

From Municipal Board to Municipal Corporation: A Comprehensive Study of the First Silchar Municipal Corporation Election 2026 And Its Implications For Urban Governance in Cachar District of Assam

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Abstract: *Silchar, the second largest city of Assam and headquarters of Cachar district, witnessed a landmark institutional transition from a Municipal Board to a Municipal Corporation. As per official record available on silcharmunicipality.in, the Silchar Municipal Board established in 1882 was upgraded to Silchar Municipal Corporation with 42 wards vide Government of Assam Notification No. E-228921/508 dated 28th November, 2022, and the corporation became operational from 30th June, 2025 when Ms. Srishti Singh, IAS assumed charge as its first Municipal Commissioner. The first election to the Silchar Municipal Corporation was conducted by the State Election Commission, Assam after a gap of six years without an elected civic body. Polling was held on 3rd October, 2026 (Saturday) from 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM across 316 polling stations in 40 wards, while Ward No. 9 (Bijendra Prasad Singh) and Ward No. 20 (Bhakti Sen Talukdar) of Bharatiya Janata Party were elected unopposed. Counting was held on 6th October, 2026 at Ramnagar ISBT / ISTT Campus, Silchar using ballot papers. As per SEC Assam data, total electorate was 2,70,772 comprising 1,29,877 male, 1,40,884 female and 11 third gender voters. A total of 133 candidates contested including BJP 38, AGP 4, Congress 38, CPI(M) 1 and Independents 52. Final voter turnout stood at 70.22% with initial reports of 63.43%. The BJP-led NDA secured a decisive mandate winning 34 seats (BJP 32, AGP 2), while Indian National Congress secured 2 seats (Ward 30 and 41) and Independents secured 6 seats (Ward 1, 19, 24, 25, 29, 42). This study, based on authentic secondary sources from sec.assam.gov.in, silcharmunicipality.in, Deputy Commissioner, Cachar press releases and verified media reports quoting SEC officials, analyses the electoral pattern, voter turnout, party performance and urban governance issues that shaped this historic election. The paper argues that despite a strong party wave, victory of six independents indicates persistence of candidate-centric voting in municipal elections and highlights challenges of urban governance in Barak Valley under the 74th Constitutional Amendment.*

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1. Introduction: Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) are considered as the third tier of governance in India's federal structure after the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 came into force. The Act mandates regular elections to municipalities, devolution of 18 functions listed in Twelfth Schedule, constitution of

Wards Committees and reservation for women and SC/ST. However, in Northeast India, implementation of this amendment has been uneven.

Silchar is often described as the lifeline of Barak Valley. Situated on the banks of river Barak, Silchar is not only the administrative headquarter of Cachar district but also the educational, medical and commercial hub for the entire Barak Valley and neighbouring states of Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. Silchar has a long civic history which is rarely discussed in academic circles.

According to official history documented on Silchar Municipal Corporation portal silcharmunicipality.in, Silchar Municipality has its origin in 1882 as a Station Committee with a population of 4925 as per census of 1872 and with an area of 5.00 sq.km. In 1893 Silchar was elevated to the rank of a 2nd class municipality in Assam. Since 1882 Silchar Town Committee was governed by the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar as Ex-Officio Chairman and other 9 nominated members. In 1883 the number of members were increased to 15. This system continued upto 1912. The system of electing 10 members and nominating 5 members was introduced after meeting dated 01.11.1912. The meeting dated 29.02.1952 resolved to abolish the cumulative system of voting. The present system of one member from one ward was introduced from the Silchar Municipal Election 1966. There were 25 wards initially. With growth of population, the number of wards rose to 28 in 1979. At present it covers an area of 15.35 sq.km with population of 1,72,830 as per 2011 census. The first Chairman of Silchar Municipal Board was Sri K.K. Chanda (23-05-1913 to 21-04-1922) and the first Executive Officer was Sri M. Chakraborty (22-09-1975 to 10-02-1976).

The last elected board was dissolved on 2nd April, 2020 and since then city was administered by Deputy Commissioner as Administrator. This created a vacuum in urban governance for six years. The demand for upgradation to Municipal Corporation was raised because city expanded beyond municipal limits to areas like Rongpur, Ramnagar, Tarapur, Meherpur, Silcoorie, Narsingtola and Ghungoor. Finally, as per Notification dated 28th November, 2022 vide No. E-228921/508, the Governor of Assam was pleased to constitute Silchar Municipal Corporation with 42 wards from Silchar Municipal Board. The corporation became operational from 30th June, 2025 as per Sentinel Assam report, and Ms. Srishti Singh, IAS had been in charge from 16-06-2025 as first Municipal Commissioner.

The Gauhati High Court in W.P. (C) No. Dhruba Kumar Saha & Ors vs State of Assam & Ors directed State Election Commission, Assam to hold elections before Durga Puja 2026. Accordingly, SEC Assam announced schedule on 2nd September, 2026. This election marks 144-year civic journey of Silchar from 1882 to 2026.

2. Review of Literature: Academic literature on urban governance in Barak Valley is scarce. Das (2018) in 'Municipal Administration in Assam: Problems and Prospects' highlighted that municipal bodies in Assam suffer from weak financial base, excessive state control and lack of trained manpower. He pointed out that many municipalities do not have GIS mapping and building bye-laws enforcement is weak.

Nath and Roy (2021) conducted a study on impact of absence of elected body in Silchar on solid waste management and found that door-to-door collection efficiency dropped by 40% during administrator rule and dumping ground at Meherpur was not scientifically managed.

Bhattacharjee and Laskar (2020) observed that politics in Barak Valley is different from Brahmaputra Valley as language identity (Bengali) and religious demography plays important role. However, their study was limited to Assembly elections.

Chaudhury (2022) studied Dibrugarh Municipal Board upgradation and noted that upgradation to corporation brings more funds under AMRUT and Smart City but also increases expectation of citizens.

No empirical study has been published on Silchar Municipal Corporation election as it is the first election after upgradation. This gap is filled by present study using authentic SEC Assam data.

3. Objectives of the Study

- i) To trace institutional history and legal framework of transition from Silchar Municipal Board to Silchar Municipal Corporation as per Notification No. E-228921/508 dated 28th November, 2022.
- ii) To analyse election schedule, electorate composition and voter turnout pattern as per official data released by State Election Commission, Assam and Deputy Commissioner, Cachar.
- iii) To examine party-wise contestation pattern and final results of first SMC election 2026.
- iv) To identify key urban governance issues that influenced voting behaviour in Silchar.
- v) To evaluate implications for democratic decentralisation and suggest measures for strengthening SMC under 74th Amendment.

4. Research Methodology And Sources: The study is descriptive-cum-analytical. Since election concluded on 6th October, 2026, detailed gazette notification of ward-wise vote share is yet to be published by SEC Assam. Therefore, study is based on authentic secondary sources which are cross-verified:

- a) Official website of State Election Commission, Assam - sec.assam.gov.in - Notification regarding Silchar Municipal Corporation Wards dated 21 September 2026 cited in Wikipedia and official press releases.
- b) Official website of Silchar Municipal Corporation - silcharmunicipality.in - for history, area, notification number and Commissioner details.
- c) Assam Tribune dated 3rd September, 2026 - SEC schedule announcement, 316 polling stations, timing 7:30 AM to 4 PM, counting 8 AM on 6th October.
- d) Northeast Live TV dated 1st October, 2026 - Public Holiday on 3rd October, 2026 declared by General Administration Department for polling.
- e) India Today NE dated 19th September, 2026 - Three-day dry days on 2nd, 3rd and 6th October, 2026 under Section 135(C) of Representation of People Act, 1951.
- f) Northeast Now, The Federal (PTI), India TV News dated 6th October, 2026 - Official counting data from Ramnagar ISBT Campus quoting SEC officials.
- g) Personal field observation in Ward No. 12, 21 and 30 during campaign last week of September, 2026.

5. Election Schedule And Process: State Election Commission, Assam is constituted under Article 243K and 243ZA of Constitution. Unlike Election Commission of India which uses EVMs, SEC Assam conducts municipal elections through ballot papers as per Assam Municipal Act.

Schedule:

- Announcement by SEC Assam: 2nd September, 2026. Model Code of Conduct came into force immediately.
- Last date of filing nomination: 11th September, 2026.

- Scrutiny and publication of valid nominations: 14th September, 2026.
- Last date of withdrawal: 17th September, 2026, final list published.
- Dry Days: 2nd, 3rd, 6th October, 2026 - sale of liquor prohibited under Rule 326(A) of Assam Excise Rules, 2016.
- Public Holiday: 3rd October, 2026 within SMC jurisdiction declared by GAD to enable voters to exercise franchise.
- Polling: 3rd October, 2026 (Saturday), 7:30 AM to 4 PM across 316 stations in 40 wards. 2 wards unopposed.
- Repoll if required: 5th October, 2026.
- Counting: 6th October, 2026 (Tuesday), 8 AM onwards at Ramnagar ISBT / ISTT Campus, Silchar.

Total candidates: 133 initially filed, but 2 elected unopposed, so polling held for 131 candidates in 40 wards as reported by Northeast Live.

6. Electorate And Turnout Analysis: As per SEC Assam data quoted by India TV News and The Hindu:

- Male voters: 1,29,877
- Female voters: 1,40,884
- Third Gender: 11
- Total: 2,70,772

Female voters outnumber male voters by 11,007 which indicates **better sex ratio** in urban Silchar compared to state average. This is positive for participatory governance.

Turnout: Initial report on 6th October morning stated 63.43% of 2.70 lakh electorate voted as per Northeast Now. Final compiled figure stood at 70.22% as per India TV News and Sentinel Assam. Both figures are quoted as variation due to compilation of ballot papers.

Ward-wise variation: Ward No. 1 (Malugram area) recorded highest 78% turnout, while Ward No. 22 (Central Silchar - Shillongpatty, Central Road) recorded lowest 50% as per field reports. Newly included peripheral wards like Rongpur, Ramnagar, Meherpur, Silcoorie showed higher enthusiasm (70% plus) than core city wards, indicating acceptance of corporation status.

For comparison, Silchar Lok Sabha seat recorded 78.18% in 2024 General Elections. Urban local body turnout is normally 8-10% lower due to urban apathy and migration.

7. Contestation Pattern: Average candidates per ward: 3.16 Party-wise:

- BJP: 38 wards
- AGP: 4 wards (Alliance partner of BJP)
- Congress: 38 wards

- CPI(M): 1 ward
- Independents: 52 wards (39% of total contestants)

High number of independents shows local leaders who were denied party ticket contested independently. This is characteristic of municipal elections where personal rapport matters more than party symbol. Many independents were former ward commissioners of Municipal Board.

8. Result Analysis: Counting was held peacefully using ballot papers at Ramnagar ISBT campus under supervision of District Election Officer Cachar, Rahul Kumar Gupta.

Final Party Position after recounting (Source: SEC Assam / DC Cachar / PTI):

- BJP: 32 seats (76.19%) - Ward 9 Bijendra Prasad Singh and Ward 20 Bhakti Sen Talukdar elected unopposed.
- AGP: 2 seats (Ward 16 and 26) - Total NDA 34 seats (80.95% majority).
- Congress: 2 seats (Ward 30 and 41).
- Independent: 6 seats (Ward 1, 19, 24, 25, 29, 42) - 14.28%.
- CPI(M): 0.

Some prominent winners declared: Saurav Kanti Nath (Ward 2), Shibani Rani Das (Ward 4), Mohitosh Chandra Mandal (Ward 8), Ranu Das (Ward 12), Joy Das (Ward 18), Sumona Das (Ward 21), Chandrima Deb (Ward 23), Kuldeep Choudhury (Ward 31), Mrinalini Sinha (Ward 32), Susmita Purkayastha (Ward 36), Uttam Kumar Goala (Ward 39), Panthadeep Roy (Ward 40).

Recounting: BJP sought recounting in Ward 29 and 30. Ward 29 initially won by Independent, Ward 30 by Congress. Final result after recount confirmed same winners as per Hindusthan Samachar dated 6th October, 2026.

Analysis: Out of 42 wards, 10 wards are minority-dominated. In these 10 wards, Independents won 6, Congress won 2, BJP won 2. This was highlighted by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in his statement: “Out of 42 seats, 10 seats were minority-dominated, and 6 independent candidates won there; Congress managed only 2 seats. This proves BJP is in EVM, BJP is in Ballot; Modi is in EVM and Modi is in Ballot”. BJP State President Dilip Saikia said: “The Congress always complains about EVM tampering, but this election was held through ballot papers, and they are nowhere.”

9. Campaign Issues - Field Observation: During last week of September, 2026, I observed campaign in Rangirkhari, National Highway, Tarapur and Silcoorie areas. Campaign was low-profile, door-to-door with hand mikes on e-rickshaws. No big rallies.

Key issues:

- a) Road and Drainage: Chronic waterlogging. Even one hour rain submerges Rangirkhari, Link Road, National Highway, Ambicapatty. Voters asked “Drain kobehobe?” Citizens demanded concrete drainage under AMRUT 2.0.
- b) Drinking Water: Irregular supply - 2-3 times a week for 1 hour. Women voters highlighted this.

- c) Waste Management: Irregular door-to-door collection. Meherpur dumping ground overflowing, needs scientific waste processing plant.
- d) Street Lighting and Security: Non-functional LED lights in many wards, concern for students returning from tuition.
- e) Property Tax: After corporation upgradation, holding tax increased. Small traders protested.
- f) Ballot Paper Narrative: State-level narrative of ballot vs EVM dominated media but voters focused on local issues.

10. Implications And Suggestions:

Implications:

- i) Restoration of democracy after 6 years of bureaucratic rule.
- ii) With MP Parimal Suklabaidya, RS MP Kanad Purkayastha and 7 MLAs from Cachar all from BJP plus Mayor from BJP, synergy expected but opposition accountability weak.
- iii) Financial challenge: Area increased from 15.35 sq km to 69.5 sq km, but own revenue (property tax) collection less than 40%. Need GIS-based property mapping.
- iv) Need to accommodate 6 independents for budget approval.

Suggestions:

- i) Constitute Ward Committees under Section 43 of Assam Municipal Corporation Act, 2022 with citizen members.
- ii) Implement Area Sabha and publish citizen charter.
- iii) Financial devolution as per 6th Assam State Finance Commission.
- iv) Use Interactive Flat Panels installed in colleges for Electoral Literacy Clubs and awareness on municipal governance.
- v) SEC Assam should publish gazette with ward-wise vote share for researchers.
- vi) Social audit by college students.

11. Conclusion: First SMC election conducted by State Election Commission, Assam on 3rd October, 2026 (polling) and 6th October, 2026 (counting) marks new chapter in 144-year civic history of Silchar. Decisive mandate to NDA with 34 seats shows organisational strength, but victory of 6 independents shows maturity of urban voters who prefer accessible candidate over party symbol. Real test will be delivery on waterlogging, waste management and drinking water. If SMC succeeds, it will be model for Dibrugarh and Jorhat which are also being upgraded. Future research should undertake primary survey once SEC Assam publishes detailed results.

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