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He commended the efforts of the district administration under the leadership of DEO Abhishek Sharma for successfully managing the election process across the district's diverse terrain. He also appreciated the special arrangements made for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and senior citizens, ensuring their participation in the democratic process. The deployment of security forces at sensitive polling stations was also lauded.

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### PDP Distt President...

embracing the BJP," he said. He added, "The BJP will form the next government in Jammu and Kashmir on its own."

Sharma claimed that the abrogation of Article 370 under PM Modi's leadership has brought peace to the Union Territory. "People are now living with dignity. A record number of tourists are visiting, and film shoots have resumed after more than three decades," he said.

He criticised the National Conference (NC) and the Congress for their role in "fostering" terrorism and unrest in the region.

"These parties are now pledging to release jailed terrorists and stone-pelters. They want to bring death and destruction back to Jammu and Kashmir," Sharma said, challenging the Congress to clarify its stance on Article 370 and the reservation rights for Gujjars, Pahadis, and OBCs, which he said were secured by the Modi government.

Sood, while addressing the gathering, expressed confidence in the BJP's "growing" popularity.

"There is a strong wave of support for the BJP, and after visiting various areas across Jammu and Kashmir, I am certain that the BJP will form the next government with full majority," he asserted.

### Foreign diplomats watching...

and democratic. "It is great to see the enthusiasm; it's great to see Kashmiris out voting after a pause for 10 years. We are very excited to see the results. It looks very healthy and very democratic," Andrews told PTI Videos at a polling station here.

The US diplomat said the process here was similar to how it happens in his country.

"It is very comparable. In my country, we use schools as well for voting. So it looks very similar," he added.

South Korea diplomat Sang Woo Lim liked the idea of Pink polling station, an initiative of the Election Commission of India where polling stations are managed by all-female staff.

"It is my first time here in Kashmir. I am happy to be here as a part of the MEA delegation. I see it is a beautiful place and people are very nice. It is special to witness how democracy works. This idea of a pink polling station is very ingenious. It is a great way to attract more people to come to vote," Lim added.

Singapore deputy head of the mission in Delhi Cheng Wei Wei Alice said it was wonderful to be part of the delegation observing the polls here.

"I am glad that all the voters showed up. That's wonderful to see. The process is very similar to how we conduct elections in Singapore. We use government buildings for polling stations so that it is easily accessible to voters," she said.

Alice said the delegates were "very thankful to the MEA for organising this trip and allowing us to visit the polling stations".

### Chugh trashes Rahul...

please its mentors in Pakistan", he added. Chugh said the Modi government has shown a new sunrise to the people of J&K, making the Union Territory a tourist capital of the country whereas Rahul Gandhi's party and the Abdullahs made it a terrorist bastion.

## Enthusiastic first-timers in Pir Panjal region vote for better education, jobs

### STATE TIMES NEWS

REASI: Jammu and Kashmir's Pir Panjal region witnessed an overwhelming response from first-time voters who enthusiastically participated in the second phase of assembly elections on Wednesday, aspiring for better job opportunities, skill education, development and good governance in the Union territory.

For them, it was not just a responsibility to exercise their right to vote but also a matter of great pride. A large number of such voters turned up at the booths, not only in urban but also in rural areas of Rajouri, Poonch, and Reasi districts.

The issues of restoration of statehood, Article 370, regional discrimination and sectarian politics failed to catch up with the young voters in J&K, as they want jobs, development, good governance, and peace.

Some returned to their native places from colleges and workplaces with a commitment to vote in their birthplaces across Rajouri, Poonch, and Reasi districts.

"I am very happy to vote for the first time in my life. It is my right and duty too. It makes me proud of my country that has given us the right to choose our representatives. I urge all youngsters to come out and vote to choose your government," said 21-year-old Ananya, an

engineering student, who came from Jammu to Rajouri for voting.

Ananya, who cast her vote at Chatyar model polling station, emphasized the need for a government that would ensure not only peace and normalcy but also jobs for the youth, skill education, and development.

"The basic demand of youngsters is to secure jobs after completing their degrees. As the education system shifts towards skill development, it is crucial that education focuses on equipping youth with practical skills," she added.

At a booth in Muradpur mountainous area of Rajouri district, many voters captured the memory of getting their index fingers inked for the first time at selfie points set up at the booth. Beyond participating in democracy's biggest celebration, these new voters unanimously demanded better education and governance.

"Getting your finger inked is a deeply satisfying experience. I cherish it. It also comes with a sense of responsibility. Voting is our right to choose our representatives and the government that will shape our future. We must perform this constitutional duty," said Sarwar, another student.

"The youth are not concerned about politics. Our focus is on electing a govern-

ment that prioritizes better education, healthcare, and job opportunities," he added.

Divya Sharma, another first-timer at a model booth in Poonch, advocated for improvement in education, particularly in professional fields, and the establishment of a government medical college to produce doctors in Poonch.

"Voting is a significant exercise to decide our future because it is linked to forming a government that makes policies for young people," she said.

Similarly, Tikshan Bali said she voted for development and good governance of Poonch. "I want the elected representatives to ensure better education, healthcare, communication infrastructure, tourism, and above all, job opportunities for youth."

Anwar Hussain, an undergraduate student from Mahore in Reasi district, also voting for the first time, emphasized the need for improved education, healthcare, and road infrastructure in their region. "We need jobs and skill education," he said.

Lakshmi Khajuria, who possesses a postgraduate degree from Pune University, had earlier considered it a futile exercise, believing her vote wouldn't make a difference.

"But seeing the changes made by governments over

the years, I felt I should contribute," Khajuria, who voted at a polling station in Katra, said.

Before casting her vote, she thoroughly reviewed each party's manifesto and candidates' track records.

"Our Union territory has ample room for development...Katra faces numerous challenges and infrastructure needs to be upgraded to take care of pilgrims. I hope my vote will contribute to overall sustainable development and infrastructure improvement in the city and J&K," she said.

In the second phase of elections in J&K, there are over 40,000 voters in the age group of 18 to 19.

Voting began at 7 am across the 26 assembly constituencies under tight security.

The second phase covers six districts - three in the Valley and three in the Jammu division.

In this phase, 93 candidates are contesting in Srinagar district, followed by 46 in Budgam district, 34 in Rajouri district, 25 in Poonch district, 21 in Ganderbal district, and 20 in Reasi district.

Key leaders whose fate will be determined in this phase include former chief minister Omar Abdullah, JKPC president Tariq Hamid Karra, and J&K BJP chief Ravinder Raina.

## Sopore apple will reach foreign shores: Rahul's promise

### STATE TIMES NEWS

SOPORE: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said if the NC-Congress alliance comes to power in Jammu and Kashmir, it will promote the famous Sopore

apple in international markets.

The Congress leader lamented that while walnuts, cashews and resins were put on his table, the famous Sopore apple, the main horticulture produce of the area, was missing.

"The main issue is of the Sopore apple. This apple has to be taken abroad. Your future lies in this and it has to be taken forward. It should not only reach across the country, but it should reach US, China, and Japan too," Gandhi said, with an apple in his hand.

Addressing an election rally here in north Kashmir's Baramulla district, Gandhi said people were eating apples from foreign countries, but "I want this apple to go to America."

"If this apple has to reach Japan and America, the first step has to be restoration of statehood. Without that it is

not possible," he said.

The Congress leader said the Narendra Modi-led central government was working for a few billionaires. "The reason why farmers are not getting good price for their apples be it here or in



Himachal, is because of Adani."

Gandhi reiterated his party's poll promise of a minimum support price of Rs 72 per kg for apple produce and said it will be covered under the crop insurance scheme as well. He said the alliance will put a stop to the eviction of the poor and spend Rs 2,500 crore on irrigation.

Gandhi said he was informed by his colleague, AICC general secretary G A Mir, that the Sopore apple is exported and is not processed locally.

"Our target is that the apple is exported to Japan and America. But there should be processing plants here as well so that people of Sopore get the benefit of the apple industry," he said.

## Congress should focus on campaigning in Jammu: Omar

### STATE TIMES NEWS

SIRINAGAR: National Conference leader Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said that alliance partner Congress should focus more on campaigning in the J a m u

r e g i o n where it has got the lion's share in the seat-sharing agreement with his party.

"It is a good thing. I hope after Rahul (Gandhi) is done campaigning in one or two seats of Kashmir, he focuses on the Jammu. Ultimately, what the Congress does in Kashmir is not that important, but what the Congress does in Jammu is important," Abdullah said.

He was commenting on the visit of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha to Sopore town for an election rally in support of

Congress candidates.

Abdullah said unfortunately, the Congress has not done as much in the plains of Jammu as the NC -- which is in a pre-poll alliance with the Congress --



expects it to do.

"The lion's share of the seats that the alliance gave in Jammu was to the Congress party and yet the Congress' campaign in Jammu is yet to begin."

"There are only five days of campaigning now. So I hope after Rahul is done campaigning on this one seat in the valley, the Congress focuses all its attention in the plains of Jammu," he said.

## BJP chief casts vote in Nowshera, says party will win

### STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir BJP president Ravinder Raina cast his vote Wednesday morning in his Nowshera assembly constituency in Rajouri district and expressed confidence the party will form the government in the union territory.

People will overwhelmingly vote for peace and development undertaken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government over the last decade, he said.

People would set new voter turnout records in the second phase of elections in Jammu and Kashmir and make democracy victorious, the BJP leader said after casting his vote at the Lamberi polling station set up at a primary school in Nowshera.

"The BJP will win with a thumping majority and form the government in Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP will also register a victory from the Nowshera seat and contribute to the party's victory," he said.

Raina said that people are overwhelmingly voting for the peace, progress, prosperity, and development ensured by PM Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah over the past 10 years.

"There is peace on the borders which used to see daily firing and shelling, disrupting the normal life of lakhs of border residents. There is new connectivity to far-flung and rural areas through tunnels, roads, and bridges. Social schemes have been implemented. Better infrastructure in all sectors of life have been put in place," he said.

Ahead of polling in the constituency, the BJP candidate from the seat visited Thakurdwara Temple in Nowshera to pay obeisance to the deity and seek blessing.

"It is a big day for Jammu and Kashmir and democracy. Today, voting will be conducted for the second phase. I pray for the betterment and bright future of Jammu and

Kashmir," he said. "I hope there is a good voter turnout and new voting records are set. It is a victory for democracy in Jammu and Kashmir."

Raina, seeking a re-election from the Nowshera assembly constituency, faces a major challenge from his former party colleague Surinder Choudhary, a former MLC. Choudhary is contesting the elections on a National Conference (NC) ticket and enjoys Congress support.

There are three other candidates in the fray from the Nowshera constituency, including from the PDP and the BSP.

The Nowshera constituency is among the 11 assembly segments in the Rajouri, Poonch, and Reasi districts of the Jammu region going to the polls in the second phase, along with 15 seats from the central Kashmir districts of Srinagar, Ganderbal, and Budgam today. A total of 239 candidates are contesting from these 26 con-

stituencies.

All eyes are set on this seat won by Raina in the 2014 assembly polls when he defeated his nearest rival, Surinder Choudhary, then a PDP member, by over 9,500 votes. It was the first time the BJP won the seat.

Nowshera had traditionally remained a Congress bastion who won it for eight consecutive terms from 1962 to 2002 before losing the seat to the NC in the 2008 elections.

Long queues are seen at various polling stations in Rajouri, Poonch, and Reasi districts, as people are coming out in large numbers to vote enthusiastically. "We are happy to vote in these elections, which are taking place after 10 long years," said Arvind Kumar, a voter who cast his vote at the Nai Basti polling station in Reasi district.

Kumar, who stood in line since 6 am with family members, said they are voting for peace, security, and development of the state.

## CEO visits Rajouri; monitors voting process

### STATE TIMES NEWS

RAJOURI: Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Jammu and Kashmir, P K Pole, on Wednesday visited Rajouri on the polling day to ensure smooth voting process across all five constituencies of the district including Nowshera, Darhal, Rajouri, Kalakote and Thanamandi.

District Election Officer (DEO) Rajouri, Abhishek Sharma, briefed the CEO regarding polling process in the district. He informed that high voter participation was witnessed in all the five constituencies with no report of any major incident. Adequate arrangements were in place to ensure voters' convenience and maintain order at polling stations, he added.

PK Pole inspected the district's Control Room, which plays a vital role in coordinating polling activities and addressing any emerging issues.

The CEO utilized the web-casting system to randomly check the status of several polling stations across all five assembly constituencies. This digital monitoring allowed him to assess the behavior of polling staff, transparency and overall



CEO J&K P K Pole interacting with media at Rajouri.

security arrangements without the need for physical inspections. Through webcasting, real-time footage of various polling booths, especially those in far-flung and remote areas, was reviewed, providing a comprehensive picture of election day activities.

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## Notorious cattle lifter arrested, 2 vehicles seized

### STATE TIMES NEWS

SAMBA: Police has worked out a cattle theft case registered at Police Station Vijaypur; arrested cattle lifter and seized two vehicles used in the commission of crime. On September 19, 2024, a written complaint was received at Police Station Vijaypur regarding theft of cattle by some unknown persons. Acting over the complaint, a case FIR No. 113/2024 U/S 303(2) BNS was registered at Police Station Vijaypur and investigation started. During the course of investigation, a police team of Police Station Vijaypur headed by SHO Vijaypur after hectic efforts and with the help of technical analysis detained one suspect namely Irshad Ahmed S/o Fareed Ahmed R/o Kheri tehsil Bishnah district Jammu who upon sustained questioning, confessed his involvement in the instant case. Further on his disclosure, two Auto Load carrier bearing registration Nos. JK02DK-7034 and JK03N-5021 who were used for lifting cattle from different areas of district Samba have been seized. It is pertinent to mention here that the said accused is a bovine lifter and used to supply the stolen cattle to the bovine smugglers.

## Scooty theft case solved, thief arrested, vehicle recovered

### STATE TIMES NEWS

JAMMU: Police on Wednesday solved a theft case by arresting the accused and recovered stolen scooty. On September 24, 2024, a written complaint was lodged by Sunil Nagpal, son of Late Prakash Nath Nagpal, resident of Upper Bazar Panjthirthi Jammu, regarding the theft of his scooty bearing registration No JK02 CN 1528 by some unknown thieves from Pacea Danga Jammu. On receiving the complaint case FIR No. 115/2024 U/S 303 (2) BNS was registered in PS Pacea Danga Jammu and investigation was started. A special team was constituted by SP City North to trace out accused, led by SHO P/S Pacea Danga and assisted by I/C PP Chowk Chabutra under the close supervision of SDPO City North Jammu did strenuous efforts and finally rounded up one suspect namely Arun Mehta, son of Madan Lal, resident of Ratnuchak, Jammu upon whose disclosure, scooty bearing registration No JK02 CN 1528 has been recovered and seized in the instant case.

## Cong, allies don't like peace in J&K; they want to bring back Art 370: Modi

### STATE TIMES NEWS

SONIPAT (HARYANA): Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday attacked the Congress, saying the grand old party and its allies do not like peace in Jammu and Kashmir and they want to bring back Article 370.

Bringing back Article 370 will be an insult to the sacrifices of the bravehearts who fought against terrorism in J&K, Modi said while addressing a poll rally in Gohana in this district.

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and other BJP leaders from the state were also present at the rally. Haryana goes to polls on October 5.

By mentioning J&K, where two of the three-phase polling is over, Modi targeted the Congress which is fighting in alliance with the National Conference (NC) in the Union Territory (UT).

Referring to the J&K polls, he said the Congress and its allies do not like peace there. A number of brave soldiers from Haryana are safeguarding the country's borders. There are many of these from the state who helped normalise the situation in J&K, he said.

When polls are peacefully held in J&K, brave mothers of

Haryana feel happy, he said.

"But Congress and their associates do not like peace in Jammu and Kashmir. The Congress wants to bring back Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. It again wants to promote terror and 'algav' (separatism) there."

"For appeasement, the Congress wants to implement the agenda of the country's enemy in India. I am sure you will teach the Congress a lesson and I have full belief," he said.

The prime minister said under the BJP government, Haryana has made a place among the top states in industry and agriculture sectors.

"Today, the world's biggest companies are interested in setting up factories in India, he said, adding "when industrialisation increases, its biggest benefit goes to the poor, farmers and Dalits".

He said when big companies invest, it will benefit the youth of Haryana and farmers of the state.

From Gurugram to Faridabad and Sonapat in Panipat, Haryana is becoming the centre of world's big companies, Modi said, adding more than 35 per cent carpets and 20 per cent clothes exported from the country are

manufactured in Haryana, he said.

In Kharkhoda here, industrial town is being set up and the endeavour is to ensure maximum employment and jobs to the youth, he said.

Many such industrial towns will be set up elsewhere in state. Maruti's unit is also coming up and many more units will come up, he said.

The prime minister said in three years, lakhs of new jobs connected to the manufacturing sector have been generated. Suzuki company manufactures car in the country and Japanese people purchase it after procuring it from India, he said, referring to the company's unit in the state.

He said with people coming to set up new units and make new investment, Haryana needs a government which gives boost to industry, and appealed to people to bring back the BJP to power.

Referring to Sonipat region, he said this land gave great men like Bhagat Phool Singh, who made girl's education their mission.

"It is my fortune that in 2015, I got the opportunity to launch Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign from Panipat," said Modi.