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WB records historic 91.91 pc voter turnout, TN 84.80 pc

accuracy of the rolls, opposition parties, particularly the TMC, alleged that large-scale disenfranchisement, turning turnout itself into a contested political statistic.

That tension spilled onto the ground in multiple districts.

Clashes, allegations of intimidation and attacks on candidates, including on two of the BJP, were reported from several constituencies, prompting the Election Commission to seek detailed reports even as it maintained that polling was "largely peaceful".

In Birbhum's Khoyrasol, tension escalated dramatically in the final hours after voters alleged that votes cast in favour of the TMC were being registered for the BJP. This triggered protests, a temporary halt in voting and clashes between locals and security personnel.

Eyewitnesses said the situation spiralled following an argument between polling officials and voters, with locals gathering outside the booth and staging a protest. While forces intervened to disperse the crowd, stone pelting was reported later, and security personnel resorted to mild force.

Earlier in the day, BJP candidate Suvendu Sarkar was allegedly manhandled in Dakshin Dinajpur's Kumarganj, while BJP MLA Agnimitra Paul's car was attacked in Asansol Dakshin, with stones shattering its rear windowpanes -- incidents the party cited as evidence of "targeted violence".

The TMC denied the allegations, accusing the BJP of attempting to "engineer" unrest.

Tension escalated further in Naoda when stones were allegedly hurled at the convoy of AJUP chief Humayun Kabir during his visit to a polling area, forcing security personnel to intervene. The incident triggered a brief flare-up, adding to the volatility in the constituency.

Clashes erupted between supporters of the TMC and the Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP), leading to a baton charge by central forces.

Meanwhile, in Birbhum's Labhpur and Malda's Chanchal, BJP polling agents were allegedly assaulted by the TMC.

In Murarai, clashes between Congress and TMC workers left at least two injured. In Domkal, allegations surfaced that voters were prevented from reaching booths, necessitating a security escort.

The Election Commission, facing mounting pressure, reported receiving around 500 complaints by noon, with another 375 through the cVIGIL app. The TMC alone claimed to have lodged over 700 complaints by mid-afternoon, many related to alleged EVM malfunction and the conduct of central forces.

The EVM issue added another layer of political contestation to an already polarised phase where identity, citizenship, and the fallout of voter list revision have overtaken traditional issues like jobs and corruption.

Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari alleged that "TMC-sheltered criminals" were intimidating voters, while the TMC accused the BJP of using central agencies and forces to influence the electoral process.

The first phase, covering all 54 seats in North Bengal along with key constituencies in South Bengal, is central to the BJP's strategy of consolidating its northern stronghold, where it had surged in 2019 and remained competitive in 2021, and to the TMC's effort to blunt that expansion early in the contest.

In 2021, the BJP had won 59 of these 152 seats against the TMC's 93.

Polling for the 234 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu and 152 constituencies in West Bengal began amid tight security this morning. Polling in the remaining 142 constituencies in West Bengal is slated for May 29, and counting of votes will take place on May 4.

The CEC lauded the voters of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu for the highest-ever voter turnout in both states since independence.

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

In the 2021 Assembly elections, West Bengal recorded a voter turnout of 85.2 per cent while Tamil Nadu recorded 76.6 per cent. The numbers reflect an overwhelming voter turnout across districts, reinforcing both states' consistent trend of high electoral participation.

Polling for the 234 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu and 152 constituencies in West Bengal began amid tight security on Thursday. Polling in the remaining 142 constituencies in West Bengal is slated for May 29, and counting of votes will take place on May 4.

PM Modi jabs TMC; rakes up infiltration, CAA

refugee families do not need to fear the TMC. Once the government is formed, the process of granting citizenship under the CAA will be accelerated. You will receive every right and benefit that every Indian citizen is entitled to. This is Modi's guarantee," he said.

The BJP, which won 77 seats in the previous Assembly election, is seeking to unseat the TMC government, while Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is aiming for another term.

Polling for the next phase is scheduled for April 29, with counting on May 4.

Sinha pays obeisance at Chandi Mata Mandir

Dhammi, Nagrota, he prayed for peace, prosperity and well-being of all.

The religious proceedings were marked by the lighting of the Akhand Jyot and the traditional reciting of Ved Path.

During his visit, the LG also reviewed the ongoing construction works of yatri halls being developed by the temple committee to facilitate the pilgrims traveling to Shri Amarnath ji cave shrine and Shri Mata Vaishno Devi cave shrine.

He assured all the necessary support and assistance from the administration.

Among those present on the occasion included Sanjay Gandotra, president of Sarv Shakti Chandi Mata Mandir, and temple committee members - D S Jamwal, Vikas Singh Jamwal, Praveen Singh and Balwan Singh.

NIA attaches property of terror accused

The attachment was carried out under the provisions of section 33(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the officials added.

The order of attachment was issued by an NIA court in Jammu in January this year.

3 houses of drug peddlers demolished

added, "We conducted a similar drive here two to three months ago. Some more drug peddlers have since been identified, and they are currently absconding. The illegal structures constructed from money earned through the drug trade were demolished today."

"Drug-related activities are harming our society and ruining our children. We want to engage our youth in sports and positive activities. This effort is part of our contribution towards nation's progress and development," he said.

Officials reiterated that the administration will continue its action against drug networks and their assets in the region.

HC directs strict adherence to office timings

fecting the smooth & timely disposal of official work. It directed that no officer or official shall arrive after or leave before the notified timings, and none shall leave their office during working hours without prior permission from the competent authority.

The high court also asked controlling officers to ensure punctuality and accountability, warning that any violation of the instructions will be viewed seriously and action will be taken under relevant rules.

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

Bhaipo' tax to the TMC's syndicate. Even to purchase cement, people are forced to pay. Say 'ta ta-bye-bye' to the Mamata government, and we will straighten up the syndicate operators," he said.

Shah also flagged the alleged decline of Balagarh's traditional boat-making industry, claiming that it had suffered under the present dispensation.

"Balagarh's boat industry once provided employment to the entire region. But due to Mamata's syndicate raj, it has shut down. Around 41 factories have been closed. I assure you that once the BJP forms the government, we will restart these units," he said.

Invoking Bengal's legacy, Shah paid tribute to educationist Ashutosh Mukherjee and Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the BJP's ideological predecessor.

"This is the land of Ashutosh Mukherjee, who had earned the moniker 'Tiger of Bengal'. His son, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, founded our party and sacrificed his life for the nation. I pay my respects to both leaders," he said. In a sharp political pitch ahead of the next phase of polling, Shah urged voters to back the BJP, framing the contest as one linked to identity and security.

"In the elections on April 29, you have to press the button beside the lotus symbol on EVMs. You are not pressing it just to make someone an MLA or to form a government. You are pressing it to free Bengal from infiltrators," the former BJP chief said.

"Earlier, Mamata Banerjee's goons used to say that you can campaign as much as you want, but they would not let anyone cast their vote. I want to tell Didi's goons that if you touch any voter, you will find yourself in the Bay of Bengal," he said.

4 OGWs held with grenade, cash

Officials said a hand grenade, 15 AK rounds, four mobile phones and some cash were recovered from their possession.

A case was registered against them at the concerned police station under various sections of UAPA and Arms Act, the officials added.

Iran defies US blockade, begins collecting tolls from Hormuz shipping

Hormuz, a route that in peacetime accounts for a fifth of the world's oil and gas flows, and other vital commodities.

Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards said they forced two ships to the Iranian shore from the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow gateway for one-fifth of the world's oil.

Analysts said Tehran, in particular its hardline leaders associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), believes that Iran's blockade gives it sufficient economic leverage to force Washington to back down on its main demands in eventual peace talks.

And some, such as Danny Citrinowicz of the Tel-Aviv Institute for National Security Studies, criticised Israel and the US for misreading the Iranian government's position.

"Tehran has consistently demonstrated a willingness to absorb economic pain while holding firm on what it views as core national interests. There is little reason to believe this time will be different," he said, in a social media post.

A brief from the Soufan Centre think tank said Iran's hardliners "argue that a prolonged elevation of global energy prices and mounting global shortages of some goods

will increasingly pressure Trump to accede to Iran's positions, end the war, and eventually withdraw US forces from the region".

Schools in a so-called "Red Zone" remained shut and universities have shifted to distance learning, ahead of the planned arrivals of delegations from Washington and Tehran.

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

cided in courts, adding that "it is not really about law." Instead, he said they should be decided by public opinion. He also criticised the US Constitution, saying it cannot be changed because it is "written in stone."

"A baby here becomes an instant citizen, and then they bring the entire family in from China or India or some other hellhole on the planet. You don't have to go too far to see that. English is not spoken here anymore. There's almost no loyalty to this country among the immigrant class coming in today, which was not always the case," Savage said.

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

ism," he said. "Our shared history of struggle, solidarity, resilience and aspirations continues to shape our partnership," he added.

The minister said Africa today occupies a central place in India's foreign policy.

"India's engagement with Africa is guided by a clear vision, which is rooted in the principles of equality, mutual respect and shared progress," he said.

Jaishankar said India's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision and Africa's Agenda 2063 are complementary roadmaps aimed at inclusive and sustainable development.

He also highlighted growing engagement between the two sides, including high-level political exchanges and India's consistent support for Africa's greater role in global governance.

A "seminal step" in this direction, he said, was the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member of the G20 during India's presidency of the grouping in 2023.

"This reflects our firm belief that the voices of the Global South must shape global governance in times to come," he said.

India-US working towards balanced trade pact: MEA

tion. He added that the talks are aligned with a broader goal of significantly expanding bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030.

"These engagements are ongoing and constructive. Both sides are working towards a balanced, mutually beneficial and forward-looking trade agreement that takes into account each other's priorities," Jaiswal said.

Recent developments in Washington indicate that the negotiations are nearing completion. A senior US official said discussions between New Delhi and Washington have been "positive and productive," with most substantive issues already resolved. Another official familiar with the talks suggested that only a few gaps remain.

The current round of negotiations involves Indian officials engaging with the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR). The American side is being led by Brendan Lynch, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, while India's delegation is headed by Darpan Jain, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce.

"We are trying to close the remaining details and work out mechanisms that will ensure India gets better market access compared to competitors," he said.

With negotiations entering their final stages, both sides appear poised to conclude a deal that could significantly reshape bilateral trade relations.

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

for the attacks, including several Pakistan-based individuals and entities such as Lashkar-e-Taiba terror group. "The special exhibition essentially serves to remind us of a few things. One, the scourge of terror upon humanity remains determined to destroy our societies.

Countries around the world need to come together and remain resolute in defeating terrorism," India's Ambassador to the US Vinay Mohan Kwatra told reporters.

Kwatra said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been clear about India's unwavering resolve to deal with and defeat the scourge of terrorism.

Lawmakers who attended the exhibition included Michael Baumgartner, Bill Huizenga and Lisa McClain (all Republicans), and Julie Johnson, April Delaney, Ro Khanna, Raja Krishnamoorthi, Jamie Raskin, Shree Thandekar and Jonathan Jackson (all Democrats). "Pakistan later also launched offensives against India.

Bhajan Sandhya Enthralled Senior Citizens with Devotional Fervor, Classical Excellence

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, APR 23

The K.L. Sehgal Auditorium resonated with spiritual energy and classical richness during a 90-minute 'Bhajan Sandhya' for senior citizens organized by the Central Government Pensioners' Welfare Association (CG-PWA) in collaboration with the Bharatiya Sangeet Sansthan (BSS).

The evening featured 14 budding artists trained under the prestigious Guru-Shishya Parampara by renowned Hindustani classical maestro Vijay Kumar Sambyal, popularly known as 'Rangeeey Thakur.' The performance mesmerised the jampacked hall, blending melodious bhajans with deep classical foundations.

The President of CGPWA, Jammu Kuldeep Khoda presided. Among those present included Padam Shree awardee Dr Nirmal Vinod, Ashok Angurana, Dr. Ashok Bhan, B.R.Sharma, Dr.Sudarshan Kumar, K B Jandial, V K Sambyal, Prem Gupta, S S Bijral, Yoginder Kaul, Hemant Sharma, VK Padha.

The musical evening took off with the serene invocation "Vartaman Sundar Kar Lo, Prabhu May Jeevan Kar Nirbhaya Ho" presented by Vanshika, Asmi, Anika, Banat, and Ragnya, setting a



deeply devotional tone for the evening.

It was followed by two poignant bhajans by Tahyra and Tejasvi—"Bol Sachidanand Om Om" and "Yeh, Khel Anokha Saara, Koi Samjhe Samjhan Haara"—which were appreciated for their depth and expression. Uday and Davinder continued the musical journey with their engaging performances.

Ridhima Bajpai presented a soulful Dogri bhajan—"Man-nua Neyi Kar Mera Mera, Ae Nagri Maya Nagri Ae, Itthe Rain Basera", penned by Dr. Nirmal Vinod and composed by 'Rangeeey Thakur' She also presented another heart touching bhajan "Jamuna Kinare Hove Gram, Braj Mein Ho Bistram".

V. K. Sambyal 'Rangeeey Thakur' accompanied by Ridhima descended on the stage amidst huge applause and enthralled the audience through profound renditions, including "Sundar Samujhi Samujhi Pag Dhar Re, Uttam Raah Pakad Re" and "Panchhi Kai Din Ka

The military conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, lasting nearly 88 hours, halted after they reached an understanding on the evening of May 10.

"We face extremist forces that seek to crush those who think differently and reject freedom, self-determination and unity. That is our common enemy," McCormick said.

"Terrorism is everyone's problem. Those who try to destroy our diversity through violence, and who do not accept us for who we are, are the true enemy. I stand with you, and I look forward to working together. We will have peace through strength," he said.

India extends airspace ban on Pak aircraft

be available for Pakistan-registered aircraft and aircraft operated/ owned or leased by Pakistan airlines/ operators, including military flights.

The ban will be effective till 2359 hours (UTC) on May 23, which means 0530 hours (IST) on May 24.

Following the terror attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on April 22, 2025, that killed 26 people, India and Pakistan had closed their respective airspaces for each other's planes.

India's airspace ban was in place since April 30 last year, while Pakistan closed its airspace for Indian aircraft from April 24, 2025.

The ban, part of various measures taken by the Indian government against Pakistan in the wake of the terror attack, was initially till May 24, 2025 and has been subsequently extended every month.

Generally, a NOTAM is a notice containing information that is essential for personnel involved in flight operations.

Indian airlines are now taking longer routes to various international destinations due to the Pakistan airspace closure.

Ladakh LG approves reforms to boost tourism, reduce compliance burden

ability, aligns with national deregulation initiatives, encourages local entrepreneurship, and strengthens the overall tourism ecosystem in Ladakh through ease of compliance.

"It is a transformative step for the tourism sector in Ladakh by making the processes simpler, transparent, and people-friendly. Reducing compliance burden and ensuring ease of doing business would empower local stakeholders and significantly enhance Ladakh's standing as a premier tourist destination. I am confident that these reforms would help position Ladakh among the top tourism destinations not only in India but globally," the LG said.

To begin with, the registration validity of tour operators has been increased from one year to five years, thereby eliminating the need for renewal every year.

Similarly, tour and travel operators engaged in adventure and mountaineering activities were earlier required to register separately as "Adventure Tour Operator" and "Mountaineering Tour Operator" at an additional registration fee of Rs 3000 each. This requirement, too, has been done away with. A unified category under the nomenclature "Travel Agent" has been introduced, which will authorise the registered entity to undertake all activities permitted under the Registration of Tourist Act.

The number of documents required for registration of tour operators has been reduced significantly from 7 to 4. Under the new framework, the requirement of a character certificate, a fixed bank balance and educational qualification for running a tour and travel agency have also been removed, thereby making the registration process easier.

Likewise, the earlier framework for registration of hotels classified the accommodation units into Category I and Category II (Standard, Deluxe, Luxury), accompanied by detailed and often cumbersome documentation requirements. But with the new regulations, this classification has been discontinued. The documents required for registration of hotels have been reduced to just 02 documents for obtaining a provisional licence with a validity of 18 months and 07 documents for getting a permanent licence that will be valid for 05 years.

In the case of homestay registration, the existing process involves multiple procedural requirements and documentation, which often act as barriers for local participation. The new framework reduces the number of required documents, making the process simpler and more accessible and thereby encouraging community-based tourism and creating livelihood opportunities for local residents.

Regarding the transfer of registration, the previous system required extensive documentation and led to procedural delays. The proposed draft introduces a simplified and streamlined mechanism with reduced documentation requirements, ensuring ease and efficiency in ownership transfers.

Similarly, the processes for cancellation of registration and change of business name under the existing framework involve multiple approvals and procedural complexities. The proposed framework simplifies these procedures, making them quicker, more transparent, and less burdensome for stakeholders.

Tributes paid to Madan Lal on his birth anniversary

HIMALAYAN MAIL NEWS JAMMU, APR 23

On 74th Birth Anniversary of ex-minister Madan Lal Sharma, a programme was organized at Shamb (Khor).

On this occasion Rich Tributes paid by Cabinet Minister Satish Sharma to their father Late Madan Lal Sharma A renowned, Social, Political & a Visionary leader of Jammu and Kashmir.

Those who were present on this occasion Babu Ram Paul Ex Minister & President Central Zone J& k. National Conference along with Rahul Mahajan Vice President Central Zone Amresh Sharma Vice President Central Zone, JKN, S. Tajinder Paul Singh, Provincial Youth President Jammu, Rajesh-



war Singh Youths leader, Devi Deyal Jogi Block secretary & Others also paid floral

Tributes to Late Madan Lal Sharma and also remembered their Significant Con-

tribution for over all welfare & development of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.