

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## INDIA alliance govt will create crores of 'lakhpatis': Rahul Gandhi

**AMRAVATI (MAHARASHTRA), APR 24:** Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday claimed that 10 years of Narendra Modi government saw only 22-25 persons becoming billionaires, but if the INDIA alliance is voted to power, it will turn crores of people into "lakhpatis".

Addressing a rally in Maharashtra's Amravati district, Gandhi also said no force in the world can change the Constitution of India.

He reiterated that caste census will be done on priority if the INDIA alliance is voted to power and it will also waive farmers' loans.

The Congress, which is a part of the opposition INDIA alliance, has listed the Mahalaxmi scheme and the right to apprenticeship among its various promises made in its manifesto for the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

The former Congress president claimed that 10 years of PM Modi's rule saw 22-25 persons becoming "arabpatis" (billionaires), while the INDIA alliance, if voted to power, will create crores of "lakhpatis".



The Mahalaxmi scheme, aiming to provide Rs 1 lakh every year to the poor women, and the right to apprenticeship, which aims to enable graduates and diploma holders to get a one-year job as apprentices and provide Rs 1 lakh in their bank accounts, will change the face of the country and make crores of "lakhpatis", he said. After the end of one-year apprenticeship, India will have a trained and skilled workforce, he said.

The Wayanad MP claimed the BJP wanted to change the Constitution because it did not want 90 per cent of the

population, which comprises the backwards, adivasis (tribals), Dalits and minorities, to know their real potential.

Describing the Constitution as the "voice" of the poor, he said, "No force in the world can change the Constitution, wonder what gave the BJP confidence to even think of doing so."

"The Constitution is not just a book, but a weapon of the poor," he said and claimed 22-25 persons were helping Modi to destroy it.

The poor, Dalits, backwards, minorities, poor from the general category, adivasis

comprise 90 per cent of the population and they do not have a representation in the corporate, government and media fields, Gandhi said.

"There are 15 per cent Dalits, 8 per cent adivasis, 50 per cent OBCs, 15 per cent minorities, five per cent poor from the general category. Since they do not have a representation, issues related to them are not highlighted as they should be," he said.

The Congress leader said the right to apprenticeship will create a trained workforce in a year's time besides providing Rs 1 lakh in their bank accounts.

A commission will be set up to take a call on when the farmers' crop loans need to be waived, he said.

The INDIA alliance government will waive farmers' loans, Gandhi said.

"There is no dearth of money in the country. If loans of the rich are waived, same rule should apply to farmers and the poor, I am only asking for justice," he said.

Elections to the Amravati and seven other Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra will be held on April 26.

## Def minister shouldn't lower his dignity by uttering 'blatant falsehoods': Chidambaram slams Rajnath

**NEW DELHI, APR 24:** Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Wednesday hit back at Defence Minister Rajnath Singh over his voicing support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'redistribution of wealth' remarks and said the Defence Minister should not lower his dignity by uttering such "blatant falsehoods".

Chidambaram also asked Singh where in the Congress manifesto there was a mention of redistribution of assets to infiltrators.

"I am disappointed that a sober politician like Mr Rajnath Singh should speak falsehoods.

Economic Times has reported his speech where he had said that it was mentioned in the Congress' Manifesto that 'Congress would grab assets of the people and



redistribute them to infiltrators," Chidambaram said. "I want to ask Mr Rajnath Singh, 'on which page of the Congress' Manifesto did you read that statement? Was Mr Rajnath Singh reading a document written by ghosts in invisible ink?'"

the former Union minister said.

The defence minister should not lower his dignity by uttering such "blatant falsehoods", Chidambaram said.

On Tuesday night, Chidambaram said, "The patho-

logical fear of defeat has driven the BJP leaders to make outrageous allegations, and I am sorry for them. What else explains the bizarre claim that the Congress will seize the mangalsutra, streedhan and Temple properties, and redistribute them?"

Even the most die-hard supporter of the BJP will not believe these "meaningless utterances", he said.

"I wonder what the RSS leaders privately think of these statements," he said.

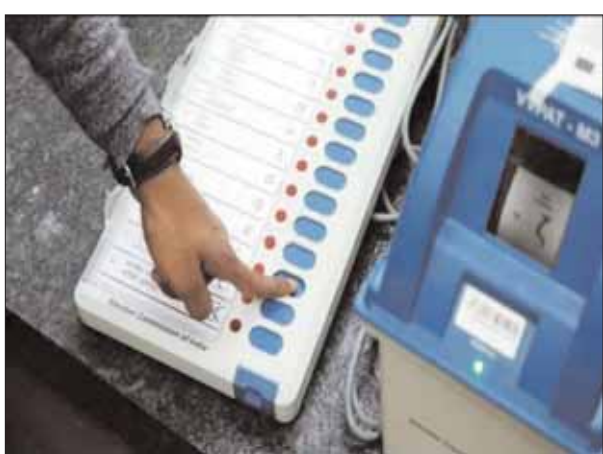
"It was a Congress government that introduced liberalisation, advocated a free and open economy, and encouraged private enterprise.

To accuse the Congress of being influenced by Maoist or Marxist ideology is beyond absurdity," he said in another post.

## SC seeks clarification from EC on functioning of EVMs, calls poll panel official at 2 pm

**NEW DELHI, APR 24:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought clarification from the Election Commission on certain aspects regarding the functioning of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and summoned a senior poll panel official at 2 pm.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, which has reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), said it needs clarification on certain aspects as there was some confusion in answers given



by the EC in its 'frequently asked questions' (FAQs) on EVMs.

"We don't want to be wrong but doubly sure in our

findings and hence we thought of seeking the clarification," the bench told Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati who was

appearing for the EC.

It asked Bhati to call senior Deputy Election Commissioner Nitesh Kumar Vyas at 2 PM. Vyas had earlier given a presentation to the court on the functioning of the EVMs.

It flagged some points on which the court wanted clarification which relates to storage of EVMs, microchip in the controlling unit of EVMs and other aspects.

The VVPAT is an independent vote verification system which enables electors to see whether their votes have been cast correctly.

On April 18, the top court reserved its verdict on the batch of pleas.

## Hemant Soren moves SC, says HC not pronouncing verdict on his plea against arrest

**NEW DELHI, APR 24:** Former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Wednesday moved the Supreme Court, saying the high court is not pronouncing verdict on his plea challenging arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta was told by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Soren, that the high court had reserved its verdict on February 28 on his plea but still no decision has been de-



livered. Soren was arrested on Jan-

uary 31 in the case after he resigned as the Jharkhand

chief minister, and party loyalist and state transport minister Champai Soren was named as his successor.

He was arrested after being grilled by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for seven hours in the case.

The ED is probing the alleged "huge amounts of proceeds of crime generated by manipulation of official records by showing dummy sellers and purchasers in the guise of forged/bogus documents to acquire huge parcels of land having value in crores".

## IED explosion damages bridge on NH 2 in Manipur

**IMPHAL, APR 24:** A bridge on the National Highway 2 in ethnic violence-hit Manipur's Kangpokpi district was partially damaged in an IED explosion early on Wednesday, disrupting traffic movement in the area, police said.

The blast occurred on the bridge between Sapermeina and Koubru Leikha areas around 12.45 am, an officer said.

No casualties were reported so far in the improvised explosive device (IED) blast, he said.

Three craters and cracks on both ends of the bridge were noticed, the officer said.



Movement of heavy vehicles has been stopped on the bridge connecting Manipur's

capital Imphal with Nagaland's Dimapur. Minutes after the explo-

sion, police personnel rushed to the spot and cordoned off the bridge, he said, adding that an investigation into the IED blast has been initiated.

Some two-wheelers, however, were seen plying on the bridge this morning.

The IED explosion occurred hours after gunfights broke out between village volunteers of the two warring communities in Imphal West district.

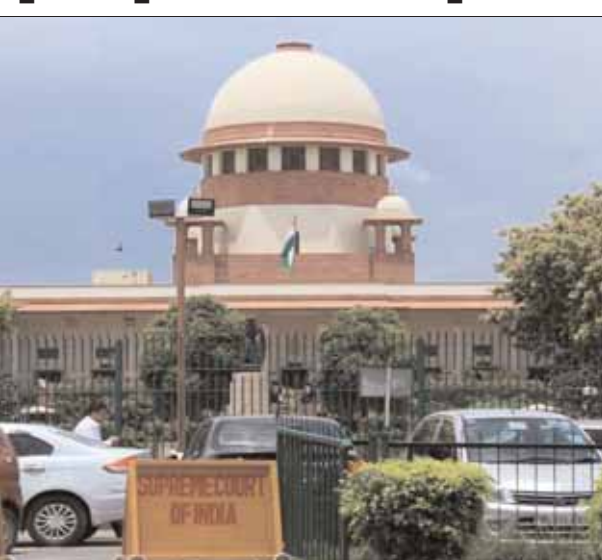
Over 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence in Manipur between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjacent hills-based Kukis since May last year.

## Electoral bonds: Plea in SC seeks SIT probe into alleged quid pro quo between parties, corporates

**NEW DELHI 24:** A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a court-monitored probe by an special investigation team (SIT) into the alleged instances of "apparent quid pro quo" between political parties, corporates and officials of investigating agencies in donations via electoral bonds.

A five-judge constitution bench of the apex court had on February 15 scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding.

Following a Supreme Court directive, the State Bank of India, which was the authorised seller of electoral bonds, had shared the data



with the Election Commission, which later made the data public. The electoral

bonds scheme, which was notified by the government on January 2, 2018, was

pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of its efforts to bring transparency in political funding.

The plea, filed through advocate Prashant Bhushan, has sought a direction to the authorities to investigate the source of funding of "shell companies and loss-making companies" to various political parties, as has been disclosed through the electoral bonds data.

It has also sought a direction to the authorities to recover the amounts from political parties as donated by companies to them as part of "quid pro quo arrangements where these are found to be proceeds of crime".

## Cong distances itself from Pitroda's 'inheritance' tax remarks

**NEW DELHI, APR 24:** The Congress on Wednesday distanced itself from Sam Pitroda's "inheritance tax" remarks, saying sensationalising them are attempts at diverting attention from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "malicious" poll campaign.

Pitroda, the president of the Indian Overseas Congress, had talked about the inheritance tax law in the United States and referred to the "redistribution of wealth" issue.

AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Pitroda has been a mentor, friend, philosopher, and guide to many across the world, and has made numerous and enduring contributions to India's developments.

"Mr Pitroda expresses his opinions freely on issues he feels strongly about. Surely, in a democracy an individual is at liberty to discuss, express, and debate his personal views.



"This does not mean that Mr. Pitroda's views always reflect the position of the Indian National Congress. Many times they do not. Sensationalising his comments now and tearing them out of context are deliberate and desperate attempts at diverting attention away from Mr. Narendra Modi's malicious and mischievous election campaign; that is anchored only in lies and more lies," Ramesh said in a post on X.

With his remarks triggering a row, Pitroda said on X that "It is unfortunate that what I said as an individual on inheritance tax in the US is

twisted by Godi media to divert attention from what lies the PM is spreading about the Congress manifesto. PM's comments on Mangal Sutra and gold snatching is simply unreal."

"I mentioned the US inheritance tax in the US only as an example in my normal conversation on TV. Can I not mention facts? I said these are the kind of issues people will have to discuss and debate.

This has nothing to do with the policy of any party in-

cluding Congress," he said.

"Who said 55 percent will be taken away? Who said something like this should be done in India? Why is BJP and media in panic," Pitroda asked.

Attacking the Congress over Pitroda's remarks, Modi said at a rally in Chhattisgarh that, "The Congress party's dangerous intentions have come to fore yet again. Now these people are saying they will impose inheritance tax on properties bequeathed to children by their parents".

Home Minister Amit Shah also slayed Pitroda's remarks, saying "The appeasement politics of the Congress stand exposed today with Sam Pitroda's statement on wealth redistribution. He reaffirmed the party's intention to seize the property of the majority and distribute it among the minority.

"It yet again brings to the fore that the empowerment of India's poor, Dalits, youth, tribes, and backward classes was never on Congress's agenda," he said on X.

## Delhi court grants time to Arvind Kejriwal to file response in case of evading summonses

**NEW DELHI, APR 24:** A Delhi court on Wednesday granted time to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to file response to the replies filed by the ED on his two petitions seeking revision against an order on allegedly evading the agency's summonses in the excise policy case.

Kejriwal had approached the special court against an order passed by a magisterial court summoning him on a complaint filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for allegedly evading the agency's summonses in the case.

Special Judge Rakesh Syal on Wednesday granted two weeks to Kejriwal to file rejoinder on the ED's reply on the AAP convener's appeals.

The court's directions came



after Kejriwal's lawyers sought time, saying they could not get instructions from him as he has been arrested by the ED in the case.

The court will now hear the plea on May 14.

Kejriwal was arrested by the

ED on March 21. He is currently in judicial custody.

The Delhi chief minister had challenged the summons issued by the magisterial court after taking cognisance of two complaints filed by the ED for evading summonses issued to

him.

The ED filed a complaint before the magisterial court seeking prosecution of Kejriwal for skipping multiple summonses issued to him in the case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.