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69.65 pc turnout...

percent in 2008. In the 2014 assembly elections, it registered 44.08 per cent voting while it was 41.59 per cent in the Lok Sabha elections.

Shopian also recorded the highest poll percentage of 57.01 per cent in assembly elections this year compared to 43.88 percent in Lok Sabha elections (2024), 48.40 percent in the 2014 assembly elections and 50.65 per cent in the 2008 assembly elections.

The Baramulla district recorded 59.84 per cent polling in the 2024 assembly elections compared to 54.49 per cent in Lok Sabha elections earlier this year; 57.29 per cent in the 2014 assembly polls and 47.96 per cent in the 2008 assembly polls. In the Jammu region, Kishtwar district recorded the highest poll percentage (80.20 percent) followed by Udhampur (75.87 percent) then Samba (75.22 percent) and Reasi (74.68 percent). Among the 90 constituencies, the statement said the highest poll percentage has been recorded in Inderwal (82.16 percent) followed by Padder-Nagseni (80.67 percent) and Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra (80.45 percent) in this assembly elections. The votes will be counted on October 8.

Situation stable but...

side, but what we need to understand (is that) the diplomatic side gives options and possibilities," Gen Dwivedi said.

"But when it comes to the execution on ground, when it relates to ground per se; it is dependent on the military commanders on both sides to take those decisions," he said, responding to a question.

The Chief of the Army Staff also referred to disputes in Depsang and Demchok and said all the pending issues are on the table.

"Whatever one can imagine is on the table along the northern front and that includes Depsang and Demchok," he said.

Asked about China's construction of villages along the frontier with India, the Army Chief said that country is carrying out "artificial immigration" and "settlements".

"No problem, it is their country," he said, adding India is also having "model villages" in border areas.

"But more importantly, now the state governments have been empowered to put in those resources and this is the time when the army, state governments and supervision by the central government are all coming together," he said.

The model villages that are being built now will be even better, the Army Chief said.

He said there is no Chinese population close to the LAC and that is the reason Beijing is carrying out the "artificial immigration".

The Army Chief also cited how the Chinese fishermen first came to the South China Sea and then the military arrived.

Last month, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks in the Russian city of St Petersburg with a focus on finding an early resolution to the row.

In the talks held on the sidelines of a conclave of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) nations, the two sides agreed to work with "urgency" and "redouble" efforts to achieve complete disengagement in remaining friction points in eastern Ladakh.

In the meeting, NSA Doval conveyed to Wang that peace and tranquility in border areas and respect for the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are essential for return of normalcy in bilateral ties.

The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

The two sides have so far held 21 rounds of Corps Commander-level talks to resolve the standoff.

India has been pressing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to disengage from the Depsang and Demchok areas.

The two sides held the last round of high-level military talks in February.

BJP to script...

past decade. This overwhelming participation is a testament to the trust reposed in the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Prime Minister's vision for Jammu and Kashmir's future, he added.

Chugh said that PM Modi's leadership has played a pivotal role in strengthening democracy in the region. His emphasis on grassroots democracy has brought about a significant shift, with the successful establishment of a three-tier Panchayati Raj System. This development has paved the way for more effective governance and representation, he said.

He said that the ongoing assembly elections in Jammu and mark a crucial milestone in the region's journey towards stability and progress. "With voter turnout being high, it is clear that the people are invested in shaping their future," Chugh said.

Cong kept every...

and is result-oriented. Those who looted rights of poor, gave slogan of 'Garibi hatao', he said.

Modi said the Congress kept every issue important for the country entangled. "Woh ujane mein expert rahe hai."

"Congress did not let Ram temple to be built in Ayodhya, they did allow B R Ambedkar's Constitution to be fully implemented in Jammu & Kashmir, they kept our sisters deprived of reservation in Parliament and vidhan sabha, they kept Muslim sisters entangled in triple talaq problem," he said.

The Congress did not resolve problems of country and countrymen, but they put all their might in establishing their son, daughter and family, he said.

Congress declared many colleges, universities as minority institutions for its vote bank, he added.

Congress's sole agenda is appeasement for vote, maximum appeasement, Modi alleged.

He said the Congress is openly saying they will end reservation of Dalits and backwards.

In Karnataka, this is what they have done. As soon as Congress came to power there, they snatched reservation of Dalits and backwards and distributed it among their vote-bank, he alleged. Modi said he is putting this question before the country and people of Haryana that despite committing so many "sins" and doing many wrongs, Congress dreams of forming the government.

He said sometimes in name of caste, they make one fight against other. The Congress feels that the stronger the feeling of unity among the people of the country, the more difficult it will be for it to win, said Modi.

And that is why Congress is doing new experiments to break the unity of the patriots. During the Lok Sabha elections, it did the same experiments with lies. Mahatma Gandhi used to experiment with truth. They experiment with lies, he said attacking Congress, while adding the grand old party is expanding it here in Haryana as well.

Congress feels that its own votebank is sure, he said.

"Woh sochti hai ki batega, ladege woh log, jo bharat say prem karte hai "they think those people who love India will get divided and fight)," he said. "We should never let the thinking and conspiracy of Congress succeed. That is why we have to take a pledge today. Entire Haryana has to take a pledge that

all those people who love India, all of them will remain united," said Modi.

"Hum ek hai aur hum ek hokar desh k liye vote karenge (We are one and we will vote unitedly for the country). We will vote unitedly for the future of our children, for safety of our daughters, for jobs without "kharchi and prachi", for new investments, new jobs in Haryana, for good roads and better irrigation, he said.

He also alleged that Congress was in the clutches of urban Naxals.

Congress people openly hugs those who are hell bent on defaming India and those who further our enemies' agenda, Modi further alleged.

"This urban Naxal alliance can never see India strong. That is why they attack our army. Our army thrashed our enemies time and again. But the Congress royal family praised enemies," he said.

Referring to some social media posts, he said it was written that Congress are saying Article 370 will be brought back in Jammu and Kashmir but it never said it will bring PoK back.

Congress broke the crown of the country, divided Kashmir and lost a large tract of an area, Modi alleged.

These are being written on social media for Congress, he said. It is the misfortune of the country that the Pakistan government supported the Congress over the issue of Article 370, he said. An agenda which Pakistan likes, whether people of Haryana will like it, he asked.

Can Congress, which makes Pakistan happy, make Haryana happy, asked Modi.

The Congress is the most deceitful and dishonest party in the country, he said.

Meanwhile, Modi said Congress never does hard work. Congress thinks that it has been 10 years and people of Haryana will hand over power to them on a platter.

"Congress had this misconception in Madhya Pradesh too and started to celebrate victory, but on day of voting, the people showed them stars in the day, showed them the mirror," he said.

Rajasthan lies in Haryana's neighbourhood, over there too Congress had made a big attempt to instigate farmers and youth against the BJP, but what happened, Congress fell "dhadam" (fell flat).

In Haryana too, this is going to happen -- "dhadam" (Congress will fall flat)," he said.

People of Haryana are going to keep Congress at bay, he added. In Haryana, the infighting which is taking place in Congress, people are watching this, Modi said.

Modi, meanwhile, also said it has been Haryana's track record that it goes with the party which rules at the Centre. In Delhi, you formed BJP government for third time and in Haryana you have decided to form BJP government for third time, he said.

Iran attacks Israel...

missiles into Israel as retaliation for attacks that killed leaders of Hezbollah, Hamas and the Iranian military. It referenced Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Revolutionary Guard Gen. Abbas Nilforushan, both killed in an Israeli airstrike last week in Beirut. It also mentioned Ismail Haniyeh, a top leader in Hamas who was assassinated in Tehran in a suspected Israeli attack in July.

Earlier on Tuesday, Israel said it had begun limited ground operations against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon.

Israeli airstrikes and artillery fire pounded southern Lebanese villages, and Hezbollah responded with a barrage of rockets into Israel. There was no immediate word on casualties.

While Hezbollah denied Israeli troops had entered Lebanon, the Israeli army announced it had also carried out dozens of ground raids into southern Lebanon going back nearly a year.

If true, it would be another humiliating blow for Hezbollah, the most powerful armed group in the Middle East. Hezbollah has been reeling from weeks of targeted strikes that killed Nasrallah and several of his top commanders.

On Tuesday morning, Israel warned people in southern Lebanon to evacuate to the north of the Awali River, some 60 kilometers (36 miles) from the border and much farther than the Litani River, which marks the northern edge of a U.N.-declared zone intended to serve as a buffer between Israel and Hezbollah after their 2006 war.

The border region has largely emptied out over the past year as the two sides have traded fire. But the scope of the evacuation warning raised questions as to how deep Israel plans to send its forces into Lebanon.

Questions raised over whether Israeli forces entered

An Associated Press reporter saw Israeli troops operating near the border in armored trucks, with helicopters circling overhead, but could not confirm ground forces had crossed into Lebanon.

Ahead of the Israeli announcement of an incursion, U.S. officials on Monday said Israel had described launching small ground raids inside Lebanon as it prepared for a wider operation.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said Tuesday the U.N. peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon has seen sporadic incursions by Israeli military forces, but "they have not witnessed a full-scale invasion."

Hagari said Israel had carried out dozens of small raids inside Lebanon since Oct. 8, when Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel after the outbreak of the war in Gaza.

Hagari said Israeli forces had crossed the border to collect information and destroy Hezbollah infrastructure, including tunnels and weapons. Israel has said Hezbollah was preparing its own Oct. 7-style attack into Israel. It was not immediately possible to confirm those claims. Hagari said Israel's aims for its ground offensive in Lebanon were limited. "We're not going to Beirut," he said. The Israeli military was accused of lying to media in 2021 when it released a statement implying ground troops had entered Gaza. The military played down the incident as a misunderstanding, but well-sourced military commentators in Israel said it was part of a ruse to lure Hamas into battle.

Israel strikes more targets and Hezbollah fires rockets

The Israeli military official said Hezbollah had launched rockets at central Israel on Tuesday, setting off air raid sirens and wounding a man. Hezbollah said it fired salvos of a new kind of medium-range missile at the headquarters of two Israeli intelligence agencies near Tel Aviv.

The Israeli military official said Hezbollah had also launched projectiles at Israeli communities near the border, targeting soldiers without wounding anyone.

Israel's statements indicated it might focus its ground operation on the narrow strip along the border, rather than launching a larger invasion aimed at destroying Hezbollah, as it has attempted in Gaza against Hamas.

Hezbollah and Hamas are close allies backed by Iran, and each escalation has raised fears of a wider war in the Middle East that could draw in Iran and the United States, which has rushed military assets to the region in support of Israel.

Israeli strikes have killed over 1,000 people in Lebanon over the past two weeks, nearly a quarter of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry. Hundreds of thousands have fled their homes.

J&K needs visionary...

and final phase of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections, covering 40 seats across seven districts, including the winter capital Jammu. More than 39.18 lakh eligible voters are set to decide the electoral fate of 415 candidates.

77 years after migrating, jubilant West Pakistan refugees vote for first time

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

R S PURA (JAMMU): Ruldu Ram's joy knew no bounds after he voted for the first time in his life at the age of 90, nearly eight decades after migrating from Pakistan during the Partition. He was among hundreds of West Pakistan refugees in the border town of R S Pura who cast their votes for the assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

"I voted for the first time. I was not entitled to vote before. We came from West Pakistan in 1947," he said.

This marks a historic moment for many who have long lacked political representation in the J&K assembly for the past 75 years.

Around 1.5 to 2 lakh people residing in various areas of Jammu, Samba and Kathua districts, particularly in the border regions, members of three communities - West Pakistan refugees (WPR), Valmikis, and Gurkhas - finally have domicile status following the abrogation of articles 370 and 35-A.

This made them natives of J&K and therefore get rights to vote in the assembly elections, employment, education and land ownership. Previously they could only vote in the Lok Sabha polls. In July of this year, the J&K administration decided to grant proprietary rights to WPR families for the state land allocated to them during their resettlement after the 1947 migration.

"For us, it is a national festival today. It is a red-letter day in the history of these three communities, particularly West Pakistan refugees. We became part of true democracy in Jammu and Kashmir as we exercise our right to vote for the first time in our lifetime today," President of the West Pakistan Refugees Action Committee Labha Ram Gandhi told PTI.

Gandhi, who led the celebrations of the community in the border town, also known as the home of Basmati rice growers, said this was a dream come true for the community which had so

far lived as "unwanted citizens".

This paves the way to elect an MLA from the community in the future, said the 63-year-old refugee leader whose name in the electoral roll at the Nundpur polling station in Samba.

"Credit goes to the prime minister and home minister for revoking Article 370, which enabled us to become voters of Jammu and Kashmir. We are grateful to them," he added.

According to records, 5,764 families of WPRs settled in various parts of Jammu after escaping West Pakistan during the Partition in 1947. The number of WPRs has increased to over 22,000 families or 1.5-2 lakh individuals.

Ahead of voting day in the final phase of polls in J&K, West Pakistan refugees celebrated by carrying out a parade through the markets in R S Pura's Purnapind area as hundreds of community members danced to beats of dhols and bands.

They visited a temple, offered prayers and exchanged sweets on the occasion. Similar scenes of celebration were witnessed in Samba and Akhnoor as well.

Enthusiasm was high among WPR voters at several polling booths in Charka, Bishnah, Chabbay Chak, Bhour Pind, Maira Mandrian, Kot Ghari, and Akhnoor in the Jammu and Samba districts.

Fifty-two-year-old Parveen Kumar, whose family had fled during the Partition and camped in R S Pura's Bhour camp area, voted at Bhour Pind.

He said, "The decades-old curse has been lifted today as we become voters of J&K. My father Nirmal Chand was a matriculate when they came here. He did not get any job when in 1947, a matriculate could secure positions like Tehsildars and officers. He was forced to do labour to feed his family. Who is responsible for that?"

"It was all because of Article 370, which barred us from becoming citizens of J&K. But we are thankful to Modi ji,

Displaced KP vote with hope of return to their homeland

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Thousands of displaced Kashmiri Pandits on Tuesday once again cast their vote with the hope that the new government in Jammu and Kashmir will facilitate their return to the Kashmir valley.

Seventy-six-year-old Badri Nath, who have participated in several parliamentary and assembly elections, voted opti-mistically in the third and last phase of assembly polls, expressing a wish for the restoration of his home in the valley.

"I am voting once again in the hope that the new government will deliver justice to our community by fulfilling the demand to return to our homes in the valley," said Nath, who originally hails from North Kashmir's Bandipora district, after casting his vote at a polling station in Muthi in Jammu district.

Criticizing past governments for their failure to address the issue, he said, "The governments led by Farooq Abdullah in 1996, followed by Mufti Sayeed and Gulam Nabi Azad from 2002 to 2008, Omar Abdullah in 2009, and Mehbooba Mufti-BJP in 2014 failed to address the rehabilitation issue."

He added that successive Congress and BJP governments at the Centre also made minimal efforts to fulfil their demands.

"We hope that our next voting will be in Kashmir," Nath said.

A majority of nearly three

lakh members of the commu-

nity reside in Jammu and Delhi, who have been living in exile for 35 years since the insurgency in Kashmir forced them to leave their homeland.

Like Nath, young entrepreneur Vikas Raina, whose father, a principal, was assassinated by Hizb-ul-Mujahideen terrorists along with two lecturers in 1997, voted in Sopore constituency along with his wife Jagriti, hopeful that the government would not only implement rehabilitation plans in Kashmir but also ensure employment opportunities for the youth.

"It is crucial to ensure the rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits as soon as possible. Alongside job opportunities in both government and private sectors, youths should also be provided land and loans to start business in the valley," Raina emphasized.

He said that over 6,000 employees, who have been recruited under the special PM employment package, should be settled in one-place township as part of the rehabilitation.

Over 18,000 Kashmiri Pandits were registered to vote in the third and final phase of elections across 16 assembly segments in three districts of North Kashmir.

"By 3 PM, over 25 per cent of Kashmiri Pandits voted at various polling stations in Jammu, Delhi, and Udhampur," Relief Commissioner Dr Arvind Karwani to PTI.

The majority of Kashmiri Pandits reside in four camps in Jagti, Nagrota, Muthi, and Pulkhoo areas of Jammu district, with Jagati alone housing around 20,000 residents.

Sixty-seven-year-old Surinder Dhar, who fled his home in a remote hamlet in North Kashmir's Kupwara district in 1990, expressed his wish to return to his roots with his vote. "But our demand for 'ghar wapsi' (homecoming) is yet to be addressed. We hope the new government will address this."

The Election Commission established 24 special polling stations for Kashmiri Pandit voters in Jammu, one in Udhampur, and four in Delhi. Kashmiri Pandits across India, including those in Jammu and Udhampur, continue to vote for candidates in their home constituencies in Kashmir to maintain their connection with the valley.

Every year on January 19, Kashmiri Pandits commemorate their "exile" from the valley.

Many youngsters, including first-time voters Kushi from Baramulla and Neha from Kupwara, also cast their votes at polling stations in Jagti and Nagrota camps.

They said that their votes were not just for the permanent rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits but also for a "stable and strong" government capable of addressing both domestic and international challenges, and ensuring the eradication of terrorism.

who changed our fate. It is a festival for us. 'This day will be etched in the memory of all of us," Kumar added.

Mohinder Kumar, whose family came from Jhelum town in Pakistan and settled in Jammu, arrived with his son Ankit to vote at the Gandhi Nagar polling station.

"We lived under the symbol of the half-moon and star (Pakistan flag) for 75 years in Jammu and Kashmir. There was a black spot on our foreheads. Today, it has been removed by the central government. It is a national festival for us," Kumar said.

Sikh Magar Singh (80), whose family came from a village in Pakistan after losing four family members to communal violence there in 1947, said the first generation who migrated are voting along with the young generation for the first time in the assembly elections.

"We thank the prime minister for restoring the respect and dignity of over 2 lakh people by granting them citizenship. It restored all our rights, including the right to vote, the right to jobs, and the right to own land. It is a moment of celebration for us," he said.

Twenty-year old Trishika and her grandmother Sarveshwari Devi voted at a polling station in the border area of Akhnoor.

Around 2,000 members of the Gurkha community in Jammu's Gorkha Nagar, too, are brimming with excitement now that they have voting rights.

Their ancestors migrated from Nepal to J&K decades ago to serve alongside the former Dogra Army. Even today, most families have at least one family member who is a war veteran.

"It was a dream come true for me and my family to vote in the assembly elections. We express our gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji and Home Minister Amit Shah ji for transforming our fortunes here. Thanks to their bold decision to revoke Article 370, we are now citizens of J&K," Suresh Chhetri said.

LG greets people on Gandhi Jayanti

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha has greeted the people on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti, which will be celebrated tomorrow.

In a message, the Lieutenant Governor has said, "On the occasion of the 155th birth anniversary of our Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, I extend my greetings to the people and pay my humble tributes to him.

Gandhi Jayanti is an occasion for all of us to rededicate ourselves to the ideals and values of Pujya Babu on peace, truth, sacrifice and non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi had said that non-violence is a power which can be wielded equally by all-children, young men and women or grown-up people, provided they have a living faith in the God of Love and have therefore equal love for all mankind. Through his message and work on cleanliness, Gandhi Ji guided the nation towards swachhta and nation building. Taking inspiration from Bapu, our students in every school in J&K are adopting a local water body, local park or a local heritage site to undertake cleanliness drive twice every month.

On the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti let us take a pledge to follow the path of truth, sacrifice, non-violence, selfless service and cooperation and dedicate ourselves towards promoting peace and harmony in the society.

JK polls: Former ministers, candidates exercise franchise

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Several former ministers and candidates were among those who exercised their franchise at various polling stations in Jammu and Samba districts on Tuesday in the third and final phase of the assembly polls.

Many of them also highlighted that the significant voter turnout symbolises the triumph of democracy over Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Democracy has prevailed in Jammu and Kashmir. The people have defeated Pakistan-sponsored terrorism," former minister and BJP candidate for Jammu North, Shyamlal Sharma said after casting his vote here.

"We will form the government, and our victory will be a testament to the people's endorsement. They are vot-

ing for the continuity of development in Jammu and Kashmir," he added.

Former minister and candidate for the Ramgarh constituency in Samba district, Dr Devender Kumar Manyal, who along with his family cast his vote here, said, "The BJP will emerge victorious in Jammu and Kashmir. We will win this election with a majority."

Senior BJP leader and candidate for the Nagrota assembly segment, Devendra Singh Rana, predicted that the BJP government would assume power in Jammu and Kashmir.

He cited the developmental initiatives spearheaded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as pivotal to the electorate's support.

Rana expressed gratitude to the Election Commission, administration, and security forces for ensuring free and fair elections in Jammu and

Kashmir, and said "this marks a triumph for democracy as J-K undergoes transformation."

Ravinder Raina, Chief of Jammu and Kashmir BJP, said "Democracy is flourishing in Jammu and Kashmir, where the people have decisively rejected Pakistan-sponsored terrorism."

"People are voting for peace, development, progress, and prosperity. Their vote is for democracy, not for terrorism," he said.

Polling commenced at 7 am across 40 assembly segments spanning seven districts, amidst stringent security measures. Long queues were observed outside polling stations.

Over 39.18 lakh voters are eligible to determine the fate of 415 candidates, including two former Deputy Chief Ministers, Tara Chand and Muzaffar Baig.