

Gaurav Gogoi and the Politics of Dependency: A Challenge to Assam's Debt-Driven Welfare Model



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AT News 22 June 2025 Updated 23 Jun 50616 views

On May 26, 2025, Gaurav Gogoi, a three-time MP and son of former Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, was appointed President of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee ([APCC](#)). His appointment marked a generational shift in Assam's Congress leadership and was seen as a strategic move to reinvigorate the party ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections. Gogoi's clean image, recent Lok Sabha victory from Jorhat by a margin of 1.44 lakh votes, and appeal among youth positioned him as a serious contender against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Gogoi's appointment replaces Bhupen Kumar Borah and is backed by a team of working presidents including Jakir Hussain Sikdar, Roselina Tirkey, and Pradip Sarkar. Senior leaders like Debabrata Saikia, Pradyut Bordoloi, and Rakibul Hussain have been assigned coordination, manifesto, and publicity roles respectively. This revamp represents Congress's aggressive push to reclaim political relevance in Assam.

The Rise of Beneficiary-Centric Welfare in Assam

Under Himanta Biswa Sarma's administration since 2021, the Assam government has promoted a model of governance that prioritizes direct financial aid, subsidies, and free provisions to large sections of the population. These include:

- **Orunodoi Scheme (3.0):** Monthly transfer of ₹1,250 to nearly 37 lakh women under DBT.
- **Free Ration Distribution:** Over 2.3 crore people receive 5 kg of free rice monthly under the PMGKAY.
- **Microfinance Relief:** Waivers under AMFIRS have benefited over 24 lakh women.
- **Entrepreneurial Assistance:** The Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan offers ₹2-5 lakh packages (50% grants, 50% interest-free loans).
- **Lakhpati Baideo & Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan:** SHGs receive ₹10,000 to ₹35,000, with a target of making 40 lakh women "lakhpati."

While these schemes provide short-term relief, critics argue that they institutionalize dependence and divert attention from real development.

Fiscal Realities from the Assam Budget 2025-26

The PRS Legislative Research's [Assam Budget Analysis 2025-26](#) offers a revealing snapshot of the state's fiscal stress:

- **GSDP Growth:** Projected at ₹7.41 lakh crore in 2025-26, a 15% rise from the previous year.
- **Total Expenditure (excluding debt):** ₹1.46 lakh crore, down 3% from 2024-25 RE.
- **Revenue Balance:** Budgeted at zero for 2025-26, improving from a -0.8% GSDP deficit in 2024-25.
- **Fiscal Deficit:** Budgeted at ₹27,398 crore (3.7% of GSDP), a sharp drop from 5.7% RE of 2024-25.
- **Borrowings:** ₹36,185 crore in 2025-26, with outstanding debt estimated at 25.7% of GSDP, or nearly ₹1.9 lakh crore.
- **Interest Payments:** ₹10,987 crore, 13% higher than 2024-25, consuming 9% of revenue receipts.

Between 2021 and 2025, Assam borrowed over ₹70,000 crore—an average of ₹17,500 crore annually—to finance these schemes. The cost of committed expenditure (salaries, pensions, interest) in 2025-26 will take up 61% of revenue receipts, reducing fiscal flexibility.

Gogoi's Critique: From Dependency to Self-Reliance

Gaurav Gogoi has repeatedly denounced the BJP's model as one that rewards idleness and erodes dignity.

On social media and in Parliament, he has said: "Assam needs opportunities, not sops. Giving fish daily is not empowerment. Teach them to fish." He alleges widespread corruption, with fake beneficiaries leeching funds from schemes like PM Kisan and Orunodoi. He has called for an audit of such schemes to ensure funds go to genuine recipients.

The Political Fray: Allegations and Counter-Allegations

The BJP, especially Sarma, has gone on the offensive, accusing Gogoi and his wife Elizabeth Colburn of past links to Pakistan's ISI—an allegation rooted in an unproven 2013 visit. Despite promises of SIT investigations, no evidence has emerged as of June 2025.

Sarma has further accused Gogoi of being supported by “suspicious communities,” attempting to delegitimize his grassroots support. Congress leaders have responded by defending Gogoi's patriotism and accusing Sarma of political desperation. Former MP Ripun Bora remarked, “These attacks reflect the BJP's insecurity over Gogoi's clean image and growing appeal.”

Gogoi's Roadmap: Youth, Employment, and Transparency

Gogoi's vision for Assam is centered on employment generation, skill development, and restoration of dignity:

- **Skill Development:** Expand ITIs, vocational training, and MSMEs.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Replace doles with low-interest loans, mentorship, and innovation hubs.
- **Job Creation:** Promote sectors like tourism, tea, handloom, and agro-processing.
- **Transparency:** Introduce real-time dashboards and audits to eliminate fake beneficiaries.

He has criticized arms licensing near borders, stating that “what Assam needs is not weapons but water, employment, and education.” He has also attacked the government over Guwahati floods, blaming encroachments and corruption.

The Risk of a Welfare Vote Bank

With 37 lakh direct Orunodoi beneficiaries and massive reach of free rice and cash schemes, undoing the welfare model risks political backlash. Gogoi must balance reform with compassion. He cannot afford to alienate the very voters he hopes to empower. The BJP's narrative of welfare as women's empowerment has gained traction, especially in rural and tea garden areas.

A Test of Leadership and Vision

Gogoi's challenge is not only to critique but to provide an alternative. As Assam grapples with debt, rising interest obligations, and minimal capital spending, the state needs a pivot. The Ahom-era legacy of self-reliance offers symbolic direction, but the path must be paved through modern governance tools.

Whether Gaurav Gogoi can be Assam's "modern Gadadhar Singha," using persuasion over coercion to inspire work, pride, and productivity, remains to be seen. But as he emerges as the Congress face for 2026, his ability to transform the narrative from one of dependency to one of dignity will define his political journey—and perhaps Assam's future.

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