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**1. Why Sri Lanka's newly elected President dissolved Parliament****Introduction**

A day after assuming office, Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake dissolved Parliament and announced a snap election.

Dissanayake had indicated during the campaign that upon coming to power, he would seek a fresh mandate to pursue his policies. There is "no point continuing with a Parliament that is not in line with what the people want," he had said, according to media reports.

**Political situation**

Sri Lanka's 225-member Parliament has a term of five years. The previous election took place in August 2020, which means the now-dissolved Parliament was supposed to be in place until August 2025.

However, the socialist National People's Power

(NPP) alliance led by Dissanayake and his Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party, had just three seats in this Parliament. This is because until 2022, the NPP largely remained on the fringes of Sri Lankan politics.

The meteoric rise of the NPP, exemplified by the mandate received by Dissanayake in Saturday's presidential election, came on the back of the mass protests that rocked Sri Lanka in 2022. The NPP led the street agitation against years of economic mismanagement and corruption — protests that forced the powerful Rajapaksa family from power and compelled President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country.

Ranil Wickremesinghe, who became President in July 2022, was backed in Parliament by the Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party.

In the backdrop of this situation, it was always likely that if he were to come to power, Dissanayake would dissolve Parliament and call fresh elections, in which the NPP would likely make major gains.

### **Sri Lankan system**

Technically, the President and Prime Minister can be from different political parties. But in reality, ever since the President was given executive powers in 1978, the two offices have been closely aligned. This is because for all practical purposes, the Prime Minister acts as deputy to the President in Sri Lanka.

The President is both the head of state and head of government, as well as the commander-in-chief of the Sri Lankan armed forces, and the head of the Union cabinet. The President has the power to dissolve Parliament. The President is directly elected for a six-year term.

The Prime Minister is the most senior member of Parliament and the Union cabinet, and the chief adviser to the President. The PM is also the first in line to succeed the President. Wickremesinghe was PM when Gotabaya was President.

### **What happens now**

Hours before Dissanayake took oath as President on Monday, Dinesh Gunawardene resigned as Prime Minister. On Tuesday, Dissanayake appointed Harini Amarasuriya, one of the three NPP members of Parliament, as Prime Minister. Amarasuriya will head the Union cabinet, which will act as the interim government until elections take place in November. A new PM will be appointed after that.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

## **2. Jhumpa Lahiri Rejects US Award Over Keffiyeh Ban**

### **Incident Summary**

Renowned Indian-American author, Jhumpa Lahiri, declined the 2024 Isamu Noguchi Award from New York's Noguchi Museum. This decision followed the museum's firing of three employees for wearing keffiyeh scarves, which are traditionally associated with Palestinian solidarity. The museum's new dress code bans political symbols and attire, sparking controversy.

### **Museum's Response**

The museum confirmed that Lahiri withdrew from the award in light of the updated policy, which prohibits employees from wearing clothing with political messages or symbols.

### **What is the Keffiyeh?**

#### **Origins and Design**

The keffiyeh is a traditional Middle Eastern headscarf, typically made from cotton with patterns that reflect local culture, such as fishing nets and olive tree leaves. It was historically worn by people from lower classes, including farmers and Bedouins.

#### **Cultural Significance**

While it started as practical protection from the desert sun, the keffiyeh has come to symbolize Palestinian nationalism and resistance, particularly against British and later Israeli rule.



## **Keffiyeh as a Symbol of Palestinian Resistance**

### **Rise to Symbolism**

The scarf became a symbol of national unity in the 1930s during the British mandate over Palestine. Its prominence grew after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, symbolizing Palestinian resilience and connection to the land.

### **Notable Figures**

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and South African icon Nelson Mandela famously wore the keffiyeh in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

## **Controversies Surrounding the Keffiyeh**

### **Bans in the West**

In some Western countries, the keffiyeh is viewed as a symbol of opposition to Israel, leading to occasional bans. After the 2023 Hamas-Israel conflict, several legislative bodies, including

those in Canada's Ontario province and Australia's Victoria, restricted its display in government chambers.

### **Commercialization Criticism**

The keffiyeh gained global attention as a fashion accessory in the 2000s. This sparked backlash from Palestinians, who criticized brands for appropriating the cultural symbol without acknowledging its historical significance.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

### **3. What is Clause 6 of Assam Accord, which Himanta govt said will implement?**

#### **Introduction**

After a meeting with representatives of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) on Wednesday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma set the ball rolling for the implementation of 52 recommendations of the Justice Biplab Sarma Committee regarding Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, as announced by the Assam government earlier this month.

This comes more than four years after the Centre-appointed high-level committee finalised its report in February 2020.

Notably, 15 key recommendations of the committee will not be implemented for the time being. These, the chief minister said, will require Constitutional amendments to be implemented. "We will take up these matters with the Centre at the right forum," he posted on X on Wednesday.

#### **What is the Biplab Sarma committee report?**

The historic Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Union government and the leadership of the Assam Movement, primarily the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), which was signed in 1985. The accord ended the six-year-long agitation in Assam against the entry of Bangladeshi migrants into the state.

Clause 6 of the accord states that "Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

In July 2019, the Union Home Ministry constituted a 14-member committee chaired by retired Assam High Court Justice Biplab Kumar Sarma, and comprising judges, retired bureaucrats, writers, AASU leaders and journalists, to suggest ways to implement the clause. Among the key questions before the committee was a definition of "the Assamese people" eligible for the "safeguards" under Clause 6.

The committee finalised its report in February 2020. But instead of it being received by the Union Home Ministry, which had constituted the committee, the report was received by then Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal of the BJP. In August 2020, four committee members released the confidential report in the public domain.



Among the key recommendations made by the committee was that the definition of "Assamese people", for the purpose of implementing Clause 6, should include "Indigenous Tribals", "Other Indigenous Communities of Assam", "Indian citizens residing in the territory of Assam on or before January 1, 1951" and their descendants, and "Indigenous Assamese" people. Based on this, the committee made several recommendations for reservations for "Assamese people", including in Parliament, the state Assembly, local bodies, and jobs.



**What recommendations of the report will the Assam government implement?**

Chief Minister Sarma said that the state government has accepted 1951 as the "cut-off date" for the specific recommendations of the report. He said, however, that this definition of "Assamese people" is confined to only the context of the report's recommendations.

Following a meeting with the AASU on Wednesday, he said that the 67 broad recommendations made by the report can be divided into three broad categories: 40 which come under the exclusive domain of the state government, 12 which will require the concurrence of the Centre, and 15 which are in the exclusive domain of the Centre. The 52 recommendations in the first two categories will be implemented by April 2025, for which the state government will submit a roadmap to AASU by October 25 this year.

These 52 recommendations largely deal with safeguards on language, land, and cultural heritage. Some key recommendations include:

**Land**

- \* Creating Revenue Circles where only "Assamese people" can own and possess land, and transfer of such land in these areas are limited to them alone;
- \* Launching a time-bound, three year programme to allot land titles to "Assamese people" who have occupied a certain piece of land for decades, but are without possession of land documents;
- \* Carrying out a special survey of char areas (riverine regions along the Brahmaputra), and for newly created chars to be treated as government land, in which river erosion-affected people should get priority in allotment;

#### Language

- \* Keeping Assamese as the official language throughout the state as per the 1960 Assam Official Language Act "with provisions for use of local languages" in the Barak Valley, Hill districts, and the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District;
- \* Making it compulsory for all state government acts, rules, orders, etc. to be issued in Assamese along with English;
- \* Constituting an Autonomous Language and Literature Academy/Council of Assam to preserve and promote all indigenous languages of Assam;
- \* Making Assamese a compulsory subject up to class VIII or class X in all English medium schools, both under the state board and CBSE;

#### Cultural heritage

- \* Establishing an autonomous authority for the development of sattras (neo-Vaishnavite monasteries), which will, among other things, provide financial assistance to them; and
- \* Creating multipurpose cultural complexes in each district to "uplift" the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups.

Chief Minister Sarma said that the autonomous councils of Assam's Sixth Schedule Areas — namely the Bodoland Territorial Council, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council — will decide whether to implement the 52 recommendations. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provides autonomous tribal councils in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram certain legislative and judicial autonomy.

Along with the Sixth Schedule areas, Sarma said that the primarily Bengali-speaking Barak Valley will also be exempted from the implementation of these recommendations.

#### **Which recommendations has the Assam government left out?**

Some of the most sensitive recommendations by the committee, however, do not find mention in the 52 points listed by the state government. Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah recently referred to these as the "soul" of the committee's report.

Among them are the introduction of an Inner Line Permit for entry into Assam as is in place in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram, as well as numerous reservations for "Assamese people". The latter include 80-100% reservation in Assam's seats in Parliament, and the same proportion reserved in the state Assembly and local bodies; 80-100% reservation in Assam government jobs; and 70-100% reservations in vacancies arising in undertakings run in partnership between the Assam government and private companies. There was also a recommendation for the creation of an Upper House (the Legislative Council of Assam) which would be completely reserved for the "Assamese people".

The BJP's political opponents have questioned where the Centre featured in discussions regarding the implementation of the committee's recommendations. Former AASU general secretary Lurinjoyti Gogoi, who was a member of the committee, questioned whether the Union Home Ministry even accepted the report.

"The Home Ministry has still not accepted the report... Until it accepts the report, the recommendations do not have any legal or constitutional value... the fundamental points here are those on political representation," he said.

However, Chief Minister Sarma has said that the Assam government will appeal to the Centre to have talks with AASU, and work towards the implementation of the remaining 15 recommendations.

"Our aim is that we should not let those recommendations which are attainable lie by the wayside because of those which are difficult and may take time," he had said earlier this month.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian Express