

## !! Continuations from Page 1 !! SC rejects pleas...

Congress-led opposition which now must "apologise" for committing the "sin of creating distrust" against EVMs. Hailing the verdict, he claimed "their(opposition) dreams have been shattered into pieces".

The Congress on its part said in a post on X that it will continue with its political campaign on greater use of VVPATs to increase public trust in the electoral process.

The apex court also issued two directives in the EVM case.

The court opened a window for aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing second and third places in poll results and allowed them to seek verification of microcontroller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon payment of fee to the poll panel.

It also directed that from May 1, the symbol loading units (SLU) should be sealed and secured in a container and stored in a strongroom along with the EVMs for a minimum period of 45 days post declaration of results.

Request for the verification of the microcontroller can be made within seven days of declaration of the results after payment of fees, the court said.

"If EVM is found tampered during verification, fees paid by the candidates will be refunded."

An EVM comprises three units -- ballot unit, control unit and the VVPAT. All three are embedded with microcontrollers which have a burnt memory from the manufacturer.

Currently, the Election Commission conducts random matching of VVPAT slips with EVMs at five polling booths per assembly constituency. VVPAT is an independent vote verification system which enables electors to see whether their votes have been recorded correctly.

The bench suggested the poll panel can examine whether electronic machines can be used for counting VVPAT slips and also whether bar codes can be used for parties along with their symbols.

Besides seeking a return to the ballot paper system, the three petitions before it had prayed that VVPAT slips should be given to the voter to verify and put in the ballot box for counting and there should be 100 per cent counting of VVPAT slips, it said.

"We have rejected all of them," Justice Khanna said.

A few hours later, Prime Minister Modi referred to the verdict in his Araria rally.

"When the Congress, the RJD and other INDIA bloc parties were in power, the poor, backwards and Dalits used to be deprived of their votes through booth capture. With the introduction of Electronic Voting Machines, they are no longer able to play their old game. Hence, they committed the sin of creating distrust against EVMs," he said.

Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal described the court verdict as "fabulous".

He said the verdict has exposed opposition parties, including the Congress, which had left no opportunity to "defame" the Election Commission.

Penning a 38-page verdict on behalf of the bench, Justice Khanna said the incorporation of VVPAT fortifies the principle of vote verifiability, thereby enhancing the overall accountability of the electoral process.

The court said the possibility to hack or tamper with the agnostic firmware in the burnt memory of EVMs to tutor/favour results was unfounded.

"Accordingly, the suspicion that the EVMs can be configured/manipulated for repeated or wrong recording of vote(s) to favour a particular candidate should be rejected."

On the claim by the petitioners that the polling devices can be tinkered with to manipulate the results, the court said repeated and persistent doubts and despair, even without supporting evidence, can have the "contrarian impact of creating distrust".

Justice Datta, who gave his separate opinion while concurring with Justice Khanna, came down heavily on the PIL petitioners saying there seems to be a concerted effort to discredit, diminish and weaken India's progress on every possible frontier and any such attempt has to be "nipped in the bud".

He said in recent years, a trend has been fast developing of certain vested interest groups endeavouring to undermine the achievements and accomplishments of the nation.

Justice Datta further said the court cannot allow the entire process of the ongoing general elections to be called into question and upended on mere apprehension and speculation of the petitioners regarding the efficacy of EVMs.

"The mere suspicion that there may be a mismatch in votes cast through EVMs, thereby giving rise to a demand for a 100 per cent VVPAT slips verification, is not a sufficient ground for the present set of writ petitions to be considered maintainable," he said.

"A voting mechanism must uphold and adhere to the principles of security, accountability, and accuracy. An over complex voting system may engender doubt and uncertainty, thereby easing the chances of manipulation. In our considered opinion, the EVMs are simple, secure and user-friendly. The voters, candidates and their representatives, and the officials of the ECI are aware of the nitty-gritty of the EVM system. They also check and ensure righteousness and integrity," the court said.

The court also said that since 2019 the Election Commission of India has, except for one discrepancy, not detected any single case of vote mismatch or wrong recording of votes on random VVPAT verification of five polling booths per assembly constituency.

Giving physical access to VVPAT slips to voters is problematic and impractical and will lead to misuse, malpractices and disputes, it added.

EC officials pointed out that constitutional courts had rejected petitions challenging the reliability of the electronic voting machines on at least 40 occasions.

The functionaries also referred to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar's recent remarks that EVMs are "100 per cent safe" and political parties know in the "heart of their hearts" that the machines are fair.

To enhance transparency and verifiability in the poll process, the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 were amended in 2013 to introduce the use of VVPAT machines. They were first used in the by-election to the Noksen assembly seat in Nagaland.

## Two terrorists killed...

for treatment, they said. A civilian was also injured near the site of the encounter on Thursday. The operation to flush out the terrorists from the area is underway , they added.

## People tasted 'Real...'

contesting the elections from Udhampur parliamentary constituency, said.

Udhampur went to polls in the first phase on April 19 and registered



Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh along with his family after casting vote.

68.27 per cent polling, sealing the fate of the Union minister and 11 other candidates.

He said the self-esteem of the people living outside the country has increased with startup initiatives increasing from 150 in 2014 to 1.50 lakh.

"Today, the world is looking up to India because they know that they are dealing with a prime minister who has a stable government and is going to be there for the next term and can do business with any country. They are comfortable with a strong prime minister rather than having a new prime minister every year," he said.

Singh said the people are "enthusiastic" about giving a third term to Modi as they know that India has gained global stature under the prime minister's leadership and acknowledge his efforts to achieve a better future for

the youth.

Referring to the abrogation of Article 370, he said Jammu and Kashmir has joined the mainstream and became part of the development endeavour after the Modi government's decision.

"Every section of the society, irrespective of religion and region, is going to vote for the BJP because Modi united the people of the country in a single thread post-independence," he added.

Asked about the possibility of assembly elections after the completion of Lok Sabha polls in Jammu and Kashmir, he said the prime minister has already assured the people about it along with the restoration of statehood and "there is nothing more to add to his statement".

He also took a dig at the Congress over the controversial statement by one of its leaders on inheritance tax, saying "Inheritance tax is alien to democratic values, Indian culture and Indian civilisation. We have a family system in place which has a legacy so it is quite incompatible with our system."

"What is being said is with a certain political design to appease certain sections of the society and so it is a part of appeasement policy which congress has been following since decades," he said.

## 50 houses damaged...

contact Tilak Raj Sharma (Driver) at 8803165939. Order by the Medical Superintendent, District Hospital Ramban."

"An Ambulance has been kept stationed on the site, men & machinery mobilised to restore the connectivity & power supply to the affected area," DC Ramban said.

DC Ramban Baseer-Ul-Haq Chowdhary said that about 50 houses developed cracks and road connectivity between Gool and Ramban snapped on Thursday evening following the "sinking of land" in the Union Territory's Ramban district.

Locals demand immediate relief and rehabilitation of all victims.

Earlier on 15 February 2024, over a dozen residential houses and a mosque have developed cracks in village Gatsu in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district, forcing the inhabitants to move in temporary shelters.

Prior to this on 19 February 2023, at least five residential houses were damaged due to a landslide in a remote hilly village Duksar Dal village of Sangaldan in Gool Sub Division in Jammu and Kashmir's Ramban district forcing authorities to shift affected families to safer locations.

On 03 February, 2023, at least nineteen families were evacuated after their homes developed cracks at Nai Basti village in Thathri of Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district Here it also needs to be mentioned that a team of experts/scientists from the Geological Survey of India (GSI) on February 05, 2023, visited Doda to analyse land subsidence after 19 houses developed cracks.

## Congress has Muslim...

he said. In the greed of its vote bank, the Congress maintained Article 370 in Kashmir for many years, Shah alleged.

"You (people) all elected Modi ji the prime minister for the second time and he abolished Article 370 on August 5, 2019 and Kashmir became a part of India forever," he said.

Highlighting the achievements of the Narendra Modi government, Shah said the prime minister has ended terrorism and safeguarded the country.

"The Congress nourished and nurtured Naxalism due to its political interest. When Modi ji became the PM, he ended Naxalism from the country in 10 years. The menace survived only in Chhattisgarh because the Bhupesh Kalka-led Congress government was in power in the state (2018-2023)," he said.

But as soon as you elected Vishnu Deo Sai as the Chief Minister (in the last assembly elections), he and Home Minister (Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma) worked to eliminate around 90 Naxalites in just four months. 123 Naxalites were arrested and 225 surrendered (during this period), he said.

"Give a third term to PM Modi, and Naxalism will be eliminated from Chhattisgarh in two years," he averred.

Nobody can accomplish in 1,000 years what Modi has done in 10 years, Shah said.

During the Sonia (Sonia Gandhi)-Manmohan (former PM Manmohan Singh) led UPA government, every day terrorists used to enter from Pakistan and carry out bomb blasts. You made Modi ji the Prime Minister. Pakistan had got into the habit of attacking and carried out attacks in Uri and Pulwama. But this time Manmohan Singh was not the prime minister, it was Narendra Modi. Our jawans entered Pakistan and eliminated terrorists by carrying out surgical strikes and air strikes within just 10 days (of the attacks), he said.

The Union minister also accused the Congress of being anti-Other Backward Class, and said it was Modi's guarantee that no one can touch the reservations for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and OBCs.

"Rahul baba, among all the parties in the country, Congress is anti-OBC. Congress for years did not act on the Kaka Kallekar report and the Mandal Commission report and made them disappear. Modi ji gave constitutional status to the backward classes commission. Modi ji did the work of giving reservation to OBCs," he added.

"They spread lies that BJP will remove the reservation, I am saying that no one can touch the reservation of SC, ST and OBC, this is Modi's guarantee," he added.

Narendra Modi has been chief minister and prime minister for 23 years, but no corruption charges were levelled against him, while on the other hand, there are leaders of Congress and UPA who committed scams worth Rs 12 lakh crore. Now dressed in new clothes of 'INDI' (opposition) alliance, they have been seeking votes, he said.

Shah sought votes in favor of party candidate Vijay Baghel from Durg seat and said that in the last assembly elections, the people of the state had defeated the appeasement politics of Congress.

"I pay tribute to Bhuneshwar Sahu, who lost his life due to vote bank politics of Congress," he said.

On April 8, last year Bhuneshwar Sahu (22) was killed in a violence erupted in Biranpur village of Bemetara district after an altercation between school children from the two communities. Sahu's father Ishwar Sahu was elected as BJP MLA in the last assembly polls from Saja assembly seat.

Shah said, "The people of Chhattisgarh took Bhuneshwar's murder very seriously not only in Durg but in the entire Chhattisgarh. We had made Ishwar Sahu (Bhuneshwar's father) a candidate, no one believed that he would defeat a strong leader like Ravindra Choubey (of Congress). The people of Chhattisgarh gave their mandate against appeasement politics."

"Congress used to oppose the creation of Chhattisgarh state. BJP leader and our former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Atal Bihari Vajpayee created Chhattisgarh (in 2000)," he added.

The BJP has fielded sitting MP Vijay Baghel from Durg.

## Scrutiny of nomination...

Ahmad Mir from Bharat Jodo Party, Rubina Akhtar from National LokTantrik Party, Ashiq Hussain Bhat from Rashtriya Jan Kranti Party, Hakikat Singh from National Panthers Party (Bhim) and Mohammad Yousef Bhat from Gana Suraksha Party.

Similarly, the nomination papers of the independent candidates namely Sheeban Ashahi, Nissar Ahmad Ahangar, Mirza Sajad Hussain Beigh, Jibrin Dar, Shahnaz Hussain Shah, Amin Dar, Riyaz Ahmad Bhat, Fayaz Ahmad Bhat, Sayim Mustafa, Waseem Hassan Sheikh, Ghulam Mohammad Wani, Hilal Ahmad Dar, Wahida Tabasum, Dr. Qazi Ashraf, Qaiser Sultan Ganai, Abdul Hamid Rather, Javid Ahmad Wani, Jehangir Ahmad Sheikh, Sajad Ahmad Dar and Saugbi Makhdoomi were also found valid and accordingly accepted by the Returning Officer 02-Srinagar Parliamentary constituency.

On the occasion, the candidature of Salman Sagar from Jammu Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) becomes null and void due to formal consideration/ approval of the candidature of the main Candidate of JKNC as he was the covering candidate from the same party.

Likewise, nominations of 10 candidates stood rejected as their nomination papers were found invalid during the scrutiny as per ECI norms.

The scrutiny was held in presence of General Observer for 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency, Mukul Kumar, contesting candidates and their proposers.

As per the Election notification, the candidates can withdraw their nomination by April 29, 2024 (Monday) before 03:00 pm in the office of Returning Officer 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency. The 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency is scheduled for Elections on May 13, 2024 under phase 4th of General Lok Sabha Elections-2024.

## Will respect EC's decision on possible deferment of LS polls in Anantnag-Rajouri: Raina

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: With some candidates seeking postponement of polls in the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat due to adverse weather conditions, Jammu and Kashmir BJP chief Ravinder Raina on Friday said they will respect any decision by the Election Commission in this regard.

"It is a democracy. As a citizen of this country, we respect the Election Commission. If the Election Commission takes any decision (with regard to deferring elections in the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat), we will respect their decision," he told reporters here.

Raina said that only two candidates could file their

nominations from the Rajouri-Poonch region, while the majority have filed their nominations from the valley due to the closure of the Mughal road connecting Kashmir with the Rajouri-Poonch belt.

The BJP leader said that National Conference leader Omar Abdullah and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti will also face problems as the road connecting Anantnag with Rajouri-Poonch is closed due to snowfall and landslides.

"Omar and Mehbooba will have problems when they will be coming to Rajouri-Poonch for campaigning. Anyone going to Anantnag from Rajouri-Poonch for campaigning will also have problems. The road has been

closed due to snowfall and rains," he said.

Raina said the BJP has nothing to do with the Election Commission taking any decision in this regard or reviewing the situation.

"Why is the BJP continuously being targeted by Omar and Mehbooba Mufti? Mehbooba took five hours to reach from Pir ki Gali to Poonch," he said.

The BJP leader said it is the people who will decide the fate of the parties. "We are also concerned about the people due to weather conditions," he said.

The J&K BJP chief also brought up the issue of the failure of candidates to file nomination papers due to the closure of the Mughal road.

## Police hunt on to nab people attempting to 'disrespect' mosque, local shrine in Pulwama

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Police have launched a hunt to arrest the people behind an attempt to "disrespect" a local shrine and a mosque in Pulwama district, officials said.

According to police, the incident occurred on Thursday night in the Dadsara area of Tral in the south Kashmir district.

"Yesterday night, some people attempted to disrespect the local shrine and a mosque in Dadsara in Tral by damaging window-panes and also tried disrespectfully displacing the Quran," a police spokesman said.

Police suspect that the aim behind this

incident was to disrupt law and order in the state, he said.

"Besides, being put behind bars, all others who have instigated or facilitated such criminals with the motive of disturbing the peace by misusing the highly revered symbols of the Almighty too will lose all government benefits, government employment, licences and permits. The full force of the entire government shall be used to detect and punish the perpetrators," the police said.

A case was registered and further investigation is underway, he added.

## Nomination filing process begins for Baramulla PC

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

BARAMULLA: In accordance with the Election schedule announced by Election Commission of India (ECI) for the conduct of Lok Sabha Elections-2024, the Returning Officer (RO), 01-Baramulla Parliamentary Constituency, Minga Sherpa on Friday issued Election Notification for the upcoming Parliamentary Elections-2024 in the Baramulla Constituency.

The RO, 01-Baramulla Parliamentary Constituency held a press conference in this regard at his office chamber, here.

During the briefing, the RO said that the Form-1 has been issued from the RO Office Baramulla and all the interested candidates who want to contest Lok Sabha

Election from 01-Baramulla Parliamentary Constituency can file the nomination papers at the Deputy Commissioner's Office Baramulla. Minga Sherpa informed that the nomination filing period for Parliamentary Constituency commenced at 11:00 AM on April 26th and the window will remain open until 3:00 PM on 3rd May, allowing interested candidates to submit their nomination papers to contest the Lok Sabha Election. He said that the nomination forms would be scrutinized on 4th May here at the Office of the RO Baramulla, while the last date for the withdrawal of the nomination is set for 6th of May upto 3 pm. The Constituency is slated to go to the polls on 20th of May.

Providing information on

Parliamentary Constituency, the RO stated that it comprises 2103 polling stations spread across 16 assembly constituencies of Baramulla, Kupwara and Bandipora districts and two assembly segments within Budgam District.

Minga Sherpa reassured that the administration has implemented comprehensive measures and followed guidelines of Election Commission of India at every step to ensure the conduct of elections in a free, fair, and transparent manner.

RO further said that arrangements have been meticulously put in place to ensure the availability of Assured Minimum Facilities (AMFs) at all the polling stations with special provisions for the voters with physical disabilities.

## Birth year controversy surrounds NC candidate

### Aga Ruhullah's candidature

#### Salman Ali Sagar is backup candidate: Reports

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: Aga Ruhullah Mehdi, the National Conference (NC) candidate for the Srinagar Lok Sabha Constituency, finds himself embroiled in a controversy following revelations from a recent Right to Information (RTI) inquiry. The inquiry has uncovered alleged manipulation of his birth year on official documents, potentially leading to disqualification and legal repercussions.

According to the RTI filed with the Registrar of Births and Deaths in Srinagar, Aga Ruhullah Mehdi's birth date is recorded as August 11, 1982, at Gupkar Nursing Home. However, all of his election affidavits since his

first election in 2002 have stated his year of birth as 1977.

Source familiar with the matter highlighted concerns over this discrepancy, particularly referencing a previous legal case in 2002 where his uncle, Aga Syed Mahmood accused him of altering his birth year. Although the case was dismissed due to insufficient evidence at the time, the recent RTI findings have revived scrutiny over the issue.

It has also come to light that Aga Ruhullah Mehdi's passport lists his year of birth as 1982, contradicting the information provided in his election affidavits. Allegations suggest that his birth year may have been

altered in 2002 to enable him to contest elections at a younger age.

Potential consequences for Aga Ruhullah Mehdi include retrospective disqualification from previous terms as an MLA and potential jail term under Section 125-A of the Representation of People's Act. If convicted, he could face a ban from contesting elections for up to 15 years and may be required to reimburse all previous remuneration received as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

In response to these developments, the NC leadership has reportedly nominated Salman Ali Sagar, the son of its General Secretary, as a backup candidate for Aga Ruhullah Mehdi.

## Srinagar boat capsized tragedy: Another body found, death toll rises to 7

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: The body of a minor, who was missing after the April 16 boat capsized tragedy in the Jhelum river here, was recovered on Friday, taking the death toll in the incident to seven, officials said. The body of a minor boy who drowned in the tragedy in the Gandabal area in the outskirts of the city here, was retrieved from the river near the Old Zero Bridge in the Rajbagh area of the city, the officials said. They said the body was taken to a hospital here for medico-legal formalities. Six people died, while three had gone missing after the incident took place. With the recovery of the body, the death toll has risen to seven, while two others are still missing. Officials said 19 people were on board, out of which 10 were rescued.

## LS polls phase-2 has been 'too good' for NDA: Modi

### ■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday that the phase two of the Lok Sabha polls has been "too good" for the BJP-led NDA, describing the support to the ruling alliance as unparalleled. He said on X as polling ended, "Phase Two has been too good! Gratitude to the people across India who have voted today. The unparalleled support for NDA is going to disappoint the Opposition even more." "Voters want NDA's good governance. Youth and women voters are powering the strong NDA support," Modi said. The prime minister had made a similar assertion after phase one of voting on April 19, saying the ruling alliance has seen a great response. It is clear that people across India are voting for the NDA in record numbers, he said.