

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Open 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' in every corner by defeating hatred: Rahul to voters

NEW DELHI, APR 19: As polling began in the first phase of the Lok Sabha polls on Friday, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi urged voters to strengthen democracy and open 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' in every corner of the country by defeating hatred.

"Today is the first phase of voting! Remember, each and every vote of yours is going to decide the future of India's democracy and its generations," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Go out and strengthen democracy by applying the balm of your vote on the wounds inflicted on the soul of the country in the last 10 years," he said.

Open 'Mohabbat Ki Dukaan' in every corner of the country by defeating ha-



ted, the Congress leader added.

Gandhi also shared a graphic of the key Congress guarantees to the people, including the right to appren-

iceship, a legal guarantee of MSP and a nationwide caste census.

The 2024 Lok Sabha polls kicked off Friday with polling being held for the first phase

scheduled in 102 seats spread across 21 states and Union territories.

Among those in the fray are Union ministers Nitin Gadkari, Sarbananda Sonowal and Bhupendra Yadav, Gaurav Gogoi of the Congress, the DMK's Kanimozhi and K Annamalai of the BJP.

Assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh (60 seats) and Sikkim (32 seats) are also being held simultaneously.

While the BJP-led NDA under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a stronger majority, the constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc are hoping for a rebound after facing reverses in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

CM Dhama among first to cast vote as Uttarakhand goes to polls

DEHRADUN, APR 19: Polling was underway on Friday for the five Lok Sabha seats in Uttarakhand, with Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama among the first to cast his vote.

Dhama along with his mother and wife Geeta arrived at the Nagra Terai polling station in Khatima and stood in a queue to cast his vote.

Talking to reporters, the chief minister noted that there is great enthusiasm among people.

"Over the last ten years Uttarakhand has seen unprecedented development. People of all sections have benefited from it. They will vote to give a third term to Narendra Modi," Dhama said.

He also spoke of BJP's Sankalp Patra which talks about the need of a UCC on the lines of the one passed by the Uttarakhand Assembly for the entire country.

"The Ganga of UCC which has originated from Uttarakhand will flow throughout the country," he said.

Former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat, who is the BJP candidate from



Haridwar, also cast his vote along with his wife and two daughters and said he was confident of winning the seat by more than five lakh votes.

BJP national spokesman and Pauri Garhwal candidate Anil Baluni also cast his vote.

Voting across 11,729 polling stations began at 7 am and will go on till 5 pm, election officials said.

Apart from 40,000 police, home guard and Prantiya Raksha Dal personnel, 65 companies of central paramilitary forces have been deployed to ensure free and fair polling in the state.

A total of 1,365 polling stations have been categorised as critical and 809 as vulnerable. Additional Chief Election Officer Vijay Kumar Joddande said.

The five seats going to polls in Uttarakhand are Haridwar, Pauri Garhwal, Tehri Garhwal, Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar and the lone reserved seat of Almora.

More than 83 lakh voters are eligible to decide the fate of 55 candidates in the fray.

Sitting BJP MPs Ajay Bhatt, Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah and Ajay Tamta have been fielded by the party

from Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar, Tehri Garhwal and Almora.

The BJP has replaced its candidates in Haridwar and Pauri Garhwal.

Former chief minister Trivendra Singh Rawat is contesting in place of Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank from Haridwar and Anil Baluni is in place of Tirath Singh Rawat from Pauri Garhwal.

The Congress has fielded former state unit chief Ganesh Godiyal from Pauri Garhwal, former chief minister Harish Rawat's son Virendra Rawat from Haridwar, Jot Singh Gansola from Tehri Garhwal, Prakash Joshi from Nainital-Udham Singh Nagar and Pradeep Tamta from Almora.

Candidates from the Bahujan Samaj Party, Uttarakhand Kranti Dal and relatively smaller outfits and Independents are also in the fray. Still, straight contests are likely between traditional rivals -- the BJP and the Congress -- in all the seats.

The BJP won all five seats in the state in the 2014 and 2019 general elections.

India delivers 1st batch of BrahMos missiles to Philippines amid China's military muscle-flexing in South China Sea

NEW DELHI, APR 19: India on Friday delivered the first batch of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines, in reflection of the growing military ties between the two countries amid China's military muscle-flexing in the South China Sea.

The supplies came over two years after India signed a USD 375 million deal with the Southeast Asian nation to supply the weapon systems.

A C-17 Globemaster transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force transported the missile and the launchers to the Philippines for the country's marine forces, official sources said.

Under the January 2022 deal, India will supply three batteries of the missiles, their launchers and related equipment.

It was the first export of the BrahMos missile by India.

A few other countries in-



cluding Argentina have also shown interest in procuring BrahMos missiles from India.

BrahMos Aerospace Pvt Ltd, an India-Russian joint venture, produces the supersonic cruise missiles that can be launched from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms.

BrahMos missile flies at a speed of 2.8 Mach or almost three times the speed of sound.

India has been looking at further expanding defence ties with the Philippines against the backdrop of

growing global concerns over China's increasing military assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Both India and the Philippines have been emphasising the need for peaceful settlement of disputes in the South China Sea and for adherence to international law, especially the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

The twin sides are also favouring implementation of an arbitral award by a UN court on the South China Sea.

The UN's Permanent Court of Arbitration, adjudi-

cating the Philippines' case against China's territorial claims in the South China Sea, ruled in favour of Manila. However, China refused to accept the verdict.

There have been growing global concerns over China's sweeping claims of sovereignty over all of the South China Sea, a huge source of hydrocarbons.

As part of efforts to boost military ties with the Philippines, India has decided to post a defence attaché to that country along with Ethiopia, Mozambique, Poland and Ivory Coast.

Supreme Court seeks Centre, Assam's reply on fresh plea challenging CAA rules

NEW DELHI, APR 19: The Supreme Court on Friday sought replies of the Centre and the Assam government on a plea challenging the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024, meant to operationalise and regulate the process of grant of Indian citizenship to non-Muslim migrants who came from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan before December 31, 2014.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justice JB Pardiwala took note of the submissions of a lawyer representing petitioner Hiren Gohain, a Guwahati resident, and issued notices to the state government and the union ministries of Home Affairs and External Affairs.

The top court also ordered that the fresh plea be tagged with those pending on the issue.

The latest plea on the hugely contentious issue said, "The uncontrolled influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to Assam has caused huge demographic changes in Assam. The indigenous people, who were

once the majority, have now become a minority in their own land." Recently, the bench, while refusing to stay the operation of the CAA Rules, asked the Centre to respond to the applications seeking a stay on their implementation till the apex court has disposed of the pleas challenging the validity of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

Gohain, in his plea, said the CAA Rules, 2024 are "ultra-vires to the Constitution" as they are "palpably discriminatory, manifestly arbitrary, illegal and against the basic structure of the Constitution".

"It is stated that the impugned Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024 violates the petitioners' fundamental rights guaranteed under Articles 14 (right to equality), 15 (right against discrimination on basis of religion, race, caste etc), 19 (freedom of speech and expression), 21 (right to life and personal liberty) etc of the Constitution," it said.

Gohain said he has filed the plea in his personal as well as in representative ca-

capacity of a majority of the indigenous people living in Assam and seeks enforcement of their fundamental rights.

Raising the issue of "uncontrolled" influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh to Assam, the plea said it was not a communal issue.

"Neither it is a Hindu-Muslim or indigenous people v/s Bengali immigrant's issue. Rather it is an issue of foreign infiltrators, be it Hindus or Muslims, who are inundating the land that for centuries has belonged to the indigenous people of Assam. In other words, it is an issue between Indians and non-Indians/foreigners and one of grave importance for the entire nation," it said.

"It is stated that according to the 2011 census the population of Assam was about 3.21 crores out of which only 1.34 crore people are indigenous Assamese. This figure includes the Assamese Muslims and indigenous people of the different tribes like Bodo, Missing, Rabha, Karbi etc.

Additionally, there are about 48 lakh people that comprise the tea tribes, it

said.

"The sum total of the aforesaid two figures comes to about 1.82 crores. A major part of the remaining population of Assam essentially comprises Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims and a minor part comprises Hindi/other language speaking people who have migrated from the other states of India," the petition said.

With the unveiling of the rules on March 11, days ahead of the announcement of the Lok Sabha elections, the Modi government kicked off the process of granting Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim migrants -- Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians -- from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

The rules came into force with immediate effect, according to a gazette notification.

The massively polarising CAA had sparked protests in various parts of the country in late 2019 and early 2020 over its alleged discriminatory provisions.

Lok Sabha elections: Police chalk out strategy to step up security, border surveillance in Delhi-NCR

NEW DELHI, APR 19: An inter-state coordination meeting of police chiefs was held to discuss security arrangements and border surveillance in view of the Lok Sabha elections in the national capital, officials said on Friday.

The meeting was led by Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order), Delhi, Madhup Tewari with police chiefs of neighbouring districts of

Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to discuss the issues for the general assembly elections, they said. "Inter-state collaboration in maintaining law and order during critical periods such as elections is very important," Tewari said during the meeting held on Thursday night. "The focus of the meeting was to discuss about the law and order situation," a senior police officer said. The officials also discussed several other matters such as

deployment of additional police personnel and paramilitary forces on the state borders, vigil on flow of illicit liquor and money, and apprehension of wanted criminals, the officer said. The officer further said the meeting aimed at fostering cooperation and synergy among law enforcement agencies by seamless exchange of intelligence and extending support to ensure the sanctity of electoral process.

Delhi Police personnel to travel in metro with weapons during crisis to reach spot sooner

NEW DELHI, APR 19: In a first, the Delhi Police personnel with weapons will be seen travelling in metro trains during emergency situations to avoid getting stuck in traffic jams and reach the spot sooner, officials said on Friday.

According to officials, the Delhi Police has got the go-ahead on its proposal in a recent meeting with the DMRC (Delhi Metro Rail Corporation) and CISF (Central Industrial Security Force), which is deployed at the stations for security checks.

As of now, the Delhi Police personnel are not allowed to travel in metro with weapons.

According to a Delhi Police officer, the final modalities for the SOP (standard operating procedure) have been chalked out, and if possible, it may be implemented before the Lok Sabha elections



in Delhi.

"We have got the approval for travelling in the metro with weapons during crisis or law and order situations from the DMRC. On April 16, a meeting was held with all the stake holders, including the DMRC and CISF, regarding the matter," the officer said.

The officer further said a group of personnel can travel without the token, but before

the journey, their in-charge or head, will have to inform the DMRC about the reason and details of the personnel.

A coach might be dedicated to the personnel depending on the situation, he said.

"The journey will be on payment basis and each travelling personnel will be wearing the uniform," the officer added.

Citing an example of riot-

like situation where extra force is required, their movement in large numbers in buses becomes difficult due to heavy traffic in Delhi, the officer said. Sometime it even takes more than an hour to reach from one district to another, he said.

The metro line has spread almost every parts of Delhi and it can be utilised in saving the time to reach the spot at the time of crisis, he added.

Another police officer said, as per the plan, transportation will be provided to the force for 'pick and drop' from metro stations to reach the spot.

This also includes the movement of paramilitary personnel, if they are to be deployed in the national capital during emergencies.

Delhi has witnessed communal riots in Trilokpuri and North-East Delhi, in 2014 and 2020, respectively.

UPSC releases marks of recommended candidates, topper Aditya Srivastava scored 54.27 per cent

NEW DELHI, APR 19: Civil services exam topper Aditya Srivastava scored 54.27 per cent in the prestigious exam conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), according to the detailed marks of the recommended candidates released by the Commission on Friday.

Following closely behind is Animesh Pradhan, who scored 52.69 per cent in the Civil Services Exam 2023.

As many as 1,016 candidates -- 664 men and 352 women -- have qualified in the examination, results of which were announced on Tuesday.

The civil services examination is conducted annually by the UPSC in three stages -- preliminary, main and personality test (or interview) -- to select officers for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), among others.

The preliminary examination consists of two objective type (multiple choice) question papers of 400 marks.

This stage is meant to serve as a screening test only, and the marks obtained in it by the candidates, who are declared qualified for admission to the main examination, are not counted for determining their final order of



merit. The merit is determined out of the total of 2,025 marks -- written or main exam is of 1,750 marks and the interview is of 275.

Srivastava (27) got a total of 1,099 marks -- 899 in the written and 200 in the personality test, according to the marks of recommended candidates disclosed by the UPSC.

A trainee Indian Police Service (IPS) officer, he hails from Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Srivastava completed his BTech in computer science from the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela and is currently an employee of the Indian Oil Corporation's (IOC) refineries division here.

Third rank holder Donuru Ananya Reddy, who appeared in the exam as an economically weaker section candidate, got 1,065 marks (52.59 per cent) -- 875 in the main and 190 in the interview -- and fourth rank holder P K Sidharth Ramkumar scored 1,059 marks (52.29 per cent) -- 874 in written and 185 in the interview. Reddy (22), who has a BA (Hons) in geography from Miranda House, Delhi University, had anthropology as her optional subject. She hails from Mahabubna-

gar in Telangana. Ramkumar (27) has a bachelor's degree in architecture from the College of Architecture in Trivandrum.

Ruhani got the fifth rank with a total of 1,049 marks (51.8 per cent) -- 856 in written and 193 in the interview. She completed her BA (Hons) in economics from St Stephens College, Delhi University.

The UPSC has put details of marks achieved by all the 1,016 candidates on its website. The Civil Services (preliminary) Exam 2023 was conducted on May 28.

A total of 10,16,850 candidates applied, of which 5,92,141 appeared in the examination. As many as 14,624 candidates qualified for the written (main) examination, which was held in September.

"A total of 2,855 candidates qualified for the personality test of the examination," the UPSC said.

Of these, 1,016 candidates were finally recommended for different government services. The government had reported 1,143 vacancies -- 180 in IAS, 37 in IPS, 200 in IPS, 613 posts in different central Group A services and 113 in Group B services -- to be filled through the civil services examination 2023, the UPSC said.