

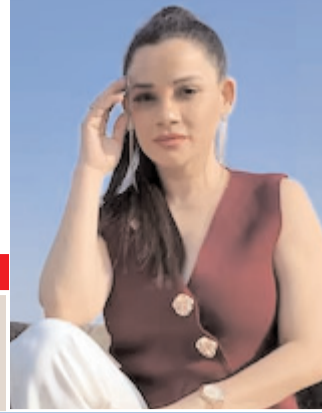


**BJP scored double 'F' in ensuring fuel, fertilizer security for nation: Kharge**

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**Kanika Maheshwari On Evolution In TV: 'Audience Is Smart, They Want Something Meaningful' | Exclusive**

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## Sinha pays obeisance at Chandi Mata Mandir



LG Manoj Sinha today paid obeisance at the holy Chandi Mata Mandir at Nagrota near here and prayed for peace, prosperity and well-being of all.

Attending the foundation day of Sarv Shakti Chandi Mata Mandir at

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## NIA attaches property of terror accused

NIA today attached a plot of land belonging to a terror accused in Pulwama district of Kashmir.

According to officials, an NIA team attached the plot of land measuring 3.2 kanals (17,300 sq ft) at Abhama in Rajpora area of Pulwama district.

"The attached property belongs to Tanveer Ahmad Wani, an accused in a UAPA case," officials said.

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## 4-member panel to probe 'irregularities' in BDO office

A four-member committee has been constituted to investigate alleged irregularities in BDO office at Nowshera in Rajouri district.

As per an order, the panel would examine the allegations and verify the facts through a fair and transparent inquiry.

The panel was directed to submit its report within a stipulated time frame.

The concerned office has been asked to provide all necessary records and extend full cooperation to ensure a smooth investigation.

## 3 houses of drug peddlers demolished

Himalayan Mail News  
JAMMU, APR 23

The administration demolished three houses belonging to drug peddlers at Rajiv Nagar here today.

Amid heavy deployment of police and CRPF personnel, the authorities demolished structures built using proceeds from drug trafficking in Rajiv Nagar area, officials said.

"The demolition drive is part of an ongoing campaign against notorious drug peddlers in the region," officials said and

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## HC directs strict adherence to office timings

Himalayan Mail News  
JAMMU, APR 23

The High Court of J&K and Ladakh has issued a circular directing all officers and officials of the district judiciary to strictly follow prescribed office timings and maintain discipline at the workplace.

The circular, issued by the registrar general, noted that some officials were arriving late, leaving early, or exiting offices even when presiding officers were still in court, af

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# WB records historic 91.91 pc voter turnout, TN 84.80 pc

### Highest-ever since Independence, says CEC

**KOLKATA/TAMIL NADU, APR 23:** As polling concluded in the two states this evening, West Bengal recorded a historic voter turnout of 91.91 pc in phase-I of the electoral exercise while Tamil Nadu was also not far behind with 84.80 pc ballots cast.

The high turnout figures underlined an active electoral exercise as polling drew to a close amid tight security arrangements across constituencies.

Soon after the polling ended, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said 'the commission salutes each voter of both states for coming out in large numbers to take part in the Festival of Democracy'.

"Highest ever percentage of polling in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu since Independence, ECI salutes each voter of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu," the CEC said.

Several districts in West Bengal recorded over 90 per cent voter turnout. Dakshin Dinajpur led with 94.85 pc, followed by Cooch Behar at 94.54 pc, Birbhum at 93.70 pc, Jalpaiguri at 93.23 pc, and Murshidabad at 92.93 pc.

The figures reflect consistently high voter participation across

the state, with all major districts comfortably staying above the 90 pc mark.

Tamil Nadu also recorded strong turnout across key districts, with Karur leading at 92.48 pc, followed closely by Salem at 90.42 pc, Dharmapuri at 90.02 pc, Erode at 89.97 pc and Namakkal at 89.63 pc.

In the 2021 Assembly elections, Tamil Nadu had recorded 76.6 per cent turnout.

Meanwhile, in the by-elections, the Umreth constituency in Gujarat recorded a voter turnout of 59.04 pc. In Maharashtra, Rahuri saw 55.70 pc polling, and Baramati reported a turnout at 57.77 pc.

Officials said 91.91 pc of the 3.60 cr electors turned up to vote in the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly polls held under the shadow of large-scale name deletions under the SIR exercise, sporadic violence and assault on at least three candidates.

Polling in 16 districts began at 7 am amid tight security to decide the electoral fate of 1,478 candidates, including 167 women, in 152 constituencies of the 294-strong state Assembly.

Long queues outside polling booths reflected strong voter participation in what is being seen as a crucial round in

a high-stakes contest between the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the BJP.

The state recorded 89.93 per cent voter turnout till 5 pm, with the Dakshin Dinajpur district leading with 93.12 per cent polling.

Analysts say the turnout reflects both heightened political mobilisation and the statistical impact of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which pruned over 91 lakh names from the voter's list across the state.

The steady climb, from 18.76 per cent in the first two hours to 41.11 per cent by 11 am and 62.18 per cent by 1 pm, underscored a strong voter response across geographies -- from the tea gardens of North Bengal to the communally sensitive belts of Murshidabad and the politically volatile Jangalmahal.

Many of the districts that voted in the first phase had seen significantly higher turnouts in the 2021 Assembly elections when polling was held in eight phases.

The SIR exercise, which shrank the electorate by nearly 12 per cent, loomed large over the phase. While the Election Commission has maintained that the revision improved the

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# PM Modi jabs TMC; rakes up infiltration, CAA

KRISHNANAGAR (WEST BENGAL), APR 23:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi today campaigned in West Bengal as polling for the first phase of Assembly elections was underway, stepping up his attack on the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) over infiltration, governance and promising to expedite citizenship under CAA.

He congratulated voters for the turnout, calling it indicative of an "overwhelming mandate for change."

Taking a swipe at the TMC over the 'jhalhuri' episode, Modi said, "I had 'jhalhuri' in Bengal, but it seems that the TMC leaders are feeling the heat of the chillies."

"You must wave the flag of the BJP-NDA's victory with full strength. On May 4, the celebration of the BJP's victory will also take place in Bengal, sweets will also be distributed, and jhalhuri will also be handed out. Jhalhuri has also given a thunderous shock to some people. I ate the jhalhuri, but the jhal (spice) hit



ful voting.

"Violence was kept at a minimum in the last 50 years of poll history in Bengal. The information I have received so far makes me certain that this is going to be a mandate for a change," the Prime Minister said.

He linked higher voter turnout to the BJP's prospects, citing polling trends in other states. "According to the information so far, voting is also breaking all previous records... We have seen that wherever there is high voter turnout, the BJP has received a strong mandate," he said.

Bengal recorded an average voter turnout of 62.18 till 1 pm, with reports of sporadic violence from some pockets across 152 constituencies.

Reiterating his position on the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Modi said the process of granting citizenship would be expedited if the BJP came to power.

"I have come to give a guarantee that the Matua community, the Namashudra community, and

Cont. on P9 >

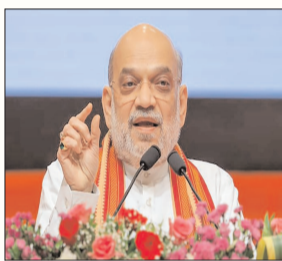
## Not single intruder will be allowed if BJP comes to power in WB: Shah

BALAGARH (WEST BENGAL), APR 23:

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said that "not a single intruder" would be allowed into West Bengal if the BJP comes to power, adding that illegal immigrants already in the state would be "selectively rooted out".

"BJP is set to form a full majority government in the state," he said while addressing a rally at Balagarh in Hooghly district during the first phase of polling.

"Today, the voting for the first phase is almost



over, and this is my 30th programme across Bengal. On May 5, Didi's game will be up. The BJP will form a government in Bengal with a full majority," he said.

The result of the West Bengal Assembly polls will be declared on May 4.

Asserting that infiltration was hurting the state's

economy and national security, Shah said, "Intruders are eating away the jobs of Bengal's youth, the rations of the poor, and working to undermine the country's security."

Stepping up his attack on the TMC government, the senior BJP leader accused it of fostering "syndicate raj" and burdening people with what he described as "Bhaipo tax", in a jibe at Mamata Banerjee's nephew and the TMC's national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

"Bengalis have to pay" Cont. on P9 >

## 4 OGWs held with grenade, cash

Himalayan Mail News  
JAMMU, APR 23

Four over ground workers (OGWs), including a woman, were arrested in Srinagar for providing logistic support to terrorists.

According to officials, police arrested the four OGWs from Hazratbal area of Srinagar city late Wednesday night.

They were identified as Zahoor Ahmad Mir, Bashir Ahmad Bhat, Ghulam Mohammad Bhat and Shazia Mohammad, all residents of Hazratbal.

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## Iran defies US blockade, begins collecting tolls from Hormuz shipping

TEHRAN, APR 23: Defying US blockade, Iran has banked the first proceeds from the tolls it is exacting on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz as disruption triggered by the US-Israeli war against the Islamic Republic continued to batter the world economy.

With planned peace talks hanging in the balance, more fuel-hungry airlines cancelled flights, oil prices opened higher and the keenly-watched S&P Global PMI index showed eurozone business activity shrinking for the first time in 16 months.

Iran vowed it will keep the strait closed to all but a trickle of approved vessels for as long as the United States blockades its ports, brushing off demands from President Donald Trump that it buckles to US threats and both reopen Hormuz and surrender its enriched uranium.

While strikes around the region have mostly ceased since the two-week-old truce began, there has been no letup in the stand-off over the crucial trade route, with both sides seeking economic leverage -- only for Trump to announce an indefinite ceasefire to create space for more Pakistani-mediated talks.

"A complete ceasefire only has meaning if it is not violated through a naval blockade," said Iran's parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who led Tehran's delegation at a first round of talks. "Reopening the Strait of Hormuz is not possible amid a blatant violation of the ceasefire."

Ghalibaf's deputy, Hamidrez Hajibabei said Iran has received its first revenue from tolls it is imposing on ships seeking to cross Cont. on P9 >

## Africa occupies central place in India's foreign policy: EAM

NEW DELHI, APR 23:

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar today said Africa occupies a central place in India's foreign policy and New Delhi's engagement with the continent is guided by a clear vision based on equality, mutual respect and shared progress.

"The gathering signifies the next phase of the long-standing partnership between India and Africa under the summit framework," he said while addressing an event marking the unveiling of the logo, theme and website for



the upcoming India-Africa Forum Summit-IV.

"We gather here to mark the next chapter in the enduring partnership between India and Africa through the India-Africa Forum Summit framework," he said.

Jaishankar said the In-

dia-Africa relationship is rooted in civilisational linkages that have been nurtured over centuries through cultural exchanges and human interaction.

He noted that India stood in solidarity with African nations during their struggle against colonialism, adding that the freedom movements of both regions are closely interlinked.

"Our bonds were further strengthened as India stood in solidarity with the African nations in their struggle against colonial

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## India-US working towards balanced trade pact: MEA

NEW DELHI, APR 23:

India and the United States are making steady headway in strengthening their economic partnership, with ongoing discussions aimed at finalising a comprehensive trade agreement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday.

Speaking at a weekly media briefing in New Delhi, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal described the negotiations as "constructive," noting that both sides are working to address mutual concerns while deepening economic coopera

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## Pak should clamp down on LeT, JeM terror outfits: US Lawmaker

WASHINGTON, APR 23:

US Congressman Brad Sherman has called on Pakistan to clamp down on terror groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which has been linked to the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack.

He remembered the victims of the Pahalgam attack on the first anniversary of the incident in which 26 innocent lives were killed.

"The attackers, identified as The Resistance Front, targeted innocent people, reportedly separating vic-

tims by religion. The group is widely seen as linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba, which has found sanctuary in Pakistan," Sherman said while speaking at an exhibition organised by the Indian embassy here on the topic "Human Cost of Terrorism".

"We must use this moment to demand that the Pakistani government clamp down on Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and other terrorist groups," the Democratic leader said.

The exhibition, organised at Capitol Hill, comes

at a time when Pakistan is projecting itself as a peacemaker by mediating efforts to end the seven-week US-Iran war.

The event was attended by lawmakers from both Democratic and Republican parties.

The digital exhibition also displays major terror attacks perpetrated across the world, including the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts, the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and the Pahalgam attack. It also identifies the terror outfits responsible Cont. on P9 >

## 'Inappropriate, in poor taste'

# India hits back at Prez Trump's 'hellhole' post

NEW DELHI, APR 23:

The ministry of external affairs today responded to US President Donald Trump's repost of comments from a right-wing commentator who called India a "hellhole", saying that the remarks were "uninformed, inappropriate and in poor taste".

The ministry said that the remarks don't reflect "the reality of the India-US relationship."

"We have seen the comments, as also the subsequent statement issued by

the US Embassy in response. The remarks are obviously uninformed, inappropriate and in poor taste. They certainly do not reflect the reality of the India-US relationship, which has long been based on mutual respect and shared interests," the MEA statement read.

The statement comes after Trump on Thursday posted a transcript of a conservative political talk show hosted by Michael Savage, which referred to India, China, and other na-

tions as "hellholes"-places from where people come to Washington in their ninth month of pregnancy and instantly become US citizens.

The host, whose ideology aligns with that of the US president, was arguing against US birthright citizenship, which guarantees automatic citizenship for almost anyone born within US territory, regardless of parentage.

Savage argued that these issues should not be de

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## India extends airspace ban on Pak aircraft

NEW DELHI, APR 23:

India has extended the ban on Pakistani aircraft using its airspace until May 24, continuing a restriction first imposed days after the April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terror attack.

With the latest extension, the closure will remain in place for over a year. Since April last year, both India and Pakistan have repeatedly extended reciprocal airspace restrictions, with Pakistan also extending its ban until May 24 earlier this week.

A Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) on Wednesday said the Indian airspace will not

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## Ladakh LG approves reforms to boost tourism, reduce compliance burden

LEH, APR 23:

Ladakh LG Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved major tourism reforms in the UT to reduce compliance burden and promote ease of doing business.

The reforms, that would deregulate tourism industry and enhance the overall experience of tourists visiting Ladakh, are aimed at promoting ease of doing business and boosting tourism sector in the UT of Ladakh, according to officials.

"The reforms have been undertaken to reduce compliance burden on stake-



holders and create a unified, streamlined, and citizen-friendly registration mechanism for tourism units in the Union Territory," officials said.

The initiative follows a series of meetings held by the LG with tourism stakeholders and delegations representing various

tourism associations. It is also aligned with the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dictum of "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance."

The new framework provides for a unified registration system for all tourism units, rationalises and significantly reduces documentary requirements, eliminates redundant classifications, simplifies procedures for registration, renewal and transfer, promotes digital and time-bound approvals, enhances transparency and account

Cont. on P9 >