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## Kathua-Udh constituency records 65.08 pc voting till 5 pm

These 'pink booths' attracted more women voters. More than 22 per cent of voters exercised their franchise in the first four hours of polling despite torrential rains, election officials said.

As polling began in the morning, a large number of women electors thronged the 'pink booth' set up at government girls' higher secondary school in Doda town to exercise their right to franchise despite heavy rains. Queued up in long lines, they were happy to vote at the 'pink booth'.

"We are very happy to vote for the first time at these all-women polling booths. There are very good facilities. We are enjoying voting," said Arifa Begum.

She said this initiative had increased the number of women thronging this polling station. "We praise this initiative of the Election Commission," she added.

"Nineteen 'pink booths' have been established in the Udhampur Lok Sabha constituency. In these model all-women polling stations, all staffers, including police and security personnel, are women," officials said.

Sunita Devi, a first-time voter who cast her vote at the 'pink booth', said it looked like she had come to a place of festival as the booth was decorated. "Such an initiative will attract more women to the polling booths and will increase the turnout. It's an innovative step to increase the female turnout," she said.

Poll officials said there had been a rush for voting since morning. It seems the initiative had attracted more women voters this time, they said.

Polling began at 7 am in 2,637 polling stations across the constituency with over 16.23 lakh electors eligible to exercise their franchise.

Voting will decide the fate of 12 candidates, including Union Minister Jitendra Singh, who is eyeing a third term after winning the seat for the BJP in 2014 and 2019.

This is the first major electoral battle after the abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019.

Prominent among others in the fray include Congress leader Lal Singh and DPAP candidate G M Saroori, besides six independents.

More than 11,000 polling staff, including reserves, have been deployed while tight security arrangements have been made to ensure free and fair elections, officials said.

According to the office of the chief electoral officer, a total of 1,472 polling stations, out of 2,637, have been equipped with webcasting facilities in the constituency having a diverse electorate comprising 16,23,195 eligible voters.

Among them, 845,283 are men, 777,899 are women, and 13 are third-gender voters. Of the 2,637 polling stations, 2,457 are in rural areas and 180 in urban areas. The highest 701 polling stations are in Kathua, 654 in Udhampur, 529 in Doda, 405 in Kishtwar, and 348 in Ramban.

## Phase 1 voting ends with 60 pc nationwide turnout: TN records 72 pc

Inner Manipur (32 assembly segments) and Outer Manipur (15 assembly segments) - on Friday while polling in the remaining 13 assembly segments in the Outer Manipur constituency will take place on April 26 in the second phase.

## Mercury falls as rains lash Jammu

ate rains and light snow over higher reaches at most places in J&K coupled with thunder and lightning till late Friday night.

"The weather is very likely to remain generally dry from April 21 to April 25 with afternoon thundershower activity can't be ruled out as there is the possibility of light rain with thunder at many places during April 26 and 27," it said.

## ED files prosecution complaint against 9 in court

Shah, Sabzar Ahmad Sheikh, Manzoor Ahmad Shah, Mohammad Iqbal Mir and Syed Khalid Geelani alias Khalid Andrabi.

The ED added that the court had taken cognizance of the complaint.

## Vice-Admiral Tripathi appointed next Navy Chief

40-year vast career and will assume his new office on April 30.

Before taking over as vice-chief of the naval staff, Tripathi served as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, of Western Naval Command.

An alumnus of Sainik School Rewa and National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, he was commissioned into the Indian Navy on July 1, 1985.

A Communication and Electronic Warfare specialist, Tripathi served on frontline warships of the Navy as a Signal Communication Officer and Electronic Warfare Officer, and later as the Executive Officer and Principal Warfare Officer of the Guided Missile Destroyer INS Mumbai.

He commanded the Indian Naval Ships Vinash, Kirch and Trishul. He has also held various important operational and staff appointments, which include Fleet Operations Officer of the Western Fleet at Mumbai, Director of Naval Operations, Principal Director Network Centric Operations and Principal Director of Naval Plans at New Delhi.

Upon his promotion to the rank of Rear Admiral, he served as Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Policy and Plans) at the Navy headquarters and as the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet.

On promotion to the rank of Vice Admiral in June 2019, the Flag Officer was appointed as Commandant of the prestigious Indian Naval Academy at Ezhimala, Kerala. He was the Director General of Naval Operations from July 2020 to May 2021, a period that witnessed a high tempo of Naval Maritime Operations.

He ensured that the Navy remained a 'Combat Ready, Credible, Cohesive and Future Proof Force, ready to address a host of complex security challenges despite the all-round severity of the Covid-19 pandemic. Later, from June 2021 to February 2023, the Flag Officer served as the Chief of Personnel.

Tripathi is a graduate of Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, where he was awarded the Thimmaiya Medal. He also attended the Naval Higher Command Course and Naval Command College at the US Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island in 2007-08, where he won the prestigious Robert E Bateman International Prize.

Admiral Tripathi is also a recipient of the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal and Nausena Medal for devotion to duty.

He is a keen sportsman and avidly follows tennis, badminton, and cricket. The Flag Officer is a student of international relations, military history and the art and science

of leadership.

## Prabhat appointed as NSG chief

as Additional Director General in the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has approved his appointment as the Director General, NSG for a period up to August 31, 2028 i.e. the date of his superannuation, the order said.

Popularly known as the "black cats", the federal contingency force NSG was raised in 1984.

Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) chief Daljit Singh Chawdhary was holding the additional charge of the NSG.

The ACC has also approved appointment of Sapna Tewari as the Special Director in the Intelligence Bureau (IB).

Tewari, a 1992 batch IPS officer of Odisha cadre, is currently working as Additional Director in the IB.

She has been appointed as the Special Director, IB for a tenure of two years from the date of assumption of charge of the post or up to the date of her superannuation i.e. April 30, 2026, the order said.

## Amid war-like situation, only BJP govt can keep India safe: Modi

(self-dependent), but the country is also donning the new identity of becoming an exporter of weapons. This year only, defence exports from India have touched Rs 21,000 crore. As I speak now, our BrahMos missiles are ready to be exported to the Philippines," Modi said.

Taking a dig at the Congress and other INDI alliance parties' leaders for not attending the January 22 Ram Temple consecration ceremony at Ayodhya, Modi said, "Even the head of the Ansari family which had been fighting for the Babri Mosque against the Hindus in courts since two generations, not just welcomed the Supreme Court verdict on Ayodhya, but attended the Ram Temple foundation and Ram Temple consecration ceremony. But the Congress and other INDI alliance leaders rejected the invite to attend the consecration ceremony just to appease their vote banks."

He said the ongoing Lok Sabha election was about making India a big global power in the next five years and asserted a strong and stable government was needed in view of prevailing situation in the world.

The PM asserted his government was committed to the welfare of the poor and pointed out that the Centre has extended the free ration scheme for five more years for nearly 80 crore beneficiaries.

Modi praised Iqbal Ansari, a former litigant in the Ram-janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, for accepting the invitation to attend the January 22 consecration ceremony at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and slammed the opposition for boycotting the event.

The PM underscored that crores of people were vaccinated against COVID-19 for free during the pandemic and the poor were supplied free ration. "Today, the country has a government that neither comes under pressure nor bows before anyone," asserted the BJP's star campaigner.

"Our principle is nation first. To ensure that India gets cheap oil, we took a decision in the country's interest," he said. The PM took a dig at neighbouring Pakistan, which is facing rising inflation and a host of other economic challenges, without taking its name. "The condition of many countries in the world is worrisome. Many countries are getting bankrupt. One of our neighbours that was a supplier of terror ('aatank') is now struggling for flour ('aata')," said Modi. The BJP stalwart maintained the ongoing Lok Sabha election is about making India a big global power in the next five years and pitched for a strong government led by the saffron party at the Centre.

## Govt will never touch reservation policy: Shah

"We will never touch the policy of reservation or let anyone else do it," he said and dismissed speculations regarding the government planning to amend the Constitution.

"If we had to change the Constitution, we could have done it earlier," he said.

Shah said the BJP-led NDA government has not misused the majority it has in Parliament.

"We have not misused the majority we have had for ten years. The Congress has the habit of misusing majority, not us," he said.

Shah said there has been no change in the BJP's commitments and highlighted that the Women's Reservation Act and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) were brought by the Modi government.

He said the opposition Congress has no issues to attack the BJP-led government.

"I have travelled across the country, everyone is waiting to vote for PM Modi for the third time. My roadshow in Gandhinagar on Thursday was in areas where I pasted the party's posters as a common karyakarta," he said.

The minister said for 30 years, the people in Gandhinagar have been voting for him -- first as an MLA and then as an MP -- and it was an emotional journey for him.

Shah said the BJP will register its best performance in south India in the Lok Sabha polls this time.

"South is ready to convert PM's popularity into seats," he said.

Shah said the Modi government has repeatedly asked Naxalites to shun violence.

"In 90 days, the BJP government in Chhattisgarh has worked extensively to combat Naxalism. We will eradicate Maoism from India," he said.

He also claimed that during the Congress rule in Chhattisgarh, there was no clampdown on Naxalites.

## As Parray files nomination from Anantnag LS seat, Azad hopes for his victory

for him was akin to voting for me".

Earlier, while addressing his supporters, Azad asked them to desist from speaking ill against any party or candidate.

He expressed regret over the war of words with some political leaders, apparently referring to National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah whom he had called a tourist.

"There was some war of words with some politicians. I regret that. This is against my nature. For 40 years, I was in Parliament; I never spoke ill against any party or leader. I want that from today we should not speak ill about any party or any party candidate. Our agenda is to serve people," he said.

Speaking at an election rally in Doda on April 15, the DPAP chief had alleged that Abdullah comes to the valley only as a 'tourist' while he spends summers in London and winters in warmer places abroad.

"Omar sahib, you visit your maternal grandfather's house during summers in London and some hot country during winters and you come here as a tourist," Azad had said.

So far, 10 candidates have filed nomination papers from the constituency including NC's Mian Altaf and PDP's Mehbooba Mufti.

Friday was the last date for filing the nominations.

## Undercurrent brewing against Modi govt: Congress

the PM as he heads to UP: Why has the BJP neglected UP's sugarcane farmers? Rs 20,000 crores later, why is the Ganga still India's most polluted river? Is the Modi Sarkar doing anything to prevent paper leaks? Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh said Uttar Pradesh is India's largest sugarcane producer and yet, the BJP government has "neglected" farmers' calls to increase the price of sugarcane."

"Prices stand at just Rs.360/quintal in UP, much lower than Rs.386/quintal in Punjab and Rs.391/quintal in Haryana. Price hikes have also failed to keep pace with inflation and farmers are now struggling due to the rising cost of fertiliser and pesticides," he said Area under cultivation has come down by almost 4000 hectares in the last three years, he said.

Amidst sugarcane shortages, mills are struggling to pay sugarcane farmers on time, and there are fears that some may shut down permanently, Ramesh said.

"This vicious cycle is threatening the livelihoods of sugarcane farmers and mill workers but the BJP government is nowhere to be seen. What is the double Anyay BJP government doing to support sugarcane farmers and mill workers in UP?" he said in a post on X.

Noting that in 2014, PM Modi had promised a cleaner Ganga through his government's flagship Namami Gange programme, Ramesh said the project sanctioned an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore between 2014 and 2019, and 815 new sewage treatment plants (STPs) had been built or proposed by 2021.

The Ministry of Jal Shakti claims that there has been a marked improvement in the state of the river but, as is often the case with this government, that claim turned out to be a "bold-faced lie", Ramesh said.

"The Sankat Mochan Foundation found that rather than improving, water quality in the Ganga has actually been degrading - faecal coliform bacteria levels are a staggering one million times higher than the permissible limit of 500 per 100 millilitres," he said.

Ramesh said the Central Pollution Control Board also found that water quality does not comply with their standards.

"While the Ministry of Jal Shakti claims that new STPs are working fine, a professor at IIT Varanasi said they were 'utterly useless' and that the government's plans were completely 'bogus'. Furthermore, as early as 2017, a CAG audit report of the project noted 'deficiencies in financial management, planning, implementation and monitoring'," the Congress leader said.

"To make matters worse, contracts for STPs have been awarded to companies with well-established links to the BJP. In 2017, a 150+ crore STP contract was given to a company chaired by former BJP MP Subhash Chandra that had no record of working in sewage treatment," he alleged.

"Another plant is operated by the Adani group, and 'scientific' studies worth 5 crores have been awarded to the Patanjali Organic Research Institute," he said.

Noting that last year, the Central Pollution Control Board declared the Ganga the most polluted river in India, Ramesh asked what have the Indian taxpayer's Rs 20,000 crores achieved.

"Under the Modi Sarkar's reign, more than 43 papers for government recruitment exams have been leaked, hurting at least 2 crore candidates. Most recently, 60 lakh applicants for the UP Police Exams had their futures clouded when exams were cancelled due to paper leaks," he said.

These are not just numbers - it is the hopes and dreams of India's youth that are hanging in the balance, Ramesh asserted.

"Under its Yuva Nyay Guarantee, the Congress has committed to bringing robust legislation that will design institutions and best practices to prevent paper leaks from occurring in the first place. What is Mr.Modi's vision to address the harm done to our youth?" he said.

As the PM visits West Uttar Pradesh, it is important to remember that while he may have engineered the flight of the RLD from the INDIA bloc to the NDA, the real Lok Dal is still with INDIA and that the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in West Uttar Pradesh was welcomed with hoardings and banners of Choudhary Charan Singh and Indira Gandhi, Ramesh said.

"A silent undercurrent is brewing across this region, against the failures of this Government," he said and asked the PM to break his "silence" on these issues.

## NC, PDP, Cong no match to BJP in J&amp;K: Kavinder

Citing the BJP's track record of transformative governance and people-centric policies, he emphasised that the BJP had emerged as the preferred choice of electorate in Jammu and Kashmir. He also highlighted the BJP's commitment to inclusive development, social justice and national security as key factors, driving its popularity among the masses.

He said the BJP's robust organisational structure and tireless efforts of its cadre had significantly strengthened the party's presence at the grassroots level, making it a formidable force in Jammu and Kashmir's political circles.

He expressed confidence that the BJP's unwavering dedication to the welfare of the people would continue to resonate with voters across the region.

Gupta reiterated BJP's unwavering commitment to upholding the principles of democracy and the rule of law. He emphasised that BJP's rise in Jammu and Kashmir was a testament to the party's vision of a prosperous, peaceful and united India. He called upon party workers and supporters to redouble their efforts in furthering the party's agenda of development & good governance.

He urged voters in Jammu and Kashmir to place their trust in BJP, saying that party remains steadfast in its commitment to serving the interests of all sections of society. He asked people not to get swayed by the bogus narratives by the parties having texture of being dynastic, changing stands for petty interests and remaining corrupt all the time.

Meanwhile, Gupta also convened a meeting with former legislators at the party headquarters here, underscoring the paramount importance of maximising public engagement during the electoral phase. Stressing the foundational role of citizen involvement in the democratic process, he urged for concerted efforts to enhance voter turnout and civic participation.

## Fight to protect constitution, democracy begins: Kcharge on LS polls

bling farm income. I am sure the crores of hard-working hands that build this nation, will vote for the agenda of SHRAMIK NYAY, rather than a continuation of an era that has reduced their wages and left them to walk kilometers on highways during the pandemic," Kcharge said in his post.

"I am sure our people belonging to the Dalit, Adivasi, OBC, EWS and Minority communities shall choose HISSEDARI NYAY over an era where they were discriminated through divisive politics and ever-increasing violence

against them," he said.

"When you push that button on the EVM, pause and reflect for a second --? Do you want our Institutions to be subverted through dictatorship, or do you want to protect Democracy," Kcharge said.

He said voters would decide India's destiny. Kcharge also extended a warm welcome to all first-time voters.

## LG chairs high-level meet, reviews labour welfare

lining the process for registration of unemployed youth and labourers in the respective departments and to improve employability of local youth in development projects. He also said that the departments should help unorganized workers to register himself or herself on e-Shram portal.

The meeting also discussed and reviewed the progress of various initiatives and schemes such as job fairs, e-Shram Portal, Ease of Doing Business, promotion of Knowledge Based Service Sector and the digital initiatives including development of Common Skilling Dashboard and J&K Youth and Skill mobile application.

Among others, the meeting was attended by LG's advisor R R Bhatnagar, chief secretary Atal Dulloo, LG's principal secretary Mandeep Kumar Bhandari, secretary, skill development, labour & employment department, Kumar Rajeev Ranjan, CEO of Mission Youth and other senior officials of the departments concerned.

He urged people to go out and vote in large numbers.

## 7 killed in Pakistan by 'gunmen'

ians," they added

A rescue I122 team shifted the bodies to the district headquarters hospital (DHQ). The martyrs were identified as Shahab Ali Khan, Attar Alam, Akbar Zaman, Inayatullah, Muhammad Aslam of the Customs Intelligence, and civilians Safatullah and five-year-old Laiba Bibi.

Police disclosed that they had recovered empties from the bushes during their preliminary investigation.

The exact number of assailants, who subsequently fled the scene, could not be immediately determined.

Earlier in the day, another incident took place in which a vehicle carrying five Japanese nationals was targeted by a suicide bomber on Friday in Karachi's Landhi area.

The police said that the Japanese nationals were hurt in the incident. However, the terrorists who were involved in carrying out the attack, were killed.

The deputy inspector general (DIG) East Azfar Mahesar said that the incident occurred near Murtaza Chorangi in Landhi, adding that the five foreign nationals were travelling in a Hiace van."

"All five Japanese remained safe. However, the private security guard with them was injured," he said.

"No one has claimed responsibility so far," the DIG said, adding that the vehicle carrying the Japanese nationals was bullet-proof.

## Congress becoming outdated, losing relevance: Rajnath

poll promises while the credit of the formation of Telangana should not go to BRS, but to the sacrifices made by several people. Referring to the 'corruption charges' during the previous Congress regimes, he said there was not even a single allegation of graft against BJP governments headed by either Atal Bihari Vajpayee or Narendra Modi.

The BJP veteran said within seven years after Modi took over as Prime Minister, India, which is being regarded as the fastest growing economy in the world zoomed to fifth position in terms of economy and poised to become the third largest by 2027. He said the BJP fulfilled all the promises such as construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 37 and abolition of triple talaq it made earlier. Dismissing false information being spread about the CAA, Singh asserted that minorities in the country will not lose citizenship under that.

Listing the achievements of the NDA government, he said under Modi's leadership, 25 crore people have been lifted out of poverty in the country. He urged people to vote

## Lok Sabha elections: 0% voting in 6 Nagaland districts over separate territory demand

**KOHIMA, APRIL 19:** Polling personnel in six eastern districts of Nagaland waited for nine hours in booths, but not one of the four lakh voters of the region turned up following a shutdown call given by an organisation to press for its demand for 'Frontier Nagaland Territory' (FNT).

Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Friday affirmed that the state government does not have any problem with the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation's (ENPO) demand for FNT as it has already recommended autonomous powers for the region.

The ENPO is the apex body of the seven tribal organisations of the eastern region.

Officials said there is no movement of people or vehicles on major streets in eastern Nagaland except those of the district administrations and other emergency services.

Additional Chief Electoral Officer of Nagaland Awa Loring said polling personnel were present between 7 am and 4 pm in the 738 polling stations in the region which comprises 20 assembly constituencies.

Sources in the CEO's office said none came up to cast votes in those nine hours. Those 20 MLAs also did not exercise their franchise.

Of the 13.25 lakh voters in Nagaland, the six districts in Eastern Nagaland have 4,00,632 voters.

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote at his village in Touphema, some 41 km on the outskirts of the state capital, the chief minister said he accepted the draft working paper for FNT which was handed over to him in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

"Everything looks okay except the power-sharing the elected legislators of the region and members of the proposed FNT," he said.

The ENPO has been demanding a separate state comprising six districts alleging that successive governments did not bring about socio-economic development in the region.

The chief minister, however, said the state government has already recommended an autonomous body so that the region gets sufficient economic packages to come at par with the rest of the state.

"When an autonomous body is created, there has to be a proper system with the elected members. The state government has nothing to do with this. The MLAs and ENPO should sit across the table to work out a formula. We can talk only after that," Rio said.

Asked if any action would be initiated against the 20 legislators of eastern Nagaland for not casting votes, he said, "We don't want confrontation. Let us see what will happen."

Hours before the Lok Sabha elections are due to begin in Nagaland, the ENPO imposed an indefinite total shutdown in the eastern part of the state from 6 pm on Thursday. The organisation also cautioned that if any person goes to vote and any law and order situation arises, it will be the responsibility of the voter concerned.