

## !! Continuations from Page 1 !! 68.27 pc polling...

staff has performed poll duty. Actual polling started from 7.00 am and continued till 6.00 pm or conclusion of polling row, whichever was later. At every polling stations, basic minimum facilities of water, electricity, toilet, ramp, verandah/ waiting room etc were made. Even wheel chair and helper were provided to needy voters. Around 1440 polling stations had CCTV for live webcasting to control rooms.

In order to ensure inclusive voting, 19 number of polling booths manned by women (also called as pink polling stations), 14 number of polling booths manned by specially abled persons and 17 number by youths. Also, in order to spread message about environmental concern, there were 20 green polling stations. To facilitate voters identification, apart from EPIC card, other documents such as Aadhaar Card, Bank Passbooks, Driving License, PAN Card, Govt employee ID card etc documents were also allowed as per ECI directions. Media facilitation was done through the passes for more than 660 journalists.

Under the overall supervision and guidance of the Election Commission of India, Chief Electoral Officer, J&K and respective DEO encouraged all eligible voters to come forward and cast their votes responsibly. "Your vote is your voice, and it plays a pivotal role in determining the direction of governance and development in the region," the CEO J&K said.

Union minister Jitendra Singh, who is eyeing a third term after winning the Udhampur seat for the BJP in 2014 and 2019, is up against Congress leader and former MP Choudhary Lal Singh and the DPAP's G M Saroori, besides six independents.

Lal Singh and Saroori were among those who cast their votes at their respective polling stations in Kathua and Kishtwar and expressed confidence in winning the seat. Union Minister Jitendra Singh visited a polling station in Kathua to oversee the polling process. He expressed confidence in retaining the seat with a huge margin.

There are a total of 84,468 potential first-time voters, aged 18-19 years, of which 45,825 are men, 38,641 are women and two are third genders, the officials said.

They said the constituency also has a sizable elderly population, with 12,020 men and 13,612 women aged 80 and above, totalling 25,632 seasoned voters contributing to the electoral process.

## 114 special polling...

In Doda district, three Women manned, three PWD manned, two Youth manned, three Green and three unique polling stations were established. Similarly, in Kathua district, six Women manned, one PWD manned, six Youth manned, three Green, 31 Border and two unique polling stations were established for ease of voters.

Likewise, in Kishtwar, three Women manned, three PWD manned, three Youth manned, four Green and three unique polling stations were established.

In Ramban district, two Women manned, three PWD manned, two Youth manned, four Green and three unique polling stations were established. Similarly, in Udhampur, four Women, four PWD, four Youth manned, six Green and three unique polling stations were established.

The newly established polling stations aim to revolutionize the electoral process by ensuring accessibility and representation for all segments of society. With a special focus on women, youth, and PWD, these stations are equipped with amenities tailored to their unique needs, fostering an environment conducive to active participation in the democratic process.

Furthermore, the ECI's commitment to environmental sustainability is showcased through the implementation of green practices at these polling stations. Every aspect is meticulously designed to minimize environmental impact and promote a greener future.

Speaking on this milestone initiative, Chief Electoral Officer, J&K, Pandurang K Pole said that the establishment of these unique polling stations underscores our unwavering dedication to fostering inclusivity and sustainability in the electoral process.

He added that the ECI believes that every citizen should have equal access to exercise their democratic right, and these polling stations represent a significant step towards achieving that goal.

## RO stands in...

of Jammu and Kashmir. Rakesh Minhas (34), who originally hails from Punjab, came to a polling station set up at the irrigation department in the Kathua town and exercised his franchise after waiting in a queue for his turn.

Rakesh Minhas and his wife Saloni Rai, both 2016 batch IAS officers, were deputed to Jammu and Kashmir from Daman and Diu in August 2022, and they were later posted as deputy commissioners of Kathua and Udhampur districts.

Polling is underway in the Udhampur parliamentary seat, spread across five districts of Udhampur, Kathua, Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban, which will seal the electoral fate of 12 contestants, including Union Minister Jitendra Singh, Congress candidate and two-time former MP Choudhary Lal Singh and DPAP candidate and former Jammu and Kashmir minister G M Saroori.

Later, Minhas showed his index finger marked with indelible ink and expressed his satisfaction over the trend of turnout in the constituency.

"We should not be careless about our democratic rights. Even if there is a queue, it takes only 15 to 20 minutes to cast your vote," Minhas told reporters.

"My appeal to voters is to come out in large numbers and fulfil their democratic right. Voting started at 7 am and will continue till 7 pm," he said, adding the inclement weather, especially in Kishtwar, in the morning had no impact on voting, which is going on smoothly.

## Congress has not...

that his government was set to win a third term.

"When its 'yuvraj' says the country will be set ablaze, (it indicates that) Congress' mindset of shackling the Constitution and imposing Emergency has not changed," Modi said, apparently referring to Rahul Gandhi's reported remarks.

Wardha and Amravati will vote in the second phase on April 26.

The prime minister further said that each and every vote from Maharashtra should be for development.

"INDIA alliance leaders in Tamil Nadu want destruction of Sanatan (dharma), and (yet) in Maharashtra they are called to speak at rallies. Congress boycotted the Ram temple pran-pratishta (consecration).... on the first Ram Navmi (after the event), 'Surya Tilak' was done using Sun's rays and the country was filled with devotion. But an INDIA alliance leader called it a sham. This is the real face of Congress," Modi said.

"Make the Congress pay for its sins in Maharashtra," the prime minister added.

"The 2024 elections are for fulfilling the dream of Viksit (developed) and Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat. The country is all set to take a decisive step in this direction," he said.

Modi also accused Congress and the INDIA bloc of being anti-development and anti-farmer, adding that to vote for them was to waste one's vote.

"Before 2014, there was a perception that nothing good can happen in the country. There was despair all around, especially among the poor, farmers, women. A poor man's son (referring to himself) has worshipped those who had been left out (of development).... Now, the country is filled with self-confidence and is looking forward to Modi's guarantees which come with a roadmap and commitment," the prime minister said.

Listing the achievements of his government, he said some four crore people benefited from the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, 50 crore people were brought into the ambit of banking and became part of the (formal) economy, 25 crore people were brought out of the Below-Poverty-Line (BPL) category, 11 crore people got water connections, and electricity reached all villages.

"Some people may have been left out of the ongoing development process. When you come across such people, collect information and inform me. Do tell them that the benefits would reach them in Modi's third term. I want to serve each and every person and I need your help," the PM told the gathering.

In the next five years, his government will provide houses and water connections to those who were left out, and free medical treatment up to Rs 5 lakh will be provided to those who are 70 and above, he said.

The country saw modern trains like Vande Bharat and the success of Chandrayaan (moon lander) mission in the last ten years, and will now see the Bullet train dream come true and the Ganyangyan (Indian crewed spacecraft) mission, the prime minister averred.

Developed India would be incomplete without women's empowerment, he said, and highlighted his government's role in expanding the network of women self-help groups and making three crore women 'lakhpatti'.

With a slew of projects, the Centre and the Maharashtra government removed the backward tag of Vidarbha (eastern Maharashtra) which had suffered due to the Congress' anti-development agenda, he said.

## World's biggest electoral...

eastern Nagaland stayed indoors following an indefinite shutdown call by an apex body of tribal organisations to press for its demand for a separate state.

Tamil Nadu, where the BJP is trying to make inroads, was among the seven states

and three Union territories where polling was held for all the seats.

Assembly elections were also held simultaneously in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim.

The tentative figure of voter turnout till 7 pm is likely to go upwards when reports from all polling stations are obtained, the EC said, adding voters reaching polling stations till the end of polling hour are allowed to cast their vote.

Among the voters were first-timers, many newly-wed couples who came in their traditional attires, physically-challenged people and some elderly persons carried on stretchers and wheelchairs.

Minor EVM glitches were reported at some booths in Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Assam.

In West Bengal, polling was marred by violence in the Cooch Behar seat. TMC and BJP workers clashed with each other and lodged 80 and 39 complaints respectively related to poll violence, voter intimidation, and assault on poll agents, sources from both parties said.

In strife-torn Manipur, around an impressive turnout of 68.62 per cent till 5 pm was recorded.

An altercation broke out between locals and unidentified persons in Thongju assembly constituency under the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha seat.

In Chhattisgarh, 63.41 per cent voters cast their votes in the Naxal-hit Bastar Lok Sabha constituency where the CRPF jawan after the grenade accidentally went off while an officer was injured in an IED blast in another incident.

For the first time in a Lok Sabha election, voters in 56 villages in Bastar cast their vote in a polling booth set up in their own village.

In Tamil Nadu, where polling is spread over 39 constituencies, a voting percentage of over 62.19 was recorded.

Voting was delayed by an hour in some polling booths in the state such as the one near Tambaram due to technical glitches in the electronic voting machines.

Arunachal Pradesh saw 65.46 per cent of the total 8,92,694 voters exercising their franchise. Though the turnout was moderate in the morning hours due to inclement weather, it gathered momentum with weather conditions improving.

In a few polling stations in the state, polling was delayed as the electronic voting machines (EVMs) developed technical snags which were later replaced, Chief Electoral Officer Pawan Kumar Sain said.

Supporters of two candidates clashed near a polling station in the Bameng constituency in East Kameng district, Inspector General of Police (Law & Order) Chukhu Apa said, adding the situation was brought under control and polling is continuing.

Incidents of EVM damage were also reported from three polling stations in East Kameng, Kurung Kumey and Upper Subansiri districts, the police officer said.

Andaman and Nicobar Islands saw a voting percentage of 56.87 per cent. There were some minor EVM glitches but it was addressed immediately, officials said.

For the first time in the Union territory, seven members of the Shompen tribe, a particularly vulnerable tribal group of Great Nicobar Islands voted for the lone Lok Sabha seat.

Assam also reported EVM malfunctioning at three polling booths of Bihpuria in Lakhimpur, one each in Hojai, Kaliabor and Bokakhat, and one in Naharkatia of Dibrugarh, an official said.

"Most of the glitches were noticed during the mock poll, which started 90 minutes before the commencement of actual voting. Those glitches were rectified immediately. Voting started sometime late in those booths and now it is going smoothly," an official said.

A vehicle carrying an EVM partially sank into a river after water level rose suddenly, washing away a mechanised boat that was ferrying the SUV in Lakhimpur constituency. The driver and the polling officer of the vehicle managed to get out before water gushed into the vehicle.

Around 47.49 per cent of the 75 lakh voters in four Lok Sabha constituencies of Bihar exercised their franchise.

Braving incessant rains, 68.27 per cent of voters exercised their choice in the first six hours of polling in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur parliamentary constituency.

In Rajasthan, 50.95 per cent voting took place while Uttarakhnd saw 53.64 per cent polling.

In Maharashtra, a voter turnout of 55.29 per cent was recorded while the six Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh recorded a voter turnout of 63.33 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh witnessed 57.61 per cent voting, Mizoram 54.18, Nagaland 56.77 and Sikkim 68.08.

Over 16.63 crore people are eligible to vote in this phase. In the first phase, there are 35.67 lakh first time voters, besides 3.51 crore young voters in the age group of 20-29 years.

Counting of votes in the elections that will conclude on June one will be taken up on June 4.

Among the prominent candidates in the fray in the first phase are Union ministers Nitin Gadkari and Sarbananda Sonowal, Gaur.

## 'BJP indebted to...

could be seen in almost all polling stations by afternoon.

Sunil Sethi further noted that voting in Udhampur Doda Kathua Parliamentary Constituency has set the tone for future election phases in Jammu and Kashmir and party sincerely hope that similar blessings and love will be shown by public on 26th april also for Jammu Reasi Parliamentary Constituency. He thanked Election Commission for making good arrangements in the electoral process and administration and police for providing support system for free and fair elections.

BJP indebted to public for huge poll turnout

First phase of polling in Jammu and Kashmir on 19th April saw huge turnout of voters and at the last count 70 % of voters casted their votes. Terning this is dance of Democracy and blessings from the public which is very encouraging and demonstrates strong foothold of democracy in India said Bhartiya Janata Party Chief Spokesperson and Prabhari of Udhampur Doda Kathua Parliamentary Constituency Sunil Sethi.

In a press release he said that overwhelming support to Modi ji by public and great enthusiasm with which the voters came in large number to show solidarity and support to Modi ji was very apparent as was gatherable from reports from polling stations.

Sunil Sethi especially thanked Women and Youth who came in large numbers despite bad weather and casted their votes in the elections which will be changing destiny and development of the country.

He noted that number of places people had to face not only bad weather but difficulties because of power disruption etc but that didn't deter them to wait patiently for casting their votes. Long queues of voters could be seen in almost all polling stations by afternoon.

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## Modi govt will...

He said the opposition Congress has no issues to attack the BJP-led government.

"I have travelled across the country, everyone is waiting to vote for PM Modi for the third time. My roadshow in Gandhinagar on Thursday was in areas where I pasted the party's posters as a common karyakarta," he said.

The minister said for 30 years, the people in Gandhinagar have been voting for him -- first as an MLA and then as an MP -- and it was an emotional journey for him.

Shah said the BJP will register its best performance in south India in the Lok Sabha polls this time.

"South is ready to convert PM's popularity into seats," he said.

Shah said the Modi government has repeatedly asked Naxalites to shun violence.

"In 90 days, the BJP government in Chhattisgarh has worked extensively to combat Naxalism. We will eradicate Maoism from India," he said.

He also claimed that during the Congress rule in Chhattisgarh, there was no clampdown on Naxalites.

## LG calls for...

and healthcare of workers. The Lt Governor directed for streamlining the process for registration of unemployed youth and labourers in the respective departments and to improve employability of local youth in development projects. He also said that Departments should help unorganized workers to register himself or herself on e-Shram portal.

The meeting also discussed and reviewed the progress of various initiatives and schemes such as job fairs, e-Shram Portal, Ease of Doing Business, promotion of Knowledge Based Service Sector and the digital initiatives including development of Common Skilling Dashboard and J&K Youth and Skill mobile application.

The meeting was attended by Rajeev Rai Bhatnagar, Advisor to Lt Governor; Atal Dulloo, Chief Secretary; Dr Mandeev Kumar Bhandari, Principal Secretary to Lt Governor; Kumar Rajeev Ranjan, Secretary, Skill Development, Labour & Employment department and CEO Mission Youth and other senior officials.

## 25 candidates file...

April 22 is the last date for withdrawal of nominations.

The allotment of poll symbols will be done on April 23, Fakhruddin said.

The key candidates from the constituency are former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and People's Democratic Party (PDP) president Mehbooba Mufti, senior National Conference (NC) leader Mian Altaf, Zaffar Iqbal Manhas of the Apni Party and Mohammad Saleem Parray of the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP).

There are also candidates from smaller political parties and several independents, including the first non-Kashmiri person to contest an election in Jammu and Kashmir. Baldev Kumar, a resident of Punjab's Mohali who is currently residing in Jammu Tawi, has submitted his nomination from the constituency, "making him the first non-Kashmiri to contest polls in the Union Territory."

The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

## Vice Admiral Dinesh...

demits office. The government followed the seniority principle while appointing him to the top post in the Navy. Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, currently serving as Chief of Personnel, is tipped to be the next Vice Chief of Navy.

"The government has appointed Vice Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, presently serving as Vice Chief of the Naval Staff as the next Chief of the Naval Staff with effect from the afternoon of April 30," the defence ministry said.

Born on May 15, 1964, Vice Admiral Tripathi was commissioned into the executive branch of the Indian Navy on July 1, 1985. A communication and electronic warfare specialist, he has had a long and distinguished service spanning nearly 30 years. Prior to taking over as Vice Chief of Navy, he had served as Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command. Vice Admiral Tripathi has commanded Indian Naval Ships Vinash, Kirah and Trishul.

He has also held various important operational and staff appointments which include fleet operations officer of the Western Fleet, director of naval operations, principal director, network centric operations and principal director, naval plans. As Rear Admiral, he served as flag officer commanding of the eastern fleet. He also served as Commandant of the prestigious Indian Naval Academy, Ezhimala. An alumnus of National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla, Vice Admiral Tripathi has undergone courses at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, Naval Higher Command Course, Karanja and Naval Command College in the US. He is a recipient of the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) and Nau Sena Medal (NM).

## Your vote safe, come out in large numbers to exercise franchise: CEC Rajiv Kumar

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Friday dismissed apprehensions about electronic voting machines (EVMs) and assured people that their vote was safe and secure.



Kumar asserted that the EVMs were 100 per cent safe as a large number of safeguards -- technological, administrative and process-oriented -- were in place.

"It is a settled issue. It is 100 per cent safe. It has been raised in the honourable Court also. We are awaiting judgment, nothing can happen to the machines. Every stage political parties and their candidates are involved.

Mock polls are done," he told PTI, replying to questions on doubts raised on the EVMs.

"There are a large number of safeguards, technological, administrative, and process-oriented. Just enjoy the voting. This is a time to enjoy the voting, not doubt anything," the CEC said.

"Enjoy your voting, your vote is safe, secure and will be recorded as you vote," Kumar said.

The first phase of the Lok Sabha elections got underway across 102 constituencies in 21 states and union territories on Friday.

"We are getting reports from the field that even if rains are happening, people are really coming out in large numbers. Women, youth, old age people... everyone is rushing towards the polling stations. It is really a delightful situation to see that people are dancing to the tune of democracy," Kumar said.

He said the Election Commission has used technology to a great extent to ensure better voter turnout by reaching out to the youth and women voters by mapping parliamentary constituencies where voting has been traditionally less.

"A turn out plan was made depending on the local context. Lots of celebrities were roped in, a number of organisations have worked with us - petrol pumps, banks, post offices in the outreach program," Kumar said.

"We are very hopeful that people will come out to vote. It is our appeal, please join in this festival of democracy. youth, women, transgender, PwD, all geographies...It is your right, your duty, your responsibility, your pride," the CEC said.

Kumar, along with fellow Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and S S Sandhu, was monitoring the progress of the election process from the control room set up at the Election Commission headquarters here.

## BJP's surrenders for sake of power still fresh in minds of J&K people: Bhalla

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SAMBHA: JKPC Working President and Congress contesting candidate from Jammu-Reasi Parliamentary seat Raman Bhalla on Friday accused the Bharatiya



Congress candidate from Jammu-Reasi Parliamentary seat Raman Bhalla during public meeting at Samba.

Janata Party (BJP) of betraying the trust and sentiments of the people of Jammu and Kashmir since coming to power.

He specifically criticized the BJP for its handling of various issues affecting the region.

Bhalla addressing election gatherings and road shows at Bhadori, Gurha Slathia, Sunjwana, Sumb, Mandi Thalora, Mandi Sangwali, Mandhi Ghar, Mandhi Khari, Kehli Mandi, Sarore in Samba district.

Prominent among those who accompanied Bhalla include Ex Minister Yashpal Kundal, Vice President and Treasurer Rajnish Sharma Mian, Distt President Sanjeev Sharma, NC Leader Sudagar Mal Gupta, Sarpanch Shamima, Harmash Singh Slathia, DDC Rajni Devi, Adv Appu Singh Slathia, MP Singh APP Party, Adhu Hussain, Vinod Kumar, Master Davinder Singh Dr. Ramesh Singh Slathia, Sobha Singh, Anita Devi besides others.

Bhalla highlighted the prolonged deprivation of 4G mobile internet services in the region for around 18 months, attributing it to the BJP government's indifference to the demands of the people. This issue has significant implications for communication, education, and business activities in the region.

He condemned the BJP's decision to abrogate Article 370, which granted special status to J&K, as a betrayal of the people's trust. Bhalla suggested that the move has led to feelings of betrayal and downgrade among the people, especially those who valued the region's special status.

Bhalla criticized the BJP for the economic challenges faced by the people, including high inflation and rising unemployment. He accused the BJP of prioritizing its own interests over the welfare of the people, leading to economic hardships for the common masses. Bhalla appealed to the people to support the Congress party as an alternative to the BJP. He emphasized Congress's past contributions to the development of the region and presents a vision for its future, focusing on faster growth, employment generation, and the empowerment of marginalized areas.

Bhalla emphasized the importance of maintaining the secular fabric and harmony among different sections of society. He warned against forces that spread hatred and division, positioning Congress as a party that upholds the pluralistic character of the nation.

Bhalla appealed for support to Congress is backed by promises of development, empowerment, and a commitment to the welfare of the people.