

Lok Sabha Elections 2024

Distt Admin hosts Voters Awareness program under SVEEP at Lolab, Keran

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS  
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Mega Voters Awareness programs under the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) initiative were today organized at Govt. Higher Secondary School Maidanpora (Lolab) and Government Higher Secondary School Keran (close to LOC).

The events were aimed to raise awareness about various voting-related activities and promote electoral literacy among citizens, especially first-time voters in the run up to the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections 2024.

The events were attended by the principals, teachers, and students from different schools, officials from various departments, general public, first time voters, community leaders and local Artists.

Participants were enthralled by election related skits, scintillating cultural performances and interac-



tive sessions designed to educate and inspire active participation in the democratic process.

Pledge taking ceremonies under SVEEP were held where participants took the pledge to vote enthusiastically in the upcoming Lok Sabha elec-

tions. On the occasion, as a token of appreciation, achiever students were also felicitated.

Mass awareness regarding electoral participation was generated through painting and Quiz competitions.

Speaking at the events, Resource Persons emphasized on the significance of electoral literacy in empowering citizens and urged everyone, especially first-time voters, to exercise their franchise responsibly in the upcoming elections.

HAL successfully conducts first flight of light combat aircraft Tejas Mk1A

**BENGALURU, MARCH 28:** The first aircraft LA5033 of the Tejas Mk1A series successfully soared in the sky after taking off from the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) facility in Bengaluru on Thursday, the public sector aerospace and defence company said.

According to HAL, the Tejas Mk1A aircraft did a successful sortie with a flying time of 18 minutes. The plane was piloted by Chief Test Pilot Group Captain K K Venugopal (retired).

"HAL achieved this significant production milestone with concurrent design and development amid major supply chain challenges in the global geopolitical environment, subsequent to the contract signature in February 2021," HAL Chief Managing Director C B Ananthkrishnan said.

Extending its gratitude to the Ministry of Defence, In-



dian Air Force, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and associated private firms for contributing to the success of this programme, HAL said the country can look forward to early induction of the Tejas Mk1A by the IAF, and more numbers through the three lines of production established at

HAL. "The Tejas Mk1A will have an advanced electronic RADAR, warfare and communication systems, additional combat capability and improved maintenance features," HAL said.

HAL had signed a Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement with CSIR-National Aerospace Laborato-

ries (CSIR-NAL) on November 8, 2023.

The agreement was aimed at manufacturing BMI Engine Bay Door for the series production of Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) — Tejas Mk1A — an indigenous 4.5 generation, all-weather and multi-role fighter aircraft for the Indian Air Force.

MGNREGS wage rates revised, hikes range between 4-10 per cent for different states; Congress slams govt

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 28:** Wages under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme have been revised, with hikes ranging between four and 10 per cent for different states.

Haryana has the highest wage rate for unskilled workers under the scheme at Rs 374 a day, while Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have the lowest at Rs 234, according to a notification.

The wage rate in three panchayats of Sikkim—Gnathang, Lachung and Lachen—is Rs 374 a day.

The wage revision under the scheme was notified by the Union rural development ministry on March 27 after clearance from the Election Commission as the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is in force for the Lok Sabha polls.

The increases have been made on the 2023 wage rates under scheme that is aimed at enhancing livelihood security of households in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual

work. The hike in the wage rate in Goa was highest in the country at Rs 34 and the per day payment now stands at Rs 356 in the state, according to the notification. In Andhra Pradesh, it was increased by Rs 28 a day and the wage rate is now Rs 300.

The increase for Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand was the lowest at Rs 7 and the wage rate in both the states is Rs 237 a day to workers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The wage rate in West Bengal has been increased to Rs 250 (increase of Rs 13), in Tamil Nadu to Rs 319 (increase of Rs 25), in Telangana to Rs 300 (increase of Rs 28) and in Bihar to Rs 228 (increase of Rs 17).

Though Haryana tops in terms of wage rate, the increase is only around four per cent.

Overall, the hikes vary between four and 10 per cent. Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka and Telangana have registered an around 10 per cent increase, an analysis of the data mentioned in the no-

tification shows.

In a report tabled in Parliament earlier this year, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj had pointed out that the high range of variation in MGNREGS wages across states.

It had also said that the wages were inadequate and not in consonance with the rising cost of living. The panel also quoted a report of the Central Government Committee on minimum wages, Anoop Satpathy Committee, had recommended that the wages under MGNREGA should be Rs 375 a day.

"Revised MGNREGS wage rates below Rs 400 a day as promised by Congress"

Meanwhile, the Congress slammed the Narendra Modi Government after it notified the revised MGNREGS wages for 2024-25, saying the daily wage rates in all states are well below the Rs 400 a day promised by the Opposition party under its "Shramik NYAY" guarantees.

In a post on X, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said: "Congratulations to MN-

REGA workers! The Prime Minister has increased your salary by Rs 7."

"Now he might ask you, 'What will you do with such a huge amount of money?' And by spending Rs 700 crore, they could also start a 'Thank you Modi' campaign in your name," he said.

"Those who are angry with this immense generosity of Modi ji, should remember—the INDIA government is going to increase the wages of every labourer to Rs 400 per day on the first day," Gandhi said on the microblogging platform.

In another post on X, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the MGNREGA wages are revised annually with effect from April 1.

"For 2024/25, the Modi government has just announced revised MGNREGA wages. Leaving aside the issue of whether this violates the spirit of the Model Code of Conduct in view of the forthcoming elections, the announced daily wage rates in ALL states are well below the Rs 400 a day, which is part of the 'Shramik NYAY' guarantees of the Indian National Congress," he said.

Veteran actor Govinda makes a political comeback, joins Shinde-led Shiv Sena

**MUMBAI, MARCH 28:** Bollywood actor Govinda, a mass entertainer of the 1990s who is known for his excellent comic timing and epic dance steps, on Thursday joined the ruling Shiv Sena in Mumbai, making a comeback in politics after a 14-year hiatus.

The former Congress Lok Sabha MP joined the Shiv Sena in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde at the time of election season.

Govinda, who gave multiple superhit films in his decades-long career, made a blockbuster entry in electoral politics in 2004. That year, the "Hero No. 1" actor emerged as a "giant killer" when, as the Congress candidate, he defeated BJP stalwart Ram Naik in the Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat.

Shinde welcomed the 60-year-old actor into his party, saying he was a popular figure in all sections of society.

Speaking on the occasion, an emotional Govinda, who started his acting career in the 1980s and whose films were massy family entertainers, said after his first stint in politics from 2004 to 2009, he never felt he would again come back to the same field.



"I am back (in politics) after a 14-year-long 'vanvas' (exile)," he remarked. The veteran actor, whose full name is Govinda Ahuja, said he would work in the art and culture field if given a chance.

Mumbai looks more beautiful and developed since Shinde has become CM, he remarked after his re-entry into politics, albeit under the banner of a different political party, which comes at a time when the country is in the midst of Lok Sabha polls.

The actor said development of the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi was unbelievable.

Shinde, who took over as CM in June 2022, said there is positivity and prosperity in Mumbai and pollution levels are also coming down in the metropolis.

The CM maintained the versatile actor has joined his party without any pre-conditions and rejected suggestions that the entry was linked to elections.

"Govinda stands for progress. He is impressed with Modi's development policies. He wants to do something for the welfare and progress of the film industry. I am sure he will be the link between the government and the film industry. He has joined us without any conditions,"

Shinde asserted.

"My government is pro-development and pro-people, and he was impressed (with its policies)," the CM said.

Asked whether the actor will be fielded from the Mumbai North-West Lok Sabha seat, Shinde clarified he hadn't put any conditions.

"He just wants to work for the film industry," he said, adding Govinda hasn't joined the party for an election ticket.

Shinde said the Shiv Sena, which heads the governing 'Mahayuti' coalition in the state, will soon release its list of Lok Sabha candidates.

NIA arrests key conspirator in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 28:** In a major breakthrough, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a key conspirator in Bengaluru's Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, according to an official statement issued on Thursday.

Muzammil Shareef was picked up on Wednesday and placed in custody as a co-conspirator after NIA teams cracked down at 18 locations, including 12 in

Karnataka, five in Tamil Nadu and one in Uttar Pradesh, it said.

The NIA, which took over the case on March 3, had earlier identified the main accused, Mussavir Shazeeb Hussain, who had carried out the blast.

It had also identified another conspirator, Abdul Matheen Taha, who is also wanted by the agency in other cases, the statement said.

"Both the men are on the

run," it added.

NIA investigations have revealed that Muzammil Shareef had extended logistic support to the other two identified accused in the case, involving an IED explosion at the cafe located at ITPL Road, Brookefield, Bengaluru, on March 1.

Several customers and hotel staff members were injured, some of them grievously, in the blast, which caused extensive

damage to the property.

"Raids were conducted today at the houses of all these three accused as well as the residential premises and shops of other suspects," the statement said.

Various digital devices were seized during the searches, along with cash, it added.

Efforts are on to nab the absconding accused and unearth the larger conspiracy behind the blast, the NIA said.

Man missing after avalanche in Himachal's Manali

**SHIMLA, MARCH 28:** A man has gone missing after an avalanche in Kullu district's Manali, police said on Thursday.

The avalanche occurred on Thursday afternoon at Jagatsukh village in the suburbs of Manali town as the snow on mountains has started to melt during the ongoing dry spell.

Sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) Manali Raman Sharma said the police, administration and locals are engaged in the rescue operation and the snow is being removed to trace the missing person. Manali DSP KD Sharma said suddenly a huge avalanche hit a drain from the top of the hill and Rajesh Kumar, a resident of Kangra, got buried in the snow. The weather remained mainly dry in the state in the past 24 hours and the local MeT office has



issued "orange" warning of thunderstorm accompanied with lightning, hail, heavy rain and gusty winds at isolated places in five

districts —Kullu, Mandi, Shimla, Chamba and Kangra — on Friday and Saturday. A fresh western disturbance is likely to affect the

Western Himalayan region from March 29 and the MeT office Shimla has predicted a wet spell in the state till April 3.

'No evidence of wrongdoing': CBI closes UPA-era Air India aircraft leasing

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 28:** The CBI has filed a closure report in its probe into the alleged irregularities in the leasing of aircraft by NACIL, a company formed by the merger of Air India and Indian Airlines during the UPA era, as there was no "evidence of any wrongdoing," officials said Thursday.

The CBI, which had taken up the investigation in 2017 on the orders of the Supreme Court, filed the closure report before a special court recently.

The officials said other cases related to alleged irregularities in Air India, including the seat-sharing arrangement with private international airlines, are continuing.

The special court will decide

whether to accept the report or direct the agency to probe further on the points the court may raise.

The case pertained to the allegations regarding irregularities in leasing a large number of aircraft by Air India which resulted in huge losses to the national carrier while private persons made pecuniary gains.

This leasing was done by the public servants of Ministry of Civil Aviation under minister Praful Patel and National Aviation Corporation of India Ltd. (NACIL) despite the airlines running with very low load because of large scale aircraft acquisition and several flights, especially overseas ones, running almost empty at a huge loss, the FIR had alleged.

The National Aviation Corporation of India Ltd. was formed after the merger of Air India and Indian Airlines.

The agency has alleged that the decision was made "dishonestly," and the aircraft were leased even while an acquisition program was going on.

The leasing decision was taken "in conspiracy with other unknown persons on extraneous considerations" that resulted in "pecuniary benefit" to private companies and consequent "loss to government exchequer," the FIR had alleged.

The aircraft leasing decision in 2006 was taken despite overseas flights running almost empty at a huge loss, it had alleged.