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MCC Distt teams...

spokesperson of Chief Electoral Officer's office, J&K, on Wednesday informed that a total of 680 wall writings, 3815 posters, 3320 banners and 5148 related material has been removed from all 20 districts of the UT.

He further apprised that 357 district MCC teams along with Flying Squad Team (FST) have performed the whole defacement removal process.

The action was aimed at ensuring that no political advertisement at the cost of public exchequer be displayed prominently in Government, public and private properties during the MCC restricted period.

Modi Govt connected...

not get to see even a motor car in their lifetime but today they are going to get the benefit of a national highway passing through their vicinity. This, he said, will be a great boost particularly for the youth and the next generation who will be benefited by drastically reduced travel time between Doda and other destinations like Jammu and Srinagar, and thus at the same time will also benefit trade, revenue and employment generation.

Accusing the Congress and its allied governments of the past, Dr Singh said, the irony is that since independence there has not been a single occasion when an MLA from this region or district was not a Minister in the State Cabinet or the MP from this region who was not a member of the Union Council of Ministers but in spite of that they did not care for the development of their own native villages which also have been provided with basic amenities like Post Office and Bank Branches only after 2014.

Dr Jitendra said, it will be a subject of analyses for future historians to understand why for over half a century this region was allowed to remain underdeveloped. Is this because the elected representatives of Congress and its allied parties from this region deliberately did not want the development process to be undertaken in this region so that the people of this region remained backward and uninformed forever and could be fooled into casting their votes after every five years.

Dr Jitendra said, in the last 10 years under Prime Minister Modi we have sought to follow a new work culture where benefits of equitable development and resources have been provided to every region regardless of vote bank considerations. For example, he said, this is the only constituency which has got not one or two but three centrally funded medical colleges out of which one is in Doda.

Similarly, Dr Singh said, this is the constituency which got the maximum number of degree colleges in the last few years regardless of vote bank consideration.This, he said, has given rise to a new realisation among the people of this region where all the communities live in harmony that Prime Minister Modi has successfully demolished the false myths and narrative created by the Congress Party about the BJP, and that BJP is the only party which follows in letter and spirit the approach of appeasement of none and justice for all.

Accompanying Dr Jitendra in this tour were former Minister and MLA Doda Shakti Parihar, former MLA Bhaderwah Dilip Singh Parihar, BJP President Vijay Thakur, DDC members, Sarpanches, local PRIs and prominent activists of the region.

LG chairs 72nd...

ratified and gave in-principle approvals to as many as 27 agenda items to augment pilgrim services and to ensure smooth functioning of the Board.

Early start of heli-service in the Jammu-Panchhi sector and Medical College of the Board at Kakryal, construction of different buildings in various Sectors aimed at augmenting capacities etc. were the major decisions taken at the meeting.

The Board observed that direct helicopter service between Jammu Airport and Panchhii Helipad on the Shrine track will not only bolster emergency response capabilities but also improve pilgrimage experience of devotees.

The Lt Governor, who is also the Chairman of SMVDSB, reviewed the progress of ongoing works and emphasized on timely completion of all projects for the ease of pilgrimage. The important projects in this regard were 'New Vaishnavi Bhawan at the shrine', 'Cottages (near Sports Stadium), Katra', 'Staff Quarters (G+2) at Banganga', 'Covered Holding Area at Adhkuwari', 'Yatri Facilitation Centre at Railway Station, Katra', 'New Yagyashala at Bhawan' etc.

The Board appreciated the facade lighting project initiated for enhancing the aesthetics/ambience at Bhawan, Adhkuwari and Darshani Deodi through a captivating visual spectacle and spiritual enlightenment.

Various new projects were also approved by the Board, which include 'Construction of Exit Track at Bhawan', 'Remodelling of Manokamna Area at Bhawan' and 'Covered Waiting Area at Darshani Deodi, Banganga'.

The Board appreciated the recent steps taken by the CEO towards development of different temples in and around Katra under its social support initiatives. The Lt Governor asked the CEO to broaden the ambit of this activity by including construction of new temples in district Reasi. He asked the CEO to come up with a comprehensive plan for consideration.

The Board appreciated the Greening initiatives reported by CEO towards improving bio-diversity and ecological balance of the area. An elaborate 'Annual Green Plan' for the year 2024-25 was also approved by the Board. The Board desired that for environmental vibrancy of Trikuta Hills, the option of aerial survey and seed dispersal through helicopters must also be initiated.

The Lt Governor emphasized for evolving a robust pilgrim-feedback mechanism, conventional and innovative means, for fostering continuous improvement in the services being provided by the Board.

Earlier, Anshul Garg, CEO, SMVDSB gave a detailed presentation on the present status of varied activities of the Shrine Board and the action taken for implementation of various decisions of the previous meetings of the Board.

Decided to contest...

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah of the promise made in Parliament. He dismissed National Conference leader and former chief minister Omar Abdullah's claim that he was an outsider in Anantnag and said, "This is absolutely baseless. This is my state and my country and I can contest from anywhere. When Omar Saheb was in school, I contested from Washim in Maharashtra and won from there."

He said Jammu and Kashmir needs thermal power stations to meet its electricity requirement and if he is elected to the Lok Sabha, he will ensure that the Union territory's power demands are met.

PDP, NC to...

While holding talks with the Congress on seat-sharing in J-K, the NC had made it clear that they will be contesting the three valley seats as they had won these in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The NC left two seats in Jammu for the Congress as part of the INDIA bloc's seat-sharing agreement.

Mufti said the need of the hour for the political parties in Jammu and Kashmir was to remain united after the Centre revoked the erstwhile state's special status in August 2019.

The former J-K chief minister, however, said the attitude of the NC leadership was disappointing and hurtful.

"When the INDI alliance's meeting took place in Mumbai, I said there that since (NC president) Farooq Abdullah is our senior leader, he will take a decision (on seat-sharing) and will do justice. I had hoped he would keep the party interests aside," she said.

But the NC took the decision to contest all the three seats in Kashmir unilaterally, she added.

Mufti said if the NC had approached her and consulted the PDP before announcing the decision, her party could have decided not to field candidates in the larger interests of Kashmir.

"But, the way Omar (Abdullah) announced the decision without taking us into confidence, and by saying that the PDP has no workers or support so they will not get a single seat, it hurt my workers and broke their hearts," she added.

She was referring to Omar Abdullah's March 8 press conference in which he announced that the NC would contest from all three seats in the valley and will not leave any for its INDIA bloc partner the PDP.

Abdullah, on his part, said he had not "made any remarks about her party and, therefore, I have nothing to say on this". The PDP was going back on the understanding reached for the DDC polls where the parties having won the seats would field their candidates, he said.

"What can I say about this? It is their own will. How can I stop them? We announced candidates for the three seats of Kashmir based on their own formula," the former chief minister of J-K said.

When the DDC elections took place, the NC had asked the PDP that seat-sharing should be done on the basis of the results of the 2109 parliamentary elections but the latter did not accept that, Omar Abdullah said.

"They told us that the candidates will be decided on the basis of the 2014 assembly polls. The decision was made that whoever had won the assembly seat will contest from that seat. So, in this parliamentary poll, the same formula was applied. Wherefrom we had won, we decided to field candidates," he added.

Abdullah said since there was no scope for seat sharing with the PDP in the parliamentary polls, "we would keep a scope for the assembly elections".

"But, now if Mehbooba Mufti has decided to contest on all seats, then perhaps she does not want an alliance for the assembly polls as well. In that case, I cannot say anything. We had kept the doors open, but if they are closing those doors, it is not our fault," he added.

On DPAP founder Ghulam Nabi Azad entering the fray for Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat, Abdullah said he was surprised.

"I am quite surprised that Azad has chosen to fight from Anantnag-Rajouri-Poonch. I would have thought that if he is keen to enter Parliament, he should have fought from his bastion, his strength in Chenab valley. I would have thought he would have fought the Udhampur seat.

"The fact that he is not fighting from Udhampur and that he is fighting from Anantnag-Rajouri-Poonch, clearly there is (something) more than meets the eye," he said.

Omar Abdullah said he cannot say anything about the reason and under what pressure did Azad come to contest the Lok Sabha elections from Anantnag.

He said the NC has fielded the best and strongest candidate in Mian Altaf Ahmad.

"Whoever is contesting against him, we hope Altaf will win with a thumping majority," he added.

Farooq Abdullah won't...

in Rawalpura on the outskirts of the city here.

"He (Farooq Abdullah) has taken permission from (party's General Secretary) (Ali Mohammad) Sagar and other party members to not contest the polls this time because of his health," Omar Abdullah said.

He said it is now the party's responsibility to field the best candidate from the constituency. He hoped that the voters would help the NC candidate succeed so that he/she becomes a voice of the people of Srinagar in Delhi.

In the 2002 Legislative Assembly elections, Omar Abdullah was chosen to lead the NC, while the 86-year-old Farooq Abdullah shifted base to the Centre.

Farooq Abdullah was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 2002 from Jammu and Kashmir and then re-elected in 2009. He resigned from the Rajya Sabha in May 2009 and won a seat in the Lok Sabha from Srinagar.

Abdullah joined the United Progressive Alliance government as a Cabinet Minister of New and Renewable Energy.

Abdullah contested the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat again in the 2014 elections but was defeated by the Peoples Democratic Party candidate Tariq Hameed Karra.

He won the polls again in 2019.

Omar Abdullah said the upcoming Parliamentary election was very different from the past polls.

"For the last 30 years, the elections have been affected in one way or the other due to which the people did not participate in the polls -- be it because of the gun or boycott calls. Our politics in Srinagar had been limited. Few areas used to come out to vote and our politics used to run on that.

"This time, the atmosphere will be different. We will not see any boycott calls, and the impact of guns will be far less. This time, the people of Srinagar have to decide whether they want to participate in politics here or not. They have to decide whether they want to raise their voice or not, whether they want to choose their representative or not," the NC vice president said.

Will not stop taking action against corruption: Modi

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

KOLKATA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said he remains committed to taking action against corruption, emphasising that those engaged in corruption have two options left - jail or bail.

Modi, while virtually interacting with BJP workers from West Bengal through the NaMo app, said the entire country has witnessed how the Trinamool Congress (TMC) has resorted to violence to stop BJP workers, but the saffron workers fearlessly stood their ground.

The Prime Minister slammed the TMC and Congress-Left alliance fighting against each other in Bengal polls as a "superficial fight" as all the three parties are the same.

"There is a superficial conflict between the Left, TMC and Congress in Bengal. They are all allies. This is an alliance of the corrupt. Those parties which are friends in other states, act as foes here. Their fight is not against each other, but against the BJP, as the BJP government is acting against their corruption. Let them do whatever they want as Modi will not stop taking action against corruption," he said.

"The corrupt have come together and keep abusing Modi. For these corrupts, there are only two options left - jail or bail," he said.

Referring to poll violence, Modi said electoral violence is the biggest challenge in Bengal.

"The biggest challenge in West Bengal elections is electoral violence, but the Election Commission has made arrangements for the security and safety of the people. We all also monitor the events that unfold in West Bengal. We have to reach every voter's house and encourage them to vote fearlessly," he said.

Modi claimed that before every election, the TMC tries to stop the BJP workers by hook or by crook.

"The country has seen how BJP karyakartas have worked despite the threats. The TMC tries to stop the BJP by resorting to violence. The country has also seen how BJP workers fearlessly

stood in their booths. We are confident of winning more seats this time," he said.

Lauding the role of the BJP workers in serving the people of the state, Modi said, "It is due to these sustained efforts by the BJP workers that the faith of the people in the BJP is increasing with every passing day."

"It is laudable how BJP karyakartas of West Bengal manage to work in a hostile environment. Our workers are putting themselves in danger and working for the people. I am confident that time we will win more seats than we had won the last time," he added.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had won 18 seats, the TMC (22) and the Congress (2).

Modi also urged party workers to reach out to the women voters of the state and "inform them about the initiatives by the central government which were not allowed to be implemented in West Bengal."

"Do the people of West Bengal know how TMC has destroyed the future of youths and does not let the welfare initiatives of the central government get implemented in Bengal? Over the past 10 years, the BJP government has worked relentlessly for people, especially for Nari Shakti. I urge you to enlist all the initiatives which don't reach the intended beneficiaries and make people aware of how the TMC government is creating hindrances," he said.

The prime minister put the amount of money, which was paid by people in the state as bribe for getting jobs, at Rs 3,000 crore.

"Around Rs 3,000 crore has been attached by the ED. Someone has given bribes to get jobs. If proven, I would ensure that those who have given bribes to get jobs will get back their money. I would urge all of you to tell this to the people," he said.

While talking to BJP's Krishnanagar candidate Amrita Roy last week, Modi had said he is working to ensure that nearly Rs 3,000 crore "looted" from poor people in West Bengal and attached by the Enforcement Directorate is returned to them.

At SCO meet, Doval flags concerns over cross-border terrorism; mentions LeT, JeM

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN): Perpetrators of terrorism should be effectively and expeditiously dealt with including those involved in cross-border terrorism, NSA Ajit Doval said on Wednesday, calling for shunning double standards in combating the menace.

In an address at a security conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) here in the Kazakh capital, he also underlined the need for holding accountable the sponsors, financiers and facilitators of terrorism, in remarks that came amid Pakistan's continuing support to various terror groups.

Doval raised the issue of the continued threat posed by various terror groups in the SCO region, including those designated by the UN Security Council such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, Al Qaeda and its affiliates and ISIS, sources said.

He said India is committed to enhancing transit trade and connectivity asserting that such initiatives must be fully respectful of sovereignty and territorial integrity of SCO member states.

The comments came in the face of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) facing increasing criticism over lack of transparency and disregard for the sovereignty of nations.

The National Security Advisor strongly condemned the barbaric terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall in Moscow on March 22 and expressed condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones.

Doval conveyed to Russian NSA Patrushev, India's solidarity with the government and the people of Russia to address the threat from terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

He pointed out that any act of terror including cross-border terrorism committed by whomsoever, wherever and for whatever motives is not justified, according to the sources.

Perpetrators of terrorism should be effectively and expeditiously dealt with including those involved in cross-border terrorism, he said.

Doval emphasised the need to counter the use of technology by terrorists including drones for cross-border smuggling of weapons and drugs.

India supports the creation of an effective mechanism for cooperation within RATS-SCO for countering terror financing and supports its further strengthening, he said.

In his remarks, Doval expressed deep concern for the security situation in Afghanistan including the continued presence of terrorist networks.

He noted that as a contiguous neighbour of Afghanistan, India has legitimate security and economic interests in Afghanistan.

Doval also conveyed that the SCO's

immediate priorities in Afghanistan include providing humanitarian assistance, ensuring the formation of a truly inclusive and representative government, combating terrorism and drug trafficking and preserving the rights of women, children and minorities.

India has invested USD three billion in Afghanistan and supplied 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat, 250 tonnes of medical aid and supplied 40,000 litres of Malathion pesticide to fight the locust menace.

In the meeting of Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev with the secretaries of the security councils of the SCO member states, Doval conveyed India's support for Kazakh initiatives in the grouping and for a successful presidency.

India is committed to further deepening its relationship with SCO and member states proactively and constructively, Doval said.

Security is India's priority in the SCO as elaborated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in line with his vision for a SECURE SCO, he noted.

The acronym SECURE stands for Security, Economic Cooperation, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity, and Environment Protection.

Doval emphasised that India's relationship with SCO countries goes back several centuries and it is committed to further deepening it.

EC reviews law and order, security situation for LS polls

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission (EC) on Wednesday directed the chief secretaries and directors general of police of all states as well as the heads of central agencies to ensure peaceful and inducement-free Lok Sabha polls and take pre-emptive measures to address communal tensions based on past experiences.

Recent violence and turmoil in Manipur and its ramifications for the conduct of a peaceful election were also addressed, with the EC urging for swift action to assist internally-displaced persons and ensure their participation in the electoral process, the poll panel said.

In his remarks, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said it is the "most important and crucial" meeting that takes place every five years of the election cycle.

Kumar told the officials that the EC seeks to deliver "absolutely spotless elections".

The EC had convened the meeting to bring all the stakeholders concerned on one platform for a seamless coordination and cooperation among the officials of neighbouring states and Union territories. Other key issues discussed at the meeting included a diligent deployment of central forces, logistical support for the movement and transportation of the security personnel and identification and monitoring of flashpoints in border areas that might have ramifications for the election process, the poll panel said.

The commission underscored the importance of strict vigilance to curb the movement of contraband items, including narcotics, liquor, arms and explosives, across the international borders.

It also sought identification of the entry and exit points for the movement of liquor and cash along the borders and curbing of illegal ganja cultivation in some states.

The commission reviewed the support from the Indian Air Force and state civil aviation departments for sorties to ferry polling teams in challenging regions of 11 states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra.

Directions were given for adequate security measures to safeguard political functionaries and poll candidates based on their threat perception, particularly in states like Chhattisgarh and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

Top officials of central forces, the Coast Guard, state chief secretaries and representatives of the defence ministry and railways attended the hybrid meeting.

4 more candidates file nomination for Jammu Lok Sabha constituency

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Four more candidates today filed their nomination papers from Jammu Lok Sabha constituency for second phase of ensuing parliamentary elections scheduled to be held in Jammu and Kashmir on April 26. The candidates, Rattan Lal from Jammu & Kashmir People's Conference, Atul Raina as independent candidate, Roop Krishan Dhar from Jammu & Kashmir People's Conference (Covering Candidate) and Ganesh Choudhary from Hindustan Shakti Sena filed their nomination papers in the office of Returning Officer. With the filing of nomination papers by these four candidates, the total number of candidates who have filed their candidature for 5-Jammu PC goes to seventeen. The last day for filing of nomination papers is April 04, 2024 up to 03:00 PM.

"One lakh people have died, thousands have been jailed. An army of orphans, an army of widows and there is no accountability? Were they not humans? Don't their lives matter?" he asked.

Lone said his father, Abdul Gani Lone, was a political person who gave up on electoral politics after the 1987 polls.

"My father participated in elections till 1987 but not after that. That is why we do not use his photos in our campaign. We respect his stand," he said.

Sajad Lone demands FIR against Farooq, Cong leaders for 'rigging' 1987 J&K Assembly polls

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

SRINAGAR: People's Conference chief Sajad Gani Lone on Wednesday said a case against National Conference president Farooq Abdullah and others for their role in the alleged rigging of the 1987 Jammu and Kashmir Assembly polls will be the biggest confidence-building measure towards Kashmiris.

"As far as 1987 is concerned, I strongly believe that even today, the biggest CBM (confidence-building measure) towards Kashmiris will be an FIR in which Farooq sahib, Congress leaders and bureaucrats are named for rigging the election," Lone told reporters in north Kashmir's Kupwara district.

The separatist-turned-mainstream politician is contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls from the Baramulla constituency.

Lone said there has been no accountability for the election rigging in 1987, which he claimed was the trigger for the outbreak of violence in Jammu and Kashmir.