

# Opposition trying to divide country on caste and religion: Gadkari



■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**  
UNA (HP): Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday alleged a section of the opposition is trying to divide the nation on caste and religion with the help of internal and external powers.

Gadkari attacked the Congress for trying to "mislead" people about the working of the BJP and its leaders. He called the Congress a "party of liars and the corrupt" and claimed there are no charges of corruption against the BJP leaders.

Calling the last phase of Lok Sabha polls on June 1 "vital", Gadkari said, "It is the duty of all to elect only those who had worked for their welfare and gave new directions to the nation's

policies and programmes." The Union minister was seeking support for BJP Lok Sabha candidate from Hamirpur Anurag Thakur and Kutlehar Assembly candidate Devinder Bhutto.

Only the BJP can bring radical changes to society and work for the welfare of the masses, Gadkari said while addressing a rally at Kutlehar in Himachal Pradesh's Una district.

In the history of India, if anyone worked to connect villages with roads, it was former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he said, adding that the BJP stalwart had launched Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana.

"I am not a minister who sells dreams, I actually

work and no journalist can question my work," the minister said.

Gadkari said the work on the bridge on Lathiani-Mandali (Govind Sagar Lake) at a cost of Rs 920 crore will start after the elections are over. The bridge would be beneficial for the people of Una, Hamirpur and Bilaspur, he added.

He said Himachal Pradesh was getting top priority in road construction with focus on linking inaccessible places through tunnels. Eight tunnels are being made till Leh and 28 ropeways are being made in the state with Rs 16 thousand crore, he added.

Similarly, the Renuka Dam and the Kishau Dam projects were being constructed. He said that what the Congress could not do in 60 years, the BJP government has done in 10 years, and the entire credit for this goes to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He exhorted people to join hands with the BJP and make Narendra Modi Prime Minister of India once again by voting for the BJP candidates.

# 16 cars gutted in east Delhi, 5 shops damaged in Chandni Chowk blaze



■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**  
NEW DELHI: Sixteen cars were gutted by a fire that broke out at a civic authority-run parking lot in east Delhi's Madhu Vihar area on Wednesday, officials said.

No one got injured in the incident that was reported at 1.17 am. Nine fire tenders were pressed into service and they controlled the blaze in four hours, an official from Delhi Fire Service (DFS) said.

The cars belonged to the locals who used to park their vehicles in the parking lot on rent basis, the officials said.

Earlier, the officials said that 17 cars were gutted but Madhu Vihar SHO Rajesh Sinha later confirmed that 16 vehicles were damaged in the

fire.

"Some vehicles were damaged but we managed to save the rest. There were no injuries in the incident," DFS officer Yashwant Meena said.

According to a police officer, it is suspected that the incident could be a result of some fire in the bushes in the area. A case is being registered and

further probe is underway.

More than 100 cars were parked in the facility, but timely action by the police and fire department saved the rest of the vehicles, he said.

"Our teams acted promptly after the emergency call. Our priority was to save lives," the officer said.

# Punjab: ED raids illegal mining sites in Punjab; seizes Rs 3.5 cr cash

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

CHANDIGARH: The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday conducted searches at multiple locations in Punjab as part of a narcotics linked money laundering case that involves prime accused Jagdish Singh alias Bhola, official sources said. The agency has seized about Rs 3.5 crore in cash during these raids. A total of 13 premises in Rupnagar district are being

searched after it was found that "illegal" mining was being done on a land that was earlier attached by the ED in the Bhola case, the sources said. Some of the accused in this alleged illegal mining case include Nasibehand and Shree Ram stone crushers and some others, the sources said. The drugs money laundering case pertains to a multi-crore synthetic narcotics racket that was unearthed during 2013-

14 in Punjab. The ED case was booked on the basis of FIRs filed by the Punjab Police. The case is commonly known as the Bhola drug case to identify the alleged "kingpin", wrestler-turned-policeman-turned-"drug mafia" Jagdish Singh alias Bhola. Bhola was arrested by the ED in January 2014 and the case is currently in trial before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in Punjab.

# Rajkot fire: Have got green signal to quiz top officials, says SIT chief; all DNA samples matched

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

AHMEDABAD: The chief of the SIT set up to probe the Rajkot game zone fire that killed 27 said on Wednesday that they have been given the go-ahead to question even senior IAS and IPS officials if the probe warranted.

In a related development, the Rajkot collector said that the DNA samples of all the victims have been matched with their relatives.

The Special Investigation Team chief Subhash Trivedi spoke to the media after Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi met the SIT members in Gandhinagar and reviewed the progress in the probe.

"We have been instructed to probe the roles of officers associated with Rajkot Municipal Corporation, fire department, police and power utility firm and take stern action if they are found guilty," said Trivedi.

A massive fire at the TRP Game Zone, a recreation facility, claimed the lives of 27 persons, including children, on May 25, prompting the



state government to set up the SIT.

The SIT comprises the commissioner of technical education BN Pani, director of the Gandhinagar-based forensic science laboratory HP Sanghvi, Ahmedabad's chief fire officer JN Khadia, and MB Desai, the superintending engineer of the roads and buildings department.

A separate investigation is being conducted by the Rajkot police that have arrested five persons so far.

"MoS Home (Sanghavi) has clearly told us to question even senior government employees, including IAS and IPS officials, if needed. In the

coming days, they will be called by the SIT for the purpose of investigation. The SIT is also probing the role of each of the seven government employees, including two police officers, who were already suspended," said Trivedi.

Since the game zone operators had stored over 30 litres of petrol on their premises, which was beyond the permissible limit, relevant sections will be added to the FIR under the Petroleum Act, said Trivedi.

"The minister has asked us to conduct a thorough probe so that action can be taken against those who were responsible for this tragedy. This is a

fool-proof case. A commercial structure was erected on a piece of land without acquiring NA (Non-Agriculture) clearance. Police will record statements under section 164 of CrPC," Trivedi said.

Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) pertains to recording of statement by a Magistrate.

He said Director General of Police (DGP) Vikas Sahay is supervising the probe being conducted by the Rajkot police into the incident.

Meanwhile, Rajkot Collector Prabhav Joshi announced that DNA samples of all the 27 deceased, whose charred bodies were recovered from the rubble, have been matched with their relatives and there are no further claimants as of now.

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

BENGALURU: An otherwise silent General Post Office in Bengaluru is witnessing an unprecedented rush of women hurrying to open India Post Payment Bank accounts, anticipating a monthly deposit of Rs 8,500 into their accounts if the INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre.

The elections are still in the process but women, largely from the minority communities sporting burqas, stood in long queues to open the account.

Some of them believed that opening the IPPB account would ensure that they get Rs 8,500 per month.

A woman said she stood in queue early in the morning itself. Another said everyone in her neighbourhood was saying that money would start coming from the day the account is opened, so she too came to open an account. Most of the women PTI



spoke to were from Shivajinagar, Chamarajpet and surrounding places in the city.

Talking to reporters, Chief Post Master of GPO Bengaluru H M Manjesh said people have been coming to the office to open IPPB accounts in the belief that the Department of Post would credit Rs 2,000 or Rs 8,500 into their accounts.

"Actually it is a rumour. Somebody has spread this rumour. The department will not pay any amount to them. However, this account can be used for any type of online transaction or even Direct

Benefit (Transfer) scheme," Manjesh clarified.

He said that the department has already informed the customers about this. "We have displayed some posters also. In spite of that, customers are requesting that we open IPPB accounts for them."

There was such a rush that more counters were opened outside the GPO building, under the open sky, he added.

"Earlier we used to open 50 to 60 accounts in a counter. Now we have made separate arrangements. We have brought our postmen for this purpose and regularly we are

opening around 500 to 600 accounts, sometimes even 1,000 accounts in a day," Manjesh said.

According to sources in the department, this rush has been witnessed for the past three days. It is learnt that some Congress MLAs spread the rumours, believing which the women made a beeline for the GPO.

The MLAs said that the women will start getting money after June 4 "when the INDIA bloc will come to power".

The Congress has made a promise to launch the Mahalakshmi scheme under which Rs 8,500 will be directly credited into the account of women heads of families belonging to Below Poverty Line (BPL) category.

It is similar to the Gruha Lakshmi guarantee scheme started by the Karnataka government in which Rs 2,000 is paid to women heads of BPL families.

# Foreign policy issues strike home in Patna and surrounding areas, say voters

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

PATNA: In the quiet village of Maner, many worlds removed from the Ukraine-Russia war zone or the rooms of power where diplomatic nuances are hampered out, global issues and India's profile are discussed animatedly and even a factor as people get ready to vote.

Most people may not completely comprehend the intricacies of foreign policy but that doesn't mean they are ill-informed, said Manoj Saw, a mehndi artist from the village on the outskirts of the Bihar capital. Describing the scene in his neighbourhood, he also identifies the reason for this interest.

The game changer, in his view, is mobile phone penetration. While jobs and prices are predominant, pressing global concerns have huge resonance too, said the 40-year-old.

The Bihar capital has two parliamentary constituencies -- Patna Sahib and Pataliputra -- both of which have sitting MPs from the BJP. Elections for these two seats will take place on June 1, the last round of the seven-phase exercise.

Saw said many nuances escape him but he is aware of India's role in G20 and the role of the government in evacuating Indian students after the Ukraine-Russia conflict broke out.

"Earlier, when mobile phones had not reached villages, we had to wait for newspapers the next morning to know what has happened even in Patna. Now,

thanks to our mobile phones, we get to know immediately what is happening in Delhi, and outside India," Saw told PTI.

He said he knows of the Ukraine-Russia conflict that began in 2022. "I don't understand it much but I had seen in the news that Indian students were evacuated by the government. People I know are talking about such issues more than in previous elections."

The Maner resident, who sets up shop at the Maurya Lok Complex in the city, said External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's videos are popular. "I see them with Hindi subtitles if available," he said.

Over the years, the understanding of foreign policy issues has grown in not just Maner but other areas, including rural belts, in and around Patna.

Saw is evidence of it. As is Laxman Kumar, who makes his living selling lassi and keeps himself informed through videos on YouTube and other social media platforms and news items.

"I had seen videos of G20 too when it happened in India," the 23-year-old said. This is the first general election since India hosted the G20 summit last year. India held the chair of the influential bloc for a year starting December 1, 2022.

According to Patna native Diptanshu Sinha, 27, the successful hosting of G20 and Jaishankar's persona coupled with his "astronomical number of followers" on

social media have taken foreign policy from metros to small towns.

"I certainly think of it as a citizen, and a voter, but domestic issues are far too many which take precedence. However, many of my friends and acquaintances in my neighbourhood in Patna say the image and profile of India globally has gone up, and therefore it is a voting factor for them" he told PTI.

Sinha, an architect who last year moved to Gurgaon for a new job, booked tickets to travel to Patna to cast his vote in Patna Sahib Lok Sabha seat.

BJP's incumbent and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad is seeking a second term from the seat, while the opposition INDIA bloc has fielded Anshul Avijit, grandson of former railway minister Babu Jagjivan Ram and son of former Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar, on a Congress ticket.

In Pataliputra, BJP has locked horns with RJD's Misa Bharati, Lalu Yadav's daughter, seeking to wrest the seat from Ram Kripal Yadav.

Subhash Kumar, who is in his mid 60s and runs a printer shop in an old lodge near Patna Junction railway station, said he closely follows global news, particularly the Ukraine-Russia and the Israel-Hamas conflicts as well as India's response to such evolving geopolitical situations.

Patna-based author and

film critic Prashant Ranjan also credits the "wider consumption" of foreign policy-related news to the penetration of mobile phones in villages and small towns.

"I see old men in my villages listening to speeches of S Jaishankar and watching his videos, most of which go viral. They may not know much about diplomats or diplomacy, but their consumption of foreign policy-related stuff has grown manifold," he told PTI.

Ranjan, who voted in the sixth phase of the elections in East Champaran Lok Sabha seat, said he is keeping a close watch on the twin contests in Patna.

"A villager in my district may not know Jaishankar's exact job, but they will say he was posted abroad as an officer and did good for the country. Many of these villagers even know South China Sea. That's how deep foreign policy has seeped into the psyche," he said.

Of course, Jaishankar's appeal to the youth, his social media outreach is a factor in popularising foreign policy domestically, Ranjan added.

Over 43 lakh voters in total are eligible to exercise their franchise, spanning the two constituencies, according to official data shared by Patna district authorities.

While domestic issues largely find space in election rallies and political speeches, both the ruling BJP and Congress, the largest opposition party in INDIA bloc, have devoted a chapter to

foreign policy in their manifestos, notably amid the ongoing geopolitical scenario.

Congress in its manifesto pledged to "restore India's global reputation as a voice of peace and moderation in world affairs" and said it will "work to strengthen India's role in multilateral institutions".

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The BJP manifesto speaks of a 'Vishwa Bandhu Bharat' and a 'Bharat First foreign policy' that will further position it as a voice of the Global South, as a first responder in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, besides its bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

"... as one surveys the political landscape in India, foreign policy seems to have descended from its rarified perch. Conversations about India's role in the world can be heard on street corners, at the dinner table, and around the proverbial water cooler. While elites might still dominate the production of foreign policy, its consumption has been democratised," reads an article in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

As voters in Patna and its nearby areas prepare to exercise their franchise, it certainly seems so.

# HC seeks JMI stand on prof's appeal against order quashing appointment as officiating VC



■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought the stand of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) on a plea by professor Eqbal Hussain challenging a single judge's order quashing his appointment as the pro vice chancellor and subsequently as the officiating VC of Jamia, holding that the appointments were not made in conformity with the relevant statute.

Hours after the order, the university appointed Prof. Mohammad Shakeel as the officiating VC. The counsel for the petitioner urged the court to grant him interim relief in the matter.

The bench, also comprising Justice Tara V Ganju, however refused to pass any such order in the appeal, saying, "We're not going to infringe working of a person who is already in office."

The single judge had directed that fresh appointment to the post of officiating VC be made within one week and also asked the 'Visitor', who is the

President of India, to order initiation of the process of appointing a regular VC in the meantime.

Hussain has filed a separate petition against the appointment of Prof Shakeel as the officiating VC.

He has said the fresh appointment is in violation of the court's order which "in clear and unambiguous terms" asked the Visitor to appoint an officiating VC.

On Tuesday, Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma and advocate Pritish Sabharwal, appearing for JMI, had informed the high court that the nominees of the Visitor participated in the meeting of the authorities concerned that decided on the appointment of Shakeel, the senior-most professor, and the matter was being considered by the Visitor.

On September 14, 2023, the then VC, Prof Najma Akhtar, had appointed Hussain as the Pro VC of Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI). Subsequently, upon Akhtar's superannuation on November 12, 2023, another notification was issued by the office of the registrar about Hussain assuming the charge of officiating VC.