

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

1 killed, 3 injured in gunfight between village volunteers in Manipur

IMPHAL, APR 28: One person was killed and three others injured in a gunfight between village volunteers of two warring communities in ethnic strife-torn Manipur's Kangpokpi district on Sunday, police said.

Dozens of gunmen had attacked Koutruk in Imphal West district on Sunday morning from elevated hilltops of neighbouring Kangpokpi district prompting village volunteers deployed in the fringe village to retaliate, the police said.

Exchange of fire gradually spread to adjacent villages of Kadangband and Senjam Chirang, they said.

Koutruk village has been witness to intense gunfights between village volunteers of two warring communities since ethnic violence broke out on May 3 last year. It has been identified as one of the most vulnerable areas for gun attacks.



More than 200 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Im-

phal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis since May 3 last year.

Meanwhile, denouncing the killing, the Kangpokpi

district-based Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) has called for a 12-hour shutdown in the district from noon of April 28.

Chants of 'shame on you' greet guests arriving for annual White House correspondents' dinner

WASHINGTON, APRIL 28: An election-year roast of President Joe Biden before journalists, celebrities and politicians at the annual White House correspondents' dinner Saturday butted up against growing public discord over the Israel-Hamas war, with large protests outside the event condemning both Biden's handling of the conflict and the Western news media coverage of it.

In previous years, Biden, like most of his predecessors, has used the glitzy annual White House Correspondents' Association gala to needle media coverage of his administration and jab at political rivals, notably Republican rival Donald Trump.

With hundreds of protesters rallying against the war in Gaza outside the event and concerns over the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the perils for journalists covering the conflict, the war hung over this year's event.

"Shame on you!" protesters draped in the traditional

Palestinian keffiyeh cloth shouted, running after men in tuxedos and suits and women in long dresses who were holding clutch purses, as guests and other participants hurried inside.

Chants accused US journalists of uncovering the war and misrepresenting it. "Western media we see you, and all the horrors that you hide," crowds chanted at one point.

Other protesters lay sprawled motionless on the pavement, next to mock-ups of flak vests with "press" insignia.

Ralliers cried "Free, free Palestine." They cheered when at one point someone inside the Washington Hilton — where the dinner has been held for decades — unfurled a Palestinian flag from a top-floor hotel window.

Criticism of the Biden administration's support for Israel's 6-month-old military offensive in Gaza has spread through American college campuses, with students pitching encampments in an effort to force

their universities to divest from Israel. Counter protests back Israel's offensive and complain of anti-semitism.

Biden's speech before an expected crowd of nearly 3,000 people was being followed by entertainer Colin Jost from "Saturday Night Live."

There will also likely be a spotlight on the many journalists detained and otherwise persecuted around the globe for doing their jobs, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who has been imprisoned in Russia since March 2023.

Law enforcement, including the Secret Service, have instituted extra street closures and other measures to ensure what Secret Service spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said would be the "highest levels of safety and security for attendees."

The agency was working with Washington police to protect demonstrators' right to assemble, Guglielmi said. However, "we will remain intolerant to any violent or

destructive behavior."

Protest organizers said they wanted to bring attention to the high numbers of Palestinian and other Arab journalists killed by Israel's military since the war began in October.

More than two dozen journalists in Gaza wrote a letter last week calling on their colleagues in Washington to boycott the dinner altogether.

"The toll exacted on us for merely fulfilling our journalistic duties is staggering," the letter states. "We are subjected to detentions, interrogations, and torture by the Israeli military, all for the crime of journalistic integrity."

One organizer complained that the White House Correspondents' Association — which represents the hundreds of journalists who cover the president — largely has been silent since the first weeks of the war about the killings of Palestinian journalists. WHCA did not respond to request for comment.

factory at all levels, with voting machines performing better than in previous years. Chief Electoral Officer Sanjay Kaul had said that in 95 per cent of the 25,231 polling booths, voting was completed by 6 PM, and by 8 PM in 99 per cent of booths.

"Only in some booths in the Vadakara constituency did voting continue later. This was due to a higher turnout after 5 PM, requiring officials to verify records and ensure accuracy, which naturally took more time," he had said in a statement.

All voters who arrived at the booths by 6 PM were given tokens to vote, indicating the vigilance of the officials, the officer said.

Congress urges Election Commission of India to probe 'terrible mismanagement' of Lok Sabha polls in Kerala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APR 28: The Congress in Kerala on Sunday alleged "terrible mismanagement" of the Lok Sabha polls held in the state on April 26 and urged the Election Commission of India (ECI) to initiate a comprehensive inquiry into it.

In a letter to the ECI, Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan alleged that the elections in Kerala were "grossly mismanaged," resulting in significant delays in many booths.

The Congress leader said that the interval between subsequent votes in many booths saw undue delays, with many voters apparently

waiting up to four-and-a-half hours for their turn.

"Many voters returned after standing in line for hours at numerous booths in the blazing heat. Furthermore, some of the voters were unable to vote despite arriving at the polling booth before 6 PM," he said.

Satheesan alleged that "grave negligence" on the part of officials was evident in many booths.

"Undoubtedly, the lacklustre attitude of the officials has been a major cause of the drop in voter turnout. Unlike other elections, the EVM malfunction was also profound," he said.

The LoP said the polling hours were not extended in

booths where voting machines were found to be faulty, and the election arrangements have never been so bad in recent times.

"The voters' list sanitisation process in Kerala was also not meticulously done, as the latest voters list has numerous double votes and obsolete votes. Hence, I request your good self to initiate a comprehensive inquiry into the terrible mismanagement of the Lok Sabha election held in Kerala on April 26, 2024," he said in the letter.

His statement came a day after the Chief Electoral Officer said the Lok Sabha election process and voting in the state were completely satisfac-

RSS now says it's not against reservation but had spoken about opposing quotas in past: Rahul Gandhi

DAMAN, APR 28: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday claimed though the RSS is now saying they are not against reservations, however, they had earlier spoken about opposing quotas.

Addressing a campaign rally at Daman in the Union Territory of Daman, Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Gandhi also said the RSS and BJP are trying to destroy the Constitution and various in-

stitutions to make their leaders "kings" of the country.

"The RSS is today saying that they are not against reservations, but earlier they had said that they oppose reservations," he said.

Notably, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat earlier in the day said in Hyderabad that the organisation has always supported reservations as per the Constitution.

Gandhi said the fight be-

tween the Congress and the RSS-BJP is ideological and sought votes for "protecting" the Constitution.

"The Constitution has served as the foundation, the seed from which these institutions have emerged. They want to destroy the Constitution, they want to destroy democracy, and different institutions, and make the RSS-BJP kings (leaders) as the kings of the country," the Congress leader said.

On the other hand, the target of the RSS and the BJP is to destroy the Constitution anyhow," he said.

At the foundational level, the ideology of the RSS-BJP is to destroy the Constitution, while that of the Congress is to protect it, he said.

"At the foundational level, the difference (between the two ideologies) is that we are protecting the Constitution and all that it has offered to India.

On the other hand, the target of the RSS and the BJP is to destroy the Constitution anyhow," he said.

Modi runs govt for billionaires, Patnaik for select few: Rahul Gandhi in Odisha

CUTTACK, APR 28: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that while PM Narendra Modi runs a government for billionaires from Delhi, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik leads a dispensation that works for "select people" in Odisha.

Addressing an election rally in Cuttack's Salepur, Gandhi claimed that though the BJD and BJP were fighting the electoral battle against each other, in reality, they were working together.

"Call it a partnership or marriage, both BJD and BJP are together," he claimed.

Taking a dig at Patnaik, Gandhi said that though he was the chief minister, the BJD government in the state was being run by his aide VK Pandian.

In an apparent reference to the PM, Gandhi said, "Uncle-ji and Naveen-babu have given Odisha PAANN, meaning Pandian, Amit Shah, Narendra Modi, Naveen Patnaik. They have looted your wealth."

"Rs 9 lakh crore was looted through the mining scam. Rs 20,000 crore was looted through land grabs. The



plantation scam was of 15,000 crore. As soon as the Congress government is formed here and in Delhi, we will start giving you back your money," he added.

Gandhi claimed that in a similar way, the BRS in Telangana used to work with the BJP, and his party ousted it from power.

"While Naveen-babu has given you Pandian, I will tell you what Congress will give you. If we come to power at the Centre, we will do five revolutionary works. We will make a list of all the poor families, and one woman from a family will be selected and we will transfer Rs 1 lakh annually to her bank ac-

count. It is Rs 8,500 per month," he said.

"We will bring a scheme -- 'pehli naukri pakti'. All the unemployed youths with degrees and diplomas will get apprenticeships, we will give you the guarantee of your first job for a year. It will be in the public sector, private sector, government hospitals and offices," he added.

Gandhi said that if Congress formed the government in Odisha, it would provide Rs 2,000 per month to women, Rs 3,000 per month to unemployed youths, 200 units of free electricity and LPG at Rs 500 per cylinder.

"While uncle-ji has worked

for 22 billionaires, we are going to create crores of lakhs," he said.

He alleged that BJP refers to tribals as 'banabasi' or forest-dwellers instead of 'adibasi' or indigenous people.

"The tribals are not 'banabasi', they are the 'adibasi', meaning they have the first right to the land, forest and water. Modi has taken away tribal rights and given them to industries. Congress will give tribals their rights back," Gandhi said.

He said that if Congress returns to power, it will waive off farm loans.

"Whenever there is a need, Congress will waive off crop loans," he said, adding that a legal framework for MSP for all crops will also be ensured.

"The salary of Anganwadi and ASHA workers will be doubled, while MGNREGA wage will be hiked to Rs 400 per day," he said.

Odisha will vote in the Lok Sabha elections and assembly polls simultaneously in four phases, starting on May 13.

There are 21 Lok Sabha seats in the state and a 147-member assembly.

BJP with its '400 paar' slogan misunderstood public mood, won't win any seat in third phase: Akhilesh

SAMBHAL (UP), APR 28: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday claimed the BJP will not win any seat in the third phase of the Lok Sabha polls and that the ruling party misunderstood the "direction of the wind" when it made its slogan of "400 paar".

Addressing a rally in Sambhal, Yadav also said the Samajwadi Party had an advantage in the third phase, saying that elections on May 7 will be held between Sambhal and "his home" in Etawah and Mainpuri.

"BJP people did not know the direction of the wind, so they kept saying '400 paar' (winning over 400 seats) and when they realised the public sentiment after the two phases of the election, BJP forgot its slogan," the former UP chief minister said.

"The wind that came from the west (western UP) in the first phase will change the BJP government. The similar trend was seen in the second phase also. People are not accepting the BJP," the SP chief said.

"It is now your responsibility in the third phase," he added to those gathered for the rally taken out in support of party candidate Zia ur Rahman Barq.

"These elections are being held from this part till our home. Netaji (SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav) has



also been an MP from this area (Sambhal). Voting is going to take place from here to Mainpuri. I can say that the BJP is not going to open its account in any Lok Sabha seat here," Yadav said.

Mulayam Singh, an ex-CM and the SP chief's father, was elected an MP from Sambhal Lok Sabha constituency twice in 1998 and 1999.

"Next to you, Samajwadi Party is winning in Rampur and Moradabad and if all the Lok Sabha seats nearby are winning, then will the people of Sambhal be left behind?"

"When the seats where BJP lost with the highest number of votes are counted, the name of Sambhal Lok Sabha should be included in that count also," he further urged the voters.

Yadav also said the election in Sambhal are an opportunity to pay tribute to party MP Shafiqur Rahman Barq, who was declared as

the SP candidate but died earlier this year. After his death, his grandson, Zia ur Rahman Barq got the party ticket. "We gave the ticket to the very popular Shafiqur Rahman Barq Saheb but he is no longer with us. This is an opportunity to pay tribute to him... He always stood for the rights of his people," he said.

The SP chief also said that the Lok Sabha polls are a fight between those that want to "abolish the Constitution" and the INDIA bloc and the socialists who want to protect the Constitution.

"Bharatiya Janata Party is conspiring to abolish the Constitution and take away our and your right to vote. So this is an election to save the Constitution and our rights," he said.

Those who are out to change the Constitution will be changed by the public, the SP leader said.

Karnataka govt forms SIT to probe alleged sex scandal involving Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna

BENGALURU, APR 28: The Karnataka government on Sunday constituted a Special Investigation Team to probe an alleged sex scandal involving Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is the grandson of JD(S) supremo and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda.

The move came following a letter by the Chairperson of Women's Commission Dr Nagalakshmi Chowdhary to the government.

The 33-year-old Prajwal was the NDA candidate in the Hassan Lok Sabha constituency, which went to polls on April 26. The JD(S) joined the NDA in September last year.

The three-member SIT of IPS officers is led by the Additional Director General of Police (CID) Bijay Kumar Singh.

The other two are Assis-

tant Inspector General of Police Suman D Pennekar and Mysuru Superintendent of Police Seema Latkar.

The SIT has been directed to complete its investigation soon.

Some explicit video clips allegedly involving Prajwal had started making the rounds in Hassan in recent days.

The decision to constitute an SIT was announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

The police have information that Prajwal, who is the son of MLA and former Minister H D Revanna, has left the country, according to a statement issued by the Chief Minister's office.

Dr Chaudhary on Thursday wrote to Siddaramaiah and state police chief Alok Mohan seeking a probe into the videos that are in circula-

tion in Hassan.

Through his election agent, Prajwal has lodged a complaint with the authorities that the videos are "doctored" and being circulated to tarnish his image ahead of the elections.

Home Minister G Parameshwara told reporters: "In case he (Prajwal) has gone to the foreign country, SIT will be responsible for bringing him back and continuing the investigation. We will not tell the SIT to do the investigation this or that way."

Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said, "....we are hanging our heads in shame." "I saw in the media that he has 'escaped'. This is an unpardonable crime. It is a matter of shame. He is an MP and the grandson of a former Prime Minister. He represented the same constituency which the former Prime Minister had

represented," Shivakumar, also state Congress chief, said.

The government order on the SIT said the investigation will include those who perpetrated sexual crime, those who filmed it and then made it public.

It said already an FIR has been lodged at the Hole-narasipur police station under section 354(A) (Sexual harassment), 354(D) (Stalking) and 506 (Criminal Intimidation) and 509 (Word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) of the Indian Penal Code, which the SIT will investigate in detail.

The order said all the cases pertaining to this incident registered in various parts of the state should be transferred to the SIT, which will utilise the resources of the CID during the investigation.