju suspected that the complainant and her husband were responsible for his wife leaving him, allegedly due to an extramarital relationship. The dispute further escalated when the deceased refused to lend Rs 2 lakh from the money obtained by selling his agricultural land. Acting on this grudge, the accused attacked Venkateshwarlu with a knife at his residence, killing him on the spot, and also assaulted the complainant to kill her.

Following the incident, a case was registered at Kurnool IV Town police station for murder and attempt to murder. After a detailed investigation, accused Raju was arrested and a charge sheet was filed. The case was closely monitored by Kurnool SP Vikrant Patil. On finding the charges proved beyond doubt, the court sentenced the accused to life imprisonment for murder and three years' imprisonment for attempt to murder.

IndiGo operates 4 repatriation flights to Jeddah; plans another flight to Muscat

NEW DELHI: IndiGo on Tuesday operated four repatriation flights to Jeddah and plans to have another flight to Muscat later in the day to bring back passengers stranded due to the Middle East conflict.

There are also plans to operate repatriation flights to cities in the UAE on March 4, depending on the local situation and required necessary approvals, the airline said in a statement. After suspending flights to the Middle East and Europe due to the ongoing situation, IndiGo said it would start reinstating select flights to Muscat (Oman), Jeddah, Madinah (Saudi Arabia) and Athens (Greece). The airline would operate a total of 26 flights to and from these four destinations. "For all other stations, IndiGo is closely monitoring the situation and working with the relevant authorities for local slots and permits to progressively restore its operational schedule," it said. Regarding the repatriation flights for March 3, the airline said four such flights are now enroute to Jeddah and one is expected to be operated to/from Muscat, later in the day.