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## Phase-1 polling signals 'wave of change', TMC shaken: Modi

recorded a historic voter turnout of 91.91 pc in phase-1 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.

After the polling ended, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar had 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 had 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.

## Investigations initiated against 48 drug peddlers: LG

from homes, schools, mohallas, and communities; a movement that begins with open, honest dialogue in towns and villages. Mothers and sisters are the moral bedrock of our society and with their help, we can win this battle," he added.

"Over two dozen drug traffickers have already been identified and they will be tracked down and held accountable. In Jammu division, thousands of peddlers are under surveillance, and each one will be relentlessly pursued until they are apprehended," he said.

"Security checks have been stepped up around schools, colleges, and other vulnerable areas. I want to make it absolutely clear that those who engage in the grave crime of poisoning the future of our youth through drug trafficking will face the harshest consequences under law," he warned.

The LG also drew attention of police and all enforcement agencies to the fact that drug traffickers and terrorists operate hand in hand and they should be treated as allies in crime.

"Our response should be decisive, thorough, and unyielding. Every route drug smuggler exploit should be watched, every financial chain should be dismantled, and every asset stripped away until their networks are completely destroyed," he said.

"For over a decade, J&K has carried the heavy silence surrounding the menace of drug abuse and this historic people's movement was launched to shatter that silence. With collective strength we must raise society's voice against the scourge of narcotics. Drugs are a wound in the heart of our society. To heal this wound, we require a people's movement that mobilises the full strength of society to eradicate drugs at their roots. The "Nasha Mukht J&K" campaign also serves to remind us that among the strongest pillars of society are the rule of law, constitutional values, the ethic of duty, and a spirit of Jan Bhagidari," the LG said.

He asked NGOs, social workers and spiritual leaders to join the campaign in large number in cities and villages.

"Social organisations, spiritual leaders, and educators are the frontline guardians of this mission. I firmly believe that through their leadership, hope can be rekindled and society renewed. The full strength of the government and the community stands beside them," Sinha said.

## NIA attaches plot belonging to terror accused

istered under various sections of the UA(P) Act, Arms Act, and Explosive Substances Act," the officials added.

## Girdawar forest guard placed under suspension

spite repeated directions, an official order said. The tehsildar, Bari Brahmana, had reported that no 'jamabandis' were digitised in Patwar Halqua Smailpur between April 8 and April 15.

"The conduct of the official reflects gross negligence and dereliction of duty in the discharge of his responsibilities," the order said.

Pending inquiry, the official was placed under suspension with immediate effect and attached to the office of tehsildar, Samba. The sub-divisional magistrate, Vijaypur, has been appointed as the inquiry officer and asked to submit a report within 15 days, it added.

In Doda district, forest department beat guard Mush-taq Ahmed was placed under suspension after a vehicle carrying illegal deodar timber was seized in Bhadarwah area.

Officials said a joint team of Forest Protection Force and territorial staff of Neru range intercepted a vehicle loaded with 20 deodar green scants (unseasoned timber planks) on April 21-22 night at Jalga.

During the operation, the in-charge beat guard was found moving on the same route in his personal vehicle, and a mechanical cutter packed in a bag was also recovered, officials said.

The suspended guard was attached to the divisional forest office, Bhadarwah, pending enquiry against him.

## Gold Futures drops to Rs 1.51 lakh/10g

Gold prices declined on Friday. The pressure on the precious metals can be attributed to a stronger US dollar and ris-

ing crude oil prices, which have intensified inflation concerns among investors, Gaurav Garg, Research Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

He added that oil prices were hovering around USD 95.84 per barrel due to geopolitical tensions, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz, which has exacerbated market uncertainty.

In the international market, Comex gold futures for the June contract slipped USD 33.54, or nearly 1 per cent, to USD 4,690.46 per ounce in New York.

Brokerage firm Kotak Securities gold hovered around USD 4,680 per ounce, heading for nearly a 3 per cent weekly loss as prolonged US-Iran tensions and the continued Strait of Hormuz blockade drove oil higher and lifted inflation concerns.

According to analysts, signs of friction between Washington and Tehran persist due to the US Navy's blockade of Iranian ports.

Iran's Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, termed the blockade an act of war, while chief negotiator Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, said a complete ceasefire would be meaningful only if maritime restrictions are lifted.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump ordered the Navy to act against any vessels laying mines in the crucial shipping route, further dampening hopes for de-escalation. Analysts said these developments have supported the US dollar's strength, putting pressure on gold prices in the global markets.

Market participants are now awaiting the final University of Michigan's consumer sentiment data for further cues on the Federal Reserve's monetary policy path and the near-term trajectory of bullion prices, Kotak Securities said in a note.

## Residences of 2 drug peddlers demolished

came under the 'Nasha Mukht Jammu & Kashmir Abhiyaan'.

RS Pura SDM Anuradha Thakur and SDPO Gurmeet Singh were present at the scene during the demolition exercise.

In a similar action, three residential properties of drug peddlers were demolished in Rajiv Nagar area of the city yesterday.

On April 18, in another administration and police crackdown on drug trade linked assets, two residential properties of NDPS-accused in Belicharana area of the city were razed.

## RBI cancels banking licence of Paytm Payments Bank

Consequently, Paytm Payments Bank is prohibited from conducting any "banking" business, it said.

The RBI also said it will make an application to the high court to wind up the bank.

"Paytm Payments Bank Limited has enough liquidity to repay its entire deposit liability upon winding up of the bank," it said.

Paytm Payments Bank has been barred from onboarding new customers with effect from March 11, 2022.

## 'Anga, Banga, Kalinga' will see BJP govts next month: Amit Shah

142 seats in south Bengal, including Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly, and North and South 24 Parganas, will be held on April 29.

Shah thanked the Election Commission and security forces for ensuring no deaths during polling, noting that 1,278 people were injured in the 2016 elections and 1,681 in 2021.

He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of balanced development between eastern and western India would be realised if the BJP comes to power in the state. Shah also alleged large-scale illegal land encroachment in Bengal and promised action similar to Assam if voted to power.

Criticising Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Shah said her remarks on women's safety reflected governance failure and claimed that even teenage girls would be able to move freely at night under a BJP government.

He also targeted Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, alleging "syndicate raj" and "bhaipo tax" in the state, and accused the TMC government of institutionalised corruption involving scams worth over Rs 10,000 crore since 2011.

Responding to Shah's claims, Abhishek Banerjee, speaking at a rally in Howrah, said the Trinamool Congress had already crossed the 100-seat mark in the first phase. He said the BJP was "gripped by panic" and cited his earlier poll predictions as evidence of his accuracy.

## Barrier-free tolling from Dec: Gadkari

said India would have to develop good infrastructure to reduce logistics cost.

"We plan to put up several seamless barrier-free tolling systems on several national highways across the country by December," he said.

This new system facilitates barrier-free tolling using integrated technologies, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) with AI analytics and RFID-based Electronic Toll Collection (FASTag).

Under this, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high performance ANPR cameras and FASTag readers, without needing to stop at toll plazas.

In case of non-compliance, e-notices will be served to violators, non-payment of which may result in suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN-related penalties.

Gadkari noted that if India wants to become a global power, the country will have to reduce logistics cost to single digits.

He said a recent report prepared by IIT Chennai, IIT Kan-

pur, and IIM Bangalore has revealed that India's construction of expressways and economic corridors has helped reduce the country's logistics cost to 10 per cent from 16 per cent earlier.

The Road Transport and Highways Minister said logistics cost is 12 per cent in the US, 12 per cent in European countries and 8-10 per cent in China.

Referring to the West Asia crisis, Gadkari said India relies on imports to meet 87 per cent of its oil requirement.

"We import fossil fuels worth Rs 22 lakh crore, which is also causing pollution... so we need to work on increasing production of alternative fuel and bio-fuel," he said.

Noting that green hydrogen is the fuel of the future, Gadkari said there is a need to reduce the cost of running a hydrogen fuel station to make it financially viable.

He said India is the fastest-growing major economy and it is a dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make the country a USD 5-trillion economy.

## 7 AAP Rajya Sabha MPs quit party; to join BJP

more closely with the 'janata' (public)," he said.

Another Rajya Sabha MP, Sandeep Pathak, said that he had never thought that this situation would arise, but it has.

"For 10 years, I remained associated with this party. And today, I am parting ways with the Aam Aadmi Party," Pathak said.

On April 15, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted raids at business entities linked to AAP Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Mittal in Punjab as part of a FEMA probe.

## SC refuses to entertain pleas of those on election duty in Bengal

ported by legal news websites.

Out of around 34 lakh appeals, reportedly only 139 have been cleared by the appellate tribunals.

The apex court was hearing two separate petitions filed by 71 and six persons respectively. The pleas sought directions to the Election Commission to allow the petitioners, whose appeals are pending, to vote in the ongoing West Bengal elections.

The first phase of polling in Bengal was held on April 23, while the second and final phase is scheduled for April 29. Results will be declared on May 4.

Earlier, while hearing the Bengal SIR matter, the Supreme Court had directed the Election Commission to issue a supplementary revised electoral roll for voters whose appeals against deletion had been allowed by appellate tribunals.

The court had also clarified that pending appeals alone would not entitle excluded persons to vote.

"We, therefore, invoke our powers under Article 142 of the Constitution and direct the Election Commission that, wherever the appellate tribunals are able to decide the appeals by April 21, 2026, or April 27, 2026, as the case may be, such appellate orders shall be given effect by issuing a supplementary revised electoral roll and all necessary consequences with respect to the right to vote shall follow.

"However, it goes without saying that mere pendency of appeals preferred by excluded persons before the appellate tribunals shall not entitle them to exercise their right to vote," the apex court said in its April 13 order.

The Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court has constituted 19 tribunals headed by former high court chief justices and judges to hear appeals against deletion or exclusion of names from the voter list.

## Oppn moves fresh notice in RS to remove CEC

tions in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.

Referring to concerns raised by various opposition parties, the notice said, "As on the date of this notice, Gyanesh Kumar has issued no show-cause notice, no advisory, and no public response to any of the said complaints."

According to sources, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and TMC leader Sagarika Ghose submitted the notice to the Rajya Sabha Secretary General.

The notice was signed by 73 Rajya Sabha MPs, while the requirement is 50 signatures.

Members of opposition parties such as the Congress, TMC, SP, DMK, Left parties, Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP), RJD, IUML and "like-minded" parties have signed the notice, sources said.

The move comes days after similar notices submitted by opposition MPs in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were rejected by the respective presiding officers. It was the first time that a notice seeking the removal of a CEC was submitted in Parliament.

In its earlier notices, the opposition had accused CEC Kumar of "failure to maintain independence and constitutional fidelity" and of acting under the "thumb of the executive".

However, in almost similar responses, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan had rejected the notices, holding that even if the allegations were assumed to be true, they did not meet the high constitutional threshold of "misbehaviour" required for his removal.

## Foreign debit cards, FCRA violations under ED scanner

were concentrated in Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected regions, including Dhamtari and Bastar in Chhattisgarh. Around Rs 6.5 crore has been withdrawn from these areas over the past few years. The pattern of withdrawals suggested a coordinated and organised effort," the spokesperson said.

The agency has also flagged concerns about the emergence of a parallel cash-based system in sensitive regions,

warning that such mechanisms could potentially facilitate unlawful activities and undermine financial oversight.

"Further findings indicate that an online billing and accounting platform, allegedly controlled by entities based outside India, was used to track the withdrawals and utilisation of funds. Around Rs 95 crore was channelled into India between November 2025 and April 2026 through this method," the spokesperson said.

The ED official added that search operations led to the seizure of 25 foreign debit cards, Rs 40 lakh in cash, and several digital devices and documents considered incriminating.

## High-level team conducts safety inspection of rail bridges over Ravi

The inspection team was led by divisional railway manager Vivek Kumar, commissioner of railway safety Dinesh Chand Deshwal, and chief administrative officer for the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project Alok Mishra.

## India-US trade talks made positive progress: Govt

to trade, customs and trade facilitation, investment promotion, economic security alignment and digital trade.

"The meetings were conducted in a constructive and positive spirit, with meaningful and forward-looking discussions enabling progress on key matters. Both sides agreed to remain engaged to maintain this momentum as they move forward," it said.

As the tariff landscape has changed in the US, both sides are relooking at the framework of the agreement, the text of which was released on February 7.

Following the decision of the US Supreme Court against the sweeping tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump on a number of countries, the Trump administration imposed a 10 per cent tariff on all countries from February 24 for 150 days.

According to that framework, the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent, from 50 per cent.

It had removed the 25 per cent tariffs on Indian goods for buying Russian oil and was to cut the remaining 25 per cent to 18 per cent under the pact.

But on February 20, the US Supreme Court ruled against Trump's reciprocal tariffs which were imposed under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

After that, the President announced the imposition of 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days, starting February 24.

Under the agreed framework, India proposed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.

India had also expressed its intentions to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

The meeting was also important as when India finalised the deal, it enjoyed a comparative advantage over its competitor countries.

Now, with all US trading partners facing a uniform 10 per cent tariff, the pact requires recalibration.

So, the agreement will have to be recalibrated, and re-drafted, a government source had said.

As the circumstances have changed, every country is engaging with the US to see what is going to be the nature of their trade agreements with America.

Further, the US Trade Representative (USTR) in March had launched two unilateral investigations against a number of countries including India.

India has strongly rejected allegations made by the US Trade Representative in those two investigations under its Section 301 of trade law and has requested to terminate the probes as the initiation notice has failed to provide cogent rationale to substantiate the claims.

China has overtaken the US to emerge as India's largest trading partner in 2025-26.

The US was India's largest trading partner for four consecutive years till 2024-25.

The country's outbound shipments to the US grew marginally 0.92 per cent to USD 87.3 billion during the last fiscal year, while imports increased 15.95 per cent to USD 52.9 billion.

The trade surplus declined to USD 34.4 billion in 2025-26 from USD 40.89 billion in 2024-25.

## Country that values workers' dignity unstoppable: Mandaviya

cent in 2025, as per data published by the International Labour Organisation," he said, highlighting that the country's efforts in this direction were recognised by the International Social Security Association in 2025.

Underscoring the impact of the four labour codes that were brought into effect last year, the Union Minister for Labour & Employment and Youth Affairs & Sports said these reforms guarantee several long-awaited protections for workers, including annual health check-ups, mandatory appointment letters, and minimum wages.

"The provision for annual health checks through ESIC hospitals will allow early detection of diseases, ensure preventive healthcare for workers, and secure their future," he emphasised.

He also noted that the convergence of ESIC with Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana had further expanded access to cashless treatment for beneficiaries across empanelled hospitals.

Built at the cost of Rs 165 cr, the hospital has been established with provision for expansion up to 100 beds and is expected to directly benefit more than 50,000 workers and their family members.

## Trump admin vows crackdown on Chinese companies 'exploiting' AI models made in US

## WASHINGTON, Apr 24:

The Trump administration is vowing to crack down on foreign tech companies' exploitation of US artificial intelligence models, singling out China at a time that country is narrowing the gap with the US in the AI race.

In a Thursday memo, Michael Kratsios, the president's chief science and technology adviser, accused foreign entities "principally based in China" of engaging in deliberate, industrial-scale campaigns to "distill", or extract capabilities from, leading AI systems made in the US and "exploiting American expertise and innovation".

The administration, Kratsios wrote, will work with American AI companies to

identify such activities, build defences and find ways to punish offenders.

The memo arrives at a time when China is challenging US dominance in artificial intelligence, an area where the White House says the US must prevail to set global standards and reap economic and military benefits.

But the US-China gap in performance of top AI models has "effectively closed," according to a recent report from Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centred AI.

China's embassy in Washington said it opposed "the unjustified suppression of Chinese companies by the US".

"China has always been committed to promoting scientific and technological

progress through cooperation and healthy competition. China attaches great importance to the protection of intellectual property rights," said Liu Pengyu, the embassy spokesperson.

In Beijing, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told reporters Friday that the US claims are groundless and were smearing the achievements of China's artificial intelligence industry.

"China firmly opposes this. We urge the US to respect facts, discard prejudice, stop suppressing China's technological development, and do more to promote scientific and technological exchange and cooperation between the two countries," he said.

Kratsios' memo also came the same week that the House Foreign Affairs Com-

mittee offered unanimous, bipartisan support for a bill to set up a process to identify foreign actors that extract "key technical features" of closed-source, US-owned AI models and to punish them with measures including sanctions.

"Model extraction attacks are the latest frontier of Chinese economic coercion and theft of US intellectual property," said Rep Bill Huizenga, who sponsored the bill.

"American AI models are demonstrating transformative cyber capabilities, and it is critical we prevent China from stealing these technological advancements."

Last year, the Chinese startup DeepSeek rattled US markets when it released a large language model that could compete with US AI giants but at a fraction of the cost. David Sacks, then serving as President Donald Trump's AI and crypto adviser, suggested that DeepSeek copied US models. "There's substantial evidence that what DeepSeek did here is they distilled the knowledge out of OpenAI's models," Sacks said then.

In a February letter to US lawmakers, OpenAI, the developer of ChatGPT, made similar allegations and said China should not be allowed to advance "autocratic AI" by "appropriating and repackaging American innovation."

Anthropic, the maker of the Claude chatbot, in February accused DeepSeek and two other China-based AI laboratories of engaging in campaigns to "illicitly ex-

tract Claude's capabilities to improve their own models" using the distillation technique that "involves training a less capable model on the outputs of a stronger one."

Anthropic said distillation can be a legitimate way to train AI systems but it's a problem when competitors "use it to acquire powerful capabilities from other labs in a fraction of the time, and at a fraction of the cost, that it would take to develop them independently".

But it can go both ways. San Francisco-based startup Anysphere, maker of the popular coding tool Cursor, recently acknowledged that its latest product was based on an open-source model made by Chinese company Moonshot AI, maker of the chatbot Kimi.