



# JINDRAH IMAGES



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## Lok Sabha Elections 2024

### Despite rain, Udhampur Parliamentary Constituency recorded 68.27% polling



JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, APRIL 19

Undeterred by the weather vagaries across the expansive canvas of the five districts of Doda, Kathua, Kishtwar, Ramban, and Udhampur underwent polling as the voters embraced their civic duty with fervor and exhibited unwavering determination. Undaunted by the

challenges, the polling parties, ensured the first phase of polls in Jammu and Kashmir were held with grace and resolve. The polling for First Phase of General Elections to 18th Lok Sabha in Parliamentary Constituency Udhampur has concluded peacefully. Till releasing this Press brief, the voting percentage was around 68.27%. It is especially

highlighted that due to weather latest updated reports are awaited from some of the Polling Stations, specially located in remote hilly areas of Kishtwar, Gandoh, Ramban, Dudu-Basantgarh etc, the polling percentage is likely to increase slightly. Once all Polling parties, especially of remote areas reaches respective

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### Udhampur's elderly voters show dedication for upholding democracy



JNEWS SERVICE  
UDHAMPUR/RAMNAGAR/  
BILLAWAR, APRIL 19

In the picturesque hills of Udhampur, amidst the drizzling rain, stood

Chunni Lal, a 91-year-old beacon of unwavering commitment to democracy. Resolute with his walking stick, Lal braved the weather to be the first

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### ECI establishes 114 special polling stations

JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, APRIL 19

In a first of its kind move towards inclusivity and environmental consciousness, the Election Commission of India (ECI) established 114 remarkable polling stations of different categories for voters in Udhampur Parliamentary Constituency (PC) which went for polling today in the first phase of General Elections to Lok Sabha 2024.

These innovative polling stations viz; women manned, youth manned,



PwD manned, Green Polling Stations, Border Polling Stations and Unique Polling Stations were designed to cater specifically

to women, youth, Persons with Disabilities (PWD), promote eco-friendly practices

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### Braving erratic weather, first time voters pose for selfies with inked fingers



JNEWS SERVICE  
KATHUA, APR 19

Braving the inclement weather, the first-time voters and future leaders of Jammu and Kashmir's

Udhampur Lok Sabha took the ownership of democratic process by exercising their franchise. The thrilled first

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### LG chairs a high-level meeting to review skill development & entrepreneurship



JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, APRIL 19

Lieutenant Governor Shri Manoj Sinha today chaired a high-level meeting to review skill development, entrepreneurship and labour welfare. Senior officials of the Department of Skill Development, Department of Labour & Employment and Mission Youth attended the meet-

ing. The Lt Governor discussed various issues such as creating convergence of skill development schemes, opportunities and strategy for employment generation across the sectors through entrepreneurship, skill gap analysis and skill mapping for upskilling, reskilling of labour force and youth, and effective,

efficient implementation of Healthcare, Social Security schemes for labour welfare and Livelihood Generation Schemes for youth and women.

The Lt Governor laid special emphasis on vital need for upskilling and reskilling of youth and labour workforce as per the evolving skill development landscape to

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### In a bid to Enhance Voting Experience; Ramnagar Polling Station decorated with Balloons, Mehendi, Toys

JNEWS SERVICE  
SRINAGAR, APR 19

As polling stations opened for the Udhampur Lok Sabha elections on Friday, the Ramnagar polling station stood out for its festive atmosphere, adorned with colorful balloons and offering additional amenities to voters.

Located in the Model Higher Secondary School of Ramnagar town, the polling station Mahila-91

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### JK Govt Proposes Increase in Dearness Allowance for Employees, Pensioners

JNEWS SERVICE  
SRINAGAR, APR 19

In a significant move aimed at enhancing the welfare of government employees and pensioners/family pensioners, the General Administration Department of the Government of Jammu and Kashmir has proposed a revision in the rates of Dearness Allowance (DA).

As per the news agency, the proposal, outlined in a letter addressed to the Chief Electoral Officer, Jammu and Kashmir, seeks to increase the exist-

ing rates of DA payable to employees and pensioners from 46% to 50% of basic pay/basic pension, effective from January 1, 2024.

Citing a memorandum from the Finance Department, the proposal highlights the decision to raise the rates of DA for central government employees from 46% to 50% of basic pay, in accordance with Office Memorandum No.1/1/2024-E-II(B) dated March 12, 2024, issued by the Department of Expenditure, Ministry

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### All India voter turnout crosses 60 pc

JNEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

The first of the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls on Friday remained largely peaceful with voter turnout exceeding 60% at 7 in the evening.

With this, the fate of as many as 1,625 candidates across 21 states and union territories (UTs) have been

locked in EVMs (electronic voting machines).

After the polling began today, sporadic incidents of violence were reported from West Bengal and strife-torn Manipur.

In Tripura, where voting took place for one seat, the vote percentage was the highest at 79.90%. This was followed by West Bengal (three seats),

where voter turnout was recorded at 77.57%.

At 47.49%, voter turnout was the lowest in Bihar where four seats were up for grabs.

"The voting percentage is likely to go upwards when reports from all polling stations are obtained as polling is scheduled till 6 PM in many

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### CS reviews position of supplies, status of paramedic courses offered in JK hospitals



JNEWS SERVICE  
JAMMU, APRIL 19

Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo, today took a holistic review of the position of essential supplies and status of paramedic courses offered across different healthcare institutions of the UT of J&K.

The meeting, besides Administrative Secretary, Health & Medical Education was also attended by the Principals of Medical Colleges; MD, JKMSCL;

Director Health Services Kashmir/Jammu and other HoDs of the Department.

During the meeting, the Chief Secretary took note of the steps followed by the J&K Medical Supplies Corporation for floating tenders to acquire drugs, equipments and other machinery for the hospitals. He asked for looking into shortening the time period considerably to get such vital supplies for health care institutions.

He further asked for

framing Essential Drug List (EDL) by each CMO for its early supply to the hospitals besides standardization of the essential equipments list across the healthcare facilities of the UT. He even took notice of the working of the Drugs & Vaccine Distribution Management System (DVDMS) Portal dealing with purchase, inventory management & distribution of drugs, disposables, other necessary

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Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Narayana  
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### Modi govt fulfilling dreams of Chaudhary Charan Singh: CM Yogi

### German Chancellor urges against escalation in the Middle East

**AGENCIES**  
GHAZIABAD (UP), APR 19

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts in uplifting farmers and said that they resonate with the aspirations of former Prime Minister Bharat Ratna Chaudhary Charan Singh.



Addressing an election rally in Modinagar, the CM appealed for votes in support of Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) candidate from Baghpat Lok Sabha constituency, Dr. Rajkumar Sangwan.

He highlighted PM Modi's initiatives to honor farmers, such as PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, emphasizing their impact on various facets of national development.

Yogi underscored the strides made in bolstering India's global standing, securing borders, combating terrorism and naxalism, and enhancing infrastructure, including constructing a 12-lane expressway and implementing rapid rail and metro projects. "These initiatives symbolize

the emergence of a new India," he said.

He said, "The voting for the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections is underway. The brisk pace of voting indicates the enthusiasm of the people to bring the Modi government back into power in the country. This is a natural inclination because those who honor our ancestors deserve respect in return. For the first time, Modi ji has brought pride to our Uttar Pradesh by bestowing Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor, upon former PM Charana Singh."

The CM highlighted India's significant strides in social welfare initiatives, pointing out that over the past four years, 80 crore people have benefited from free ration distribution, contrasting starkly with the dire situation of hunger affecting 23 crore individuals in Pakistan.

He said, "When we elect a good leader, the outcomes are also positive. Today, 60 crore people have been linked to the Ayushman Bharat Yojana, Jan Dhan accounts of 50 crore people have been opened, 12 crore farmers have been given Kisan Samman Nidhi, and toilets have been provided to 12 crore households. Addi-

tionally, 10 crore mothers have benefited from the Ujjwala Yojana."

Regarding the Surya Tilak of Lord Shri Ram on the occasion of Ram Navami, Yogi said that it has made the entire country proud.

He criticized the SP, BSP, and Congress, accusing them of posing a security threat in western Uttar Pradesh. He pointed out that under their rule, neither women nor businessmen felt safe, and farmers' tube wells were even removed from their fields. "Our government has made a provision to provide free electricity to 15 lakh private tube wells. The government has taken this decision to realize the dream of Chaudhary Saheb," he said.

He pointed out that previous administrations were known for inciting riots, whereas now there are no such riots or curfews, and Kanwar Yatras are celebrated grandly. "We've made it clear that those jeopardizing the safety of women and businessmen will be held accountable," he said.

The CM stressed the importance of securing victory for the NDA candidate in Baghpat to bolster their tally beyond 400 and fortify the Modi government's mandate. He commended Jayant Chaudhary's selection of Dr. Rajkumar Sangwan, a dedicated worker committed to the principles upheld by Chaudhary Charan Singh for public service.

Highlighting Sangwan's steadfast adherence to these values, he emphasized the imperative of supporting his candidacy to nurture the nation's progress. "A grassroots worker who has remained dedicated to the principles and vision of Chaudhary Saheb deserves our support. A 'Nal' in Baghpat is essential to secure his victory and to see the lotus blossom across the nation," he said.

RLD president Jayant Chaudhary, BJP regional president Satyendra Sisodia, district president Satyapal Pradhan, MLA Dr Manju Siwach, District Panchayat president Mamta Tyagi, and other leaders were present on the occasion.



**AGENCIES**  
NORDERNEY ISLAND, APRIL 19

Following a suspected Israeli retaliatory attack on Iran, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has warned against further escalation in the Middle East.

"Everyone must ensure now and in the near future that there is no further escalation of the war," Scholz said on Friday.

He stressed that the position urging restraint is shared by Germany and its allies, but declined to comment further on reports of Israeli strikes on targets in Iran.

Scholz acknowledged on Friday only that there had been "renewed military activity" overnight. Israel has not commented publicly on the reported attack.

Scholz's comments came while attending a conference of his centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) on the German North Sea island of Norderney.

According to US media reports, one or more Israeli missiles were used to attack a target in Iran. There were initially no reports of damage.

Last weekend, Iran attacked Israel with hundreds of drones and missiles, almost all of which were intercepted by Israeli and allied air defenses, in retaliation for a suspected Israeli attack on the Iranian embassy compound in Damascus.

### Two suspects held in Poland over attack on Moscow opponent in Vilnius

**AGENCIES**  
RIGA, APRIL 19

Two people have been arrested in Poland for allegedly carrying out last month's violent attack in Lithuania on Kremlin critic Leonid Volkov, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said on Friday.

The suspects are to be handed over to the country soon, Nausėda said in Vilnius, according to Lithuanian radio.

There was initially no announcement from the Polish authorities regarding the arrest.

Nausėda did not provide any further information on the two suspects or the possible extradition date. The Lithuanian Police also did not comment.

### Reports of spat with Netanyahu misleading: Germany

**AGENCIES**  
BERLIN, APRIL 19

Germany's Foreign Office is disputing as "misleading" an Israeli media report about a heated argument between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock over the situation in the Gaza Strip.

"Key points in this account of the hour long meeting between Foreign Minister Baerbock and Prime Minister Netanyahu are wrong and misleading," the Foreign Office wrote in a post to X, formerly Twitter, on Friday.

The German ambassador to Israel, Steffen Seibert, made the same statement without offering specifics.

A journalist from the Israeli TV station Channel 13 had previously reported that Baerbock reacted negatively when shown footage from the Gaza Strip depicting markets filled with food during a meeting in Israel on Wednesday.

Baerbock reportedly responded by pointing out widespread hunger in Gaza and offered to show Netanyahu pictures of starving children on her cell phone.

Netanyahu is said to have replied that she should look at photos of the markets and also of people on the beach, as there were no cases of hunger there.

According to the Channel 13 report, Baerbock advised him not to show the pictures as they did not correspond to the reality in the Gaza Strip.

Netanyahu, in turn, is said to have loudly replied that the photos were real and that Israel was not showing an invented reality like the Nazis. In 1942, for example, the Nazis had a film crew shoot a propaganda film with scenes of everyday life in the Warsaw ghetto, where Jews were forced to live in abysmal conditions.

Baerbock reportedly asked Netanyahu whether he was accusing doctors working in Gaza, as well as the international media, of lying about the situation.

The images of the market stalls filled with fruit and vegetables were published this week by COGAT, an Israeli agency within the Defence Ministry responsible for contacts with the Palestinian Territories and humanitarian aid.

The images show markets in the north of the coastal area, which is particularly affected by food shortages. According to COGAT and aid organizations, some food recently arrived in the area, although aid workers and residents say it remains far from enough.

### Sensex, Nifty witness worst week since March 15 amid Iran-Israel conflict

**AGENCIES**  
MUMBAI, APRIL 19

Ending a four-day losing streak, India's benchmark indices closed higher on Friday led by HDFC Bank and Bajaj Finance, among other factors. The Sensex ended 599 points, or 0.83 per cent, higher at 73,088, while the Nifty closed at 22,147, up 151 points, or 0.7 per cent, on Friday.

However, the benchmark indices posted their worst weekly fall in over a month as worries over the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran weighed on investor sentiment. The Nifty and the Sensex declined 1.65 per cent and 1.56 per cent, respectively, in the week ended April 19, its worst decline since March 15.

Intraday, the benchmarks declined nearly 1 per cent amid investor concerns that the West Asia turmoil might escalate to a war. During the day, the Nifty slipped as much as 0.99 per cent to 21,777.65, while the Sensex fell 0.93 per cent to 71,816.46 before bouncing back.

HDFC Bank Ltd, ICICI Bank Ltd, Bharti Airtel Ltd, Bajaj Finance Ltd, and Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd added positively to the index, while Larsen & Toubro Ltd, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd, Infosys Ltd, Bajaj Auto Ltd, and HCL Technologies Ltd recorded limited gains in the index.

On the NSE, five sectors ended higher, one settled flat, while six declined, while 11 sectors declined and nine advanced on the BSE.



### 30 injured in accident on Capri ferry in Naples

**AGENCIES**  
CAPRI, APRIL 19

Around 30 people were injured in a collision on a ferry sailing to the Italian mainland from the Mediterranean island of Capri on Friday, rescue officials said. The exact course of events was initially unclear. According to reports, the high-speed Isola di Procida collided with the dock upon arrival in the city of Naples, Xinhua news agency reported.

Despite the number of injuries, no one was seriously hurt in the incident, the rescue service said.

The meeting of the foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) economically strong democracies has been under way on Capri in the Gulf of Naples since Wednesday. The vast majority of participants were still on the island on Friday.

Capri is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Italy. The island, which has fewer than 15,000 permanent residents, attracts tens of thousands of visitors every day during the high season. The ferry crossing from the mainland takes about an hour.



### Single phase polling for LS ends in TN, Pondy

**AGENCIES**  
CHENNAI APR 19

The single phase Polling to elect 39 members to the 18th Lok Sabha from Tamil Nadu and the lone LS seat in the Union Territory of Puducherry ended on Friday evening, amid tight security.

The polling, which began at 0700 hrs, ended at 1800 hrs and passed off peacefully.

Chief Electoral Officer Satyabrata Sahoo said the polling was by and large peaceful.

Barring some minor incidents, where voters in few places announced boycott of polling initially and later turned up to cast their vote after being pacified by the authorities and minor protests and complaints of glitches in EVMS, no major untoward incident was reported from any part of the State.

As per the latest updates, an estimated 65 per cent polling was reported in Tamil Nadu and nearly 75 per cent in Puducherry as the polling drew to a close.

The provisional voting percentage will be known in the night and the final figure will be announced by tomorrow after collecting details from all the 68,321 polling booths in Tamil Nadu.

Going by the trend the polling percentage was expected to be low this time when compared to more than 70 per cent turnout recorded in the last three LS elections.

Meanwhile, as the gates of the polling stations were closed at 1800 hrs, a large number of people turned up to cast their ballot in the evening.

Those who had entered the booth and are standing in the queue, will be issued tokens to enable them to exercise their franchise.

Mr Sahoo said the polling process will end only after all those standing in the queue and having tokens cast their ballots.

After this, the EVMS will be sealed and transported to strong rooms in counting centres, where a round-the-clock three-tier security arrangements were put in place, including deployment of central paramilitary forces.

The counting will take place on June four.

In the bye-election to Vilavancode Assembly seat in Tamil Nadu in the southern tip of Kanniyakumari, the turnout was around 58-60 per cent.

The electoral fortunes of 950 candidates in Tamil Nadu--876 men and 74 women-- including 609 Independents were sealed in the EVMS and their fate would be known on June 4. Those in the fray included sitting MPs and first time candidates of various parties.

Leaders of leading political parties, including the DMK and its allies, their arch rival the Opposition AIADMK and the NDA Front headed by the BJP, and the Naam Tamizhar Katchi (NTK), have cast their ballots.

Besides, leading film personalities also exercised their democratic duty.



### Shivakumar accuses BJP for possible imposition of Governor's rule

**AGENCIES**  
BENGALURU, APRIL 19

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has accused the BJP of threatening the state government and misleading voters about the possibility of imposing Governor's rule due to alleged deteriorating law and order.

Addressing the media here on Friday, Shivakumar questioned the intentions of the Leader of the Opposition, R Ashoka, alleging that the BJP is planning a drama to impose Governor's rule. "No matter how they project it, this can't be done here," he firmly stated. The BJP has been critical of the Congress government, claiming a series of criminal incidents reported across the state in the last 48 hours as evidence of the worsening law and order situation.

Defending the Congress-led government's record on law and order, the Deputy CM emphasised that Karnataka has the best law and order in the country.

In response, the Karnataka BJP criticised the state government for the alleged deterioration in law and order, accusing the Congress government of pursuing appeasement politics at the expense of public safety.



## Jasprit Bumrah's stellar form echoes warning shots for T20 World Cup rivals



AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, APR 19

India's ace pace sensation Jasprit Bumrah has been showcasing outstanding performances with notable consistency so far in the ongoing season of the Indian Premier League.

With the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 in the West Indies and USA fast approaching, the ongoing IPL is going to play a vital role in helping teams determine their squads for the marquee event, which begins immediately after the conclusion of the T20 league on June 1.

For India, Jasprit Bumrah is a certainty in their 15-member T20 World Cup squad, with a high likelihood of him featuring in the playing XI for all of India's games. Considering the form he's in, the pacer is poised to become one of India's key players at the tournament after missing out on the 2022 edition due to injury.

In his seven IPL matches so far, Bumrah has accounted for 13 wickets

at a miserly economy of 5.96. He even holds the record for best innings figures in the tournament so far when he returned 5/21 against the Royal Challengers Bengaluru last week.

Following Thursday's thrilling clash against Punjab Kings, the Mumbai Indians bowler became the holder of the Purple Cap - awarded to the leading wicket-taker of the tournament. He returned 3/21 including a double-wicket over inside the Powerplay. Bumrah has been used as one of his team's vital cogs for bowling in the death overs, however, the bowler also expressed his desire to make an impact early on in the innings, an ICC report said.

"Of course, you want to make an impact early on when the ball does something," he said after Mumbai won a thriller against Punjab in the last over by nine runs.

"Because in this format, probably the ball does swing for the first two overs. And when I want to bowl more, I do play

Test cricket. That is where all my desires for bowling more gets over. In this format, when the ball swings for the first two overs, you do want to make an impact and when the opportunity comes, I'm happy to contribute," Bumrah added.

In an IPL season marked by the record for the highest team total being broken thrice this year, also featuring numerous high-scoring games, Bumrah boasts the best economy rate in the tournament so far (minimum overs bowled: 3).

The pacer pointed out the rules which favour the batters, making T20 a challenging format for the bowlers and explained how he prepares to showcase his best in the shortest format.

"Obviously, this format is a little difficult for the bowlers because the batsmanship is going up,"

Bumrah said. "With the time restrictions [over-rate penalties] as well and the Impact Player rule, that does not help the bowler too much because the

batting line-up becomes deeper and deeper and the bowler becomes half the bowler when you get an extra option."

"But I feel like all of those things are not in your control. What you can do is try to prepare to the best of your ability and back yourself in any situation because all of that will then put you in a good space of mind and you can go out there and execute with a smile on your face," he said.

With top pacers from other teams like New Zealand's Trent Boult (current economy rate: 7.37), South Africa's Kagiso Rabada (8.32), Bangladesh's Mustafizur Rahman (9.15), Australia's Mitchell Starc (10.54) recording economy rates over 7, Bumrah has remained impeccable in keeping the batters in check.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup begins on June 1 with a double-header day in Dallas and Guyana. India will kick off their campaign against Ireland in New York on June 5.

## Indian insurance industry in FY24: Non-life grew by 12.8 pc, life at 2 pc

AGENCIES  
CHENNAI, APRIL 19

The Indian insurance industry closed FY24 logging a higher growth rate, with the non-life sector growing at 12.8 per cent and the life sector at two per cent over FY23 figures.

"In FY24, the non-life insurance industry reported a premium of Rs. 2.9 lakh crore growing at 12.8 per cent compared to the 16.3 per cent growth reported in FY23," said credit rating agency CARE Ratings in a research report.

While the motor and health insurance segments drove the growth for the non-life sector, compared to last year's growth rates, there was a decline owing to a fall in liability, crop insurance, and credit guarantee.

Further, for the month of March 2024 as well, the growth rate was comparatively lower as growth in health was offset by slower growth in motor and a fall in the fire insurance segment, CARE Ratings said.

The four public sector general insurers' grew their business by 9 per



cent last fiscal (gross direct premium Rs.90,344.5 crore) as compared to 10 per cent growth logged in FY23 (Rs.82,891.3 crore), CARE Ratings said. The FY24 numbers have demonstrated robust growth which can be primarily attributed to group health and motor insurance.

The specialised insurers logged lower growth last fiscal as compared to FY23 due to the crop insurance premiums of Agriculture Insurance Company reduced by 32.1 per cent for FY24, as select public sector general insurers and a few private general insurers picked up a larger proportion of crop insurance premiums.

The standalone private health insurers (SAHI) continued their growth

momentum last fiscal booking a gross premium of Rs.33,116 crore, up from Rs.26,243.9 crore earned in FY23.

Further, with the sectoral regulator approving two SAHIs in FY24, competition is expected to accelerate even further in FY25.

CARE Ratings estimates that the Indian non-life insurance market will grow at a rate of approximately 13-15 per cent in the medium term. The industry's growth will continue to be driven by the health and motor insurance segments as they account for around 68 per cent of the premiums.

Growth would be aided by macroeconomic factors such as higher GDP growth, disposable

income levels, anticipated favourable monsoon.

However, intensified competition, an uncertain international geopolitical environment, and elevated inflation could potentially negatively affect economic growth and subsequently impact the non-life insurance sector.

On the other hand, the life insurance sector closed FY24 with two per cent growth in new business premium.

According to Life Insurance Council, the new business premium for the life insurers last fiscal stood at Rs.3,77,960 crore as against Rs.3,70,543 crore earned in FY23.

Following alterations in the taxation of high-value non-linked policies, the life insurance sector encountered a range of challenges during FY24, including a slowdown in growth, said Avinash Singh, Senior Research Analyst, Emkay Global Financial Services Ltd in a report.

Be that as it may, the life insurance industry grew their individual agents base by adding 2,76,850 agents in FY24 alone.

## Nigerian military kills 192 suspected terrorists in one week

AGENCIES  
ABUJA, APRIL 19

At least 192 suspected terrorists, including three key figures, were killed in anti-terror operations in Nigeria over the past week, the military said.

Some 341 others were nabbed in raids by troops, with 62 hostages freed from their captors during the period, Edward Buba, a spokesman for the military, told reporters in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, Xinhua news agency reported. In the northeast-



ern part of the country, a total of 122 members of the Islamic State's West Africa

Province (ISWAP) and their families surrendered to the troops during the

operations, Buba said.

The air force of the military conducted air strikes on suspected ISWAP fighters' hideouts and a logistics hub, including their food processing unit, in the village of Kolleram located along the shores of Lake Chad, according to the spokesman.

## Close to two-thirds of Bengal electorate vote across 3 LS seats

AGENCIES  
KOLKATA, APRIL 19

Notwithstanding reports of stray violence, close to two-thirds of the 5.6 million electorate voted till 3 p.m. on Friday across the three Lok Sabha constituencies of northern West Bengal.

Polling was brisk and long queues were seen outside the booths in the first phase election comprising the Cooch Behar, Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri constituencies.

According to the Election Commission, the overall polling figure was 66.34 percent after eight hours of polling. Cooch Behar recorded 65.54 per cent polling, Alipurduar 66.23 percent and Jalpaiguri 67.28 percent.

Only Tripura with 68.35 per cent polling is ahead of Bengal in terms of votes cast so far in the country.

Meanwhile, the poll panel has received 468 complaints up to 2 PM with 218 from Cooch Behar, 150 from Alipurduar and 100 from Jalpaiguri.

The Election Commission of India has sought a report as to why the state police had stopped BJP MLA Shikha Chatterjee's car at Dubgram. She is an MLA from Datagram Pool Bari under the Jalpaiguri district.

Voting has been by and large peaceful so far save



some stray incidents of violence and voter intimidation, particularly from Cooch Behar seat, which is witnessing a high-profile battle between Union Minister of State for Home and BJP contestant Nisith Pramanick and Trinamool candidate Jagadish Chandra Barma Basunia.

The reports of stray violence were received from Sitalkuchi, Mathabhanga, Sitai and elsewhere in Cooch Behar.

The Election Commission has restricted Bengal Minister and formidable Trinamool Congress leader Udayan Guha to the Dinhat segment after Pramanick appealed to the poll panel against his alleged intimidatory tactics. Guha was seen at the Dinhat police station this morning to complain about an alleged attack on the TMC block president at Jenkins High School in Dinhat.

Pramanick accused Guha of fomenting violence, saying the Bengal Minister knew very well that the

Trinamool Congress was going to lick the dust.

He said, "Whatever the electorate decides, we are going to accept."

Guha accused the poll officials of "siding" with the BJP.

He said he had never seen central forces being deployed a month before the polling day.

Though there has been no report of any untoward incident inside any polling booth, which are being guarded by armed central forces, so far 383 allegations of irregularities have been received by the poll panel in the first five hours.

The poll panel in Delhi has sought action taken reports from Cooch Behar, official sources said.

On Friday, a total of 27,63,506 women are among the voters spread across tea gardens, tribal belts, rural hamlets and urban pockets in the three LS constituencies who are eligible to choose their representatives from

among 30 odd contestants in some 5814 booths until 5 pm. Long queues were seen outside many polling stations.

About 250 companies of armed central forces were deployed and some 10,000 state police personnel were posted to ensure peaceful and fair polling.

Thirteen extra CAPF companies were put on reserve to be used in case of any exigency.

Poll officials and election observers are monitoring the voting process in the field.

Though the contest is multi-cornered, the real fight could be between the state's ruling Trinamool Congress and the main opposition - the Bharatiya Janata Party. The latter won all three seats in the 2019 Lok Sabha poll.

The contest is expected to be between Pramanick and Basunia in the Cooch Behar seat, in Alipurduar between Monoj Tigga (BJP) and TMC's Prakash Chik Baraik, and in Jalpaiguri between Jayanta Kumar Roy of BJP and Nirmal Chandra Roy from the ruling party.

Pramanick was among those who exercised their franchise in the first phase polling.

The voting process commenced at 7 AM under a tight security arrangement. UNI PC-SJC SSP

## I-League's best defender Hammad turns a step back into giant leap forward

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, APR 19

Approximately a decade ago, Muhammad Hammad, then a skinny teenager from Kashmir, was harbouring dreams of becoming a professional cricketer. However, providence had different plans for him. In the I-League 2023-24, which was essentially his comeback season, Hammad not only donned the captain's armband for his hometown club, Real Kashmir FC but also won the Jarnail Singh Award for Best Defender of the season for his fine performance.

"I realised while recovering from my injury that I could not play at a high level right away. It was either train and sit on the bench, or go play in a couple of state leagues to get my match fitness, and then play the I-League," said Hammad. "Once you adjust to playing at a lower intensity, then you can move up the ranks to higher levels."

The results of Hammad's patience have been amazing, to say the least. He has played every minute of Real Kashmir's I-League 2023-24 campaign, operating in the meanest defence of the league, which only let in 19 goals in 24 matches, the I-League sources said.

"It was not easy, but the tough times gave me the discipline I needed to do



He played in the R-League (Rajasthan State League) for Jaipur Elite FC before playing for FC 1 in the Jammu & Kashmir Premier Football League.

"I realised while recovering from my injury that I could not play at a high level right away. It was either train and sit on the bench, or go play in a couple of state leagues to get my match fitness, and then play the I-League," said Hammad. "Once you adjust to playing at a lower intensity, then you can move up the ranks to higher levels."

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"It was not easy, but the tough times gave me the discipline I needed to do

this. Especially when you play for Real Kashmir, you play your home matches in extremely cold weather, but then a lot of the away games are played in exactly opposite conditions, which can be difficult," he said. "But if you maintain your discipline, you can make sure that you are fit enough for the coach to select you for every game, no matter what the conditions are."

"Not conceding goals is something that we as a club have always been good at. I think it also comes down to the atmosphere at our home matches. The fans here in Kashmir support us so passionately whenever we have a game at the TRC Turf, it just gives us all that hunger to go out and perform, to not concede, and to score goals," said Hammad. The Snow Leopards had a solid first half of the season, winning six of their first 11 matches, which included seven clean sheets. How-

ever, January 2024 brought forth ill tidings for the club when former owner Sandeep Chattoo passed away.

"Sandeep sir had a massive role not only in Real Kashmir FC but also in football in Jammu and Kashmir. I've been with the club from the start, so I've known him closely. He used to help everyone on a personal basis," said Hammad. "It's not easy to sustain in the I-League for so many years. Now we have an I-League club and a steady stream of players in the I-League, so it's a big thing."

"It was a shock for all of Kashmir when he passed away. But we are all thankful to the coach, staff, and co-owners for taking the initiative to keep the club running. So far, we have not faced any issues, and hats off to them for continuing the work in the same fashion," he said.

As everyone now looks forward to the upcoming 2024-25 season in a few months, Hammad wants to carry forward the progress he's made since his return from injury.

"Of course, like everyone, I want to play at higher levels. I want to play in the ISL and represent India one day. But right now, I need to keep improving my game, and rectifying my mistakes. I need to raise my level with every game," said Hammad.

## Wipro net profit dips 8 pc to Rs Rs 2,835 crore in Jan-March quarter

AGENCIES  
BENGALURU, APRIL 19

IT software major Wipro on Friday reported an 8 per cent net profit of Rs 2,835 crore for the Jan-March quarter of 2023-24 compared to the corresponding figure of Rs 3,074.5 crore in the same period last year.

The company's revenue fell 4.2 per cent to Rs 22,208.3 crore in the three months ended March 31, according to a stock exchange filing. The Bengaluru-based company had reported a consolidated revenue of Rs 23,190.3 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

The IT services segment revenue of the company came in at \$2,657.4 million, an increase of 0.1 per cent sequentially and



a decrease of 6.4 per cent from a year earlier.

Data released on Friday indicates that voluntary attrition stood at 14.2 per cent with IT major seeing its headcount shrink by 6,180 employees in Q4FY24 and by 24,516 on a full-year basis.

For the quarter ending June 30, the company has guided for a sequential revenue of (-)1.5 per cent

to 0.5 per cent in constant currency terms.

Wipro CEO Srinu Pallia, said 2023-24 proved to be a challenging year for the IT industry, and the macroeconomic environment remains uncertain.

"However, I am optimistic about the opportunities that lie ahead."

Pallia said the company is on its way to a major technological shift

with Artificial intelligence transforming the needs of its clients "as they seek to harness its power for competitive advantage and enhanced business value."

"We have the capabilities, leadership, and the strength of over 2,30,000 Wiproites around the world to help us realise our goals. Although there's a considerable amount of work ahead of us, I am confident that together, with our collective effort, we can pave the way for the next chapter of growth," Pallia added.

Srinivas Pallia has just taken over the reins of the company this month after his predecessor Thierry Delaporte abruptly resigned as its CEO amid reports that the Wipro promoters were not happy with his performance.

## Climate-smart deeptech firm Ecozen raises \$30 mn from Nuveen, other investors

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Climate-smart deeptech startup Ecozen on Friday said that it has raised \$30 million in a mix of debt and equity from existing investors, including asset management firm Nuveen.

The startup also raised debt support from the InCred Credit Fund and the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC).

"The capital raised will enable us to scale our operations and deepen our market penetration in domestic and international territories. We are committed to empowering customers and expediting the transition to climate-smart technologies on



a global scale," Devendra Gupta, CEO and Co-Founder of Ecozen, said in a statement.

According to the company, the latest funds will be used to cater to the growing demand for Ecozen's innovative products and to

further its commitment to climate-smart technology.

The company has grown five times over the last two years, with profits growing three times as well.

Ecozen's continued growth and innovation exemplify the type of

transformative impact we aim to achieve through our investments, paving the way for a sustainable and inclusive low-carbon economy," said Rekha Unnithan, MD and Head of Private Equity Impact Investing at Nuveen.

The startup said that it is expecting to double its revenue in the current fiscal year, buoyed by strong demand for existing products and plans to leverage its tech stack of advanced motors and controls, thermal energy storage, AI and IoT to enter new segments undergoing a transition to cleaner energy sources.

The company is also set to expand its offerings and market presence into Africa and Southeast Asia.

## Iran's nuclear sites unharmed after overnight explosions: IAEA

AGENCIES  
VIENNA, APRIL 19

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says no nuclear facilities were harmed after explosions were reported in the central Iranian province of Isfahan.

"IAEA can confirm that there is no damage to Iran's nuclear sites," the UN's nuclear watchdog posted on X.

Director General Rafael Grossi "continues to call for extreme restraint from everybody and reiterates that nuclear facilities should never be a target in military conflicts."

Isfahan is home to important facilities of the Iranian defence industry. The country's largest nuclear research centre is also located in Isfahan.

Iranian state media also said there was no danger to the nuclear facilities there.

Iran reported that several small flying objects had been shot at in the skies over Isfahan early Friday.

Several US news outlets, citing anonymous US government officials, reported that Israel had struck Iran in retaliation for last Saturday's large-scale drone and missile attack by the Islamic Republic.

## AAP accuses ED; claims CM is not being given insulin in jail

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, APR 19

Senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Friday accused the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Jail administration of hatching a conspiracy to take Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's life. Addressing a press conference here, Singh expressed concern over the Chief Minister's life, alleging that the BJP is hatching a conspiracy to jeopardize his life.

Highlighting his earlier statement Singh said, "I had stated that a deep conspiracy is going on against Arvind Kejriwal. At that time, many people objected to my statement as to what was I talking about. But I know the working style of the BJP, the way BJP leaders work, they stoop to the extent of taking someone's life, and hatch conspiracies to the extent of taking someone's life," he alleged.

"And now with the kind of proceedings which are continuously going on against Arvind Kejriwal, I want to say that a



deep conspiracy is being hatched against him and any kind of accident can happen with him inside the jail," he said.

"The Chief Minister of Punjab is being made to meet him like a terrorist," he said alleging that ED officers, along with officials from the LG office and jail administration are deliberately spreading false news.

Lashing out at the ED and the jail authorities, he said, "According to the jail rules, you cannot make any kind of information about any prisoner, related to his health or his food habits, public. I want to ask the ED; with what authority did they get Arvind Kejriwal's false diet chart publicized in the media yesterday? What is the

conspiracy behind this? Are you planning to give poison to him under some pretext? Are you trying to kill him? What do you want to do? Because what you propagated in the media yesterday was a complete lie."

He further slammed the BJP stating that at the behest of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the life of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is being played with in jail.

"Kejriwal is a diabetic patient for the last 30 years. He has been suffering from diabetes for years and takes insulin to maintain the sugar level. All the big media journalists who know him, are well-aware that he takes insulin," he added.

said. The epicentre, with a depth of 10.0 km, was initially determined to be at 55.52 degrees north latitude and 157.25 degrees west longitude, Xinhua news agency reported. In July 2023, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake also triggered a tsunami advisory for southern Alaska. The earthquake was felt widely throughout the Aleutian Islands, the Alaskan Peninsula and Cook Inlet regions, according to the Alaska Earthquake Center.

## 5.0-magnitude quake hits Alaska Peninsula

AGENCIES  
BEIJING, APRIL 19

An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.0 jolted the Alaska Peninsula at 0727 GMT on Friday, the GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences

## IPL: Ashutosh Sharma's brilliant batting draws praise from Suryakumar



AGENCIES  
MULLANPUR, APRIL 19

In a thrilling encounter between Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians in the 33rd match of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024, Punjab Kings' batsman Ashutosh Sharma's remarkable batting performance has earned him accolades from Mumbai Indians' Suryakumar Yadav.

Ashutosh Sharma, who considers Suryakumar and Glenn Maxwell as his idols, showcased his exceptional talent with a stunning innings of 61 runs off just 28 balls. His innings included two fours and seven towering sixes, displaying his prowess with the bat.

Despite Ashutosh's

brilliant efforts, Punjab fell short in their chase, posting a total of 183 runs, eventually losing the match by nine runs to Mumbai.

Speaking about Ashutosh's innings, Suryakumar expressed his admiration, stating, "He is not 'mini Surya'. He displayed his skill brilliantly and tried to change the course of the match. I really enjoyed watching him bat. I can't say that I wanted him to win the match for Punjab, but I was really feeling good seeing the way he was batting."

Suryakumar also revealed that he had messaged Ashutosh after his debut innings against Gujarat Titans and has been in regular contact

with both Shashank Singh and Ashutosh since then. He praised Ashutosh's fantastic mentality and expressed hope that both players would continue to excel without altering their game.

Reflecting on Mumbai's victory, Suryakumar emphasised the significance of the win for the team's momentum in the highly competitive tournament.

The match between Punjab and Mumbai witnessed a blend of exceptional batting performances, with Ashutosh Sharma's innings standing out as a highlight despite his team's defeat. His display of talent and potential has certainly marked him as a player to watch out for in the future of IPL 2024.

## German Police find arsenal of weapons in raid on alleged drug dealer

AGENCIES  
STUTTGART, APRIL 19

Police in south-western Germany seized a large arsenal of weapons, including an assault rifle and a machine pistol, during a raid on a suspected drug dealer's home, authorities announced on Friday.

Police also seized a number of other weapons along with 10,000 rounds of ammunition and narcotics during the search in the town of Schöntal, which took place on April 11 but was only publicly disclosed on Friday.

The 46-year-old allegedly bought drugs from



six other suspected drug dealers who were arrested at the end of March.

The man is now in custody, according to a

police statement. The public prosecutor's office is investigating violations of the Weapons of War Act and the Narcotics Act.

## Mizoram witnesses low voter turnout



AGENCIES  
AIZAWL, APR 19

Continuing a trend seen in the last Lok Sabha elections, Mizoram recorded a low voter turnout on Friday, with only 52.62 per cent of the total 8,56,364 eligible voters casting their votes by 5:00 PM. During the first phase of the general elections to the Lok Sabha, Mizoram went to the polls on Friday (April 19). Polling proceeded peacefully across all 1,276 polling stations in

the state, according to the state CEO office.

Despite extensive voter awareness campaigns conducted by the election department to encourage greater participation in the Lok Sabha polls, voters in Mizoram appeared hesitant to elect their representative to the single Lok Sabha seat allotted to the state.

Historically, Mizoram has struggled with lower voter turnout during Lok Sabha elections compared to its Assembly

counterparts, despite the close timing of the elections. In response, the Election Department has launched proactive initiatives to raise awareness and encourage greater participation in the Lok Sabha polls.

Expressing concern over the potential for low voter turnout, State Chief Electoral Officer Madhup Vyas held a press conference on Friday at noon, urging government employees to exercise their right to vote.

## MI captain Hardik Pandya fined for slow over-rate

AGENCIES  
MULLANPUR, APR 19

Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their TATA Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 match against Punjab Kings at the PCA New International Cricket Stadium here on Thursday night.

As it was his team's first offence of the season under the IPL's Code of Conduct relating to minimum over rate offences, Pandya was fined Rs 12 lakhs, an IPL media advisory on Friday said.

## China's He, three African runners disqualified for Beijing Half Marathon

AGENCIES  
BEIJING, APR 19

Beijing Half Marathon organizers announced on Friday that the four runners who were involved in last Sunday's controversial race finish have been stripped of medals.

Organizers launched an investigation after video clips of Sunday's race showed the Kenyans Robert Keter and Willy Mnangat and Dejene Bikila of Ethiopia deliberately slowed down before the finish line to let China's He Jie win.

## Egypt urges Iran and Israel to exercise restraint

AGENCIES  
CAIRO, APRIL 19

Egypt has urged Iran and Israel to exercise restraint and avoid plunging the region into conflict, a foreign ministry statement said.

Egypt expressed deep concern over the continued mutual escalation between Israel and Iran and warned of the consequences of expanding the conflict in the region and its dangerous impact on the safety and security of its people.

Oman, meanwhile, has condemned a suspected Israeli attack on the Iranian province of Isfahan as well the repeated Israeli attacks in the region, a foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement.

The Gulf state urged the international community to address the roots of tension and conflict through dialogue, diplomacy and political solutions. It also called for focusing on cease-fire efforts in Gaza and reaching "a just and permanent solution for the Palestinian cause in order to restore security, stability and comprehensive peace in the whole region."

## 5.7-magnitude quake hits southeast of the Loyalty Islands -- USGS

AGENCIES  
BEIJING, APRIL 19

An earthquake with a magnitude of 5.7 jolted southeast of the Loyalty Islands at 0918 GMT on Friday, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

The epicentre, with a depth of 79.5 km, was initially determined to be at 21.93 degrees south latitude and 170.89 degrees east longitude, Xinhua news agency reported.

## India's forex reserves dip by \$5.4bn after 8-week rise to lifetime high

AGENCIES  
MUMBAI, APRIL 19

India's foreign exchange reserves fell by \$5.4 billion to \$643.16 billion as of April 12, according to the latest weekly data released by the RBI on Friday.

This is the first time in 8 weeks that the foreign exchange reserves have recorded a fall after having touched lifetime highs in the preceding weeks.

Market analysts attribute the decline to the RBI actively releasing dollars in the market to curb the volatility in the rupee.

The Indian currency has tended to weaken as oil prices have been on the rise which has triggered an increase in the demand for dollars to finance costlier imports. The data released on Friday showed that the foreign currency portion of the reserves fell by as much as \$6.51 billion in the



reserves as a reflection of the strength of the Indian economy.

"It is our prime focus to build a strong buffer in the form of a substantial quantum of forex reserves which will help us when the cycle turns or when it rains heavily," he remarked while unveiling the first monetary policy review of the current financial year that began on April 1.

India's forex reserves, including the central bank's forward holdings, can now cover more than 11 months of imports, which is a two-year high.

The RBI Governor also said that the Indian rupee (INR) has remained largely range-bound as compared to both its emerging market peers and a few advanced economies during 2023-24 and was the most stable among major currencies during this period.

week ended April 12.

However, there was an increase of \$1.24 billion in the value of gold assets held by the RBI which cushioned the fall of the forex kitty.

Central banks have also been buying gold in recent months as an investment in safe-haven assets amid geopolitical uncertainties triggered by the Middle East conflict.

India's foreign exchange reserves had gone up by \$2.98 billion during the

week ended April 5 to scale a new all-time high of \$648.562 billion.

That was the seventh consecutive week of a jump in overall reserves.

The forex kitty had increased by \$2.95 billion during the preceding week ended on March 29, after notching a cumulative \$26.5 billion rise in the previous five weeks.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das had earlier this month referred to the record foreign exchange

## Wipro sees its employee strength fall by 6,180 in Q4 in 6th consecutive decline

AGENCIES  
BENGALURU, APRIL 19

IT bellwether Wipro saw its employee strength fall by 6,180 in the fourth quarter (Q4) of FY24, in the sixth consecutive quarter of decline for the company.

When it comes to the full year, the IT services major witnessed its headcount decline by 24,516.

The total headcount for Wipro stood at 234,054 for the last financial year, and the company's attrition rate remained flat at 14.2 per cent.

"FY24 proved to be a challenging year for our



industry, and the macro-economic environment remains uncertain. However, I am optimistic about the opportunities that lie ahead. We are on the brink of a major technological

shift," said Srinu Pallia, CEO and Managing Director, Wipro.

"We have the capabilities, leadership, and the strength of over 230,000 Wiproites around the

world to help us realise our goals," he added.

According to Aparna Iyer, Chief Financial Officer, the company generated the highest operating cash flow in recent years "which is at 183 per cent of our net income in Q4 and 159 per cent on a full-year basis".

The gross revenue reached Rs 222.1 billion (\$2.7 billion), which was flat (quarter-on-quarter). The IT services segment revenue was at \$2,657.4 million, an increase of 0.1 per cent QoQ and a decrease of 6.4 per cent YoY.

## Kunal Shah's CRED receives in-principle approval for payment aggregator business

AGENCIES  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 19

Credit Card bill payment leader CRED has received the in-principle approval to enter into the payment aggregator business, a media report said on Friday.

According to TechCrunch, citing sources, the startup received the initial approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for the payment aggregator license this week.

This development marks a step forward for the fintech company towards the expansion of its business offerings.

When reached, the company did not immediately comment.



As per the report, the in-principle license approval to CRED comes after RBI's recent crackdown on fintech activities

and increased caution in giving licences to enterprises.

Earlier this year, online food delivery platform

Zomato's wholly-owned subsidiary Zomato Payments Private Limited (ZPPL) was granted a certificate of authorisation from RBI to operate as an 'Online Payment Aggregator'. In February, CRED reached an agreement to acquire the online wealth management platform Kuvera in an effort to take on the likes of Zerodha and Groww.

The reports to acquire Kuvera initially surfaced last year in October.

According to the company, post-acquisition, Kuvera founders, team and product will continue to operate independently while working closely with CRED leadership to scale its network, ecosystem, brand and distribution.

## One crew member killed in Russian Tu-22M3 plane crash



AGENCIES  
MOSCOW, APRIL 19

A crew member of the Russian Tu-22M3 strategic bomber died when the aircraft crashed in the Krasnogvardeysky district of the Stavropol Territory, regional governor Vladimir Vladimirov said on social media Friday.

Updated information has been received on the incident. Unfortunately, the third crew member died. The search for the fourth pilot continues,

he wrote, Xinhua news agency reported.

The plane crashed in the Krasnogvardeysky district of the Stavropol Territory while returning to its home airfield after completing a combat mission. Initial findings suggest that the crash was caused by a technical fault. The Tu-22M3 long-range supersonic missile carrier bomber is designed to destroy sea- and ground-based targets by guided missiles and aerial bombs.

## 7 killed in fire in Indonesia's Jakarta



AGENCIES  
JAKARTA, APRIL 19

Seven people were killed in a fire at a frame shop house on Mampang Prapatan Raya Street in Indonesia's capital city Jakarta, according to police.

"There are five adults and two children who were found in a warehouse on the second floor," said Mampang Police Chief Commissioner

David Kanitero, adding that all the bodies have been evacuated on Friday, Xinhua news agency reported.

Meanwhile, five injured are still in intensive care at a hospital.

The fire broke out in the shop stocked with wood, paint, and paint thinner on Thursday evening. It was extinguished after 24 fire engines with 110 personnel were deployed.

## Lok Sabha Elections 2024: EO reviews compliance with election expenditure regulations in Ganderbal

JNEWS SERVICE  
GANDERBAL, APRIL 19

Expenditure Observer (EO) to 2-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency, Sambit Mishra today undertook a comprehensive review of compliance with election expenditure regulations in Ganderbal ahead of the Lok Sabha elections 2024.

The meeting was attend-

ed by District Election Officer, Shyambir; SSP Ganderbal, Sandeep Gupta; Additional District Development Commissioner Mushtaq Ahmad Simnani, Additional Deputy Commissioner Gulzar Ahmad, Dy DEO, District Treasury Officer, along with various other officials and teams involved in the election process.

The Nodal officer Elec-

tion Expenditure Monitoring provided a detailed overview of the Election Monitoring mechanism, highlighting the constitution of Election Expenditure Monitoring Cell, Flying Squad Teams, SSTs, and VVTs, all aimed at ensuring rigorous compliance with election expenditure regulations.

During the meeting, the Expenditure Observer

underscored the importance of adhering to ECI guidelines, emphasising the crucial role of each stakeholder in safeguarding the democratic process. He called for a collective commitment towards upholding democratic values and maintaining transparency in electoral expenditures, thus upholding the integrity of the electoral process.

## BJP national president takes dig at Congress MP

AGENCIES  
WAYANAD, APR 19

BJP national president J P Nadda on Friday took a dig at senior Congress leader and MP Rahul Gandhi, claiming that he is contesting from Wayanad in Kerala because he knows that he will lose if he contests from his own constituency Amethi in Uttar Pradesh in this Lok Sabha polls. Addressing a roadshow in Sulthan Batherly as part of electioneering for BJP state president and NDA candidate K Surendran, he alleged that Rahul Gandhi's politics is without a proper stance.

He also claimed that "Rahul Gandhi is not confident of contesting from his own constituency at Amethi. His alliance with



anti-nationals, banned Popular Front of India (PFI) political party, Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), is because he has no faith in people of the nation.

Nadda further claimed that sitting MP from Wayanad Rahul Gandhi is not talking about anything about the country.

He said, "Rahul Gandhi is under investigation in National Herald corruption case, that is why he was protecting corrupt people and implementing family politics and his hallmark is politics of appeasement."

Rahul Gandhi is fighting against NDA with CPI leader D Raja as a

member of INDIA bloc in New Delhi, while Raja's wife Annie Raja is contesting against Rahul in Wayanad as Left Democratic Front (LDF) candidate, he said and claimed that this proves that Rahul Gandhi has no political stance.

Nadda further claimed that "the Lotus will bloom in Wayanad to strengthen progress of the country. India has become fifth largest economy during the Narendra Modi's 10-year rule.

This time India will grow to be the third largest economic power in the world and ensure overall development of the country, he claimed.

Listing out Modi's achievements, BJP chief said that women were given free gas connection

through Ujjwala Yojana. 10 lakh people in Kerala got drinking water through Jal Jeevan Mission, crores of toilets were built under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, four crore houses were constructed under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in the country, out of these two lakh houses were built in Kerala, health insurance of Rs five lakh has been given to poor people under Ayushman Bharat scheme, he added.

Earlier, Nadda arrived at Wayanad at 1130 hours in morning and held a roadshow at Sulthan Batherly from 1200 hrs to 1330 hrs.

Later, he will attend a public meeting at Kulappully in Palakkad district and at Thiruvananthapuram in evening.

## DC Bandipora discusses restoration of electricity supply to Gurez

AGENCIES  
BANDIPORA, APRIL 19

The Deputy Commissioner (DC) Bandipora, Shakeel Ur Rehman today convened a meeting here to discuss issues for restoration of electricity supply to Gurez through a grid that got damaged during recent snowfall.

It is worth mentioning here that Gurez was connected to the electricity grid for the first time in November last year but got cut off due to recent heavy snowfall in the Razdan area.

The meeting also discussed threadbare infrastructure damages and logistical constraints in the restoration process.

## 7 killed, 22 injured in PoK road accident

AGENCIES  
ISLAMABAD, APRIL 19

At least seven people were killed and 22 others injured when a van fell into a ditch in Muzaffarabad of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), the rescue service reported on Friday.

The accident took place in the Garhi Dupatta area of Muzaffarabad when a passenger van went off the road in mountainous terrain and fell on the roof of a house before eventually hitting the ditch, resulting in casualties, said the rescue service.

The deceased included a person who was in the house upon which the bus fell, it added.

Following the accident, the rescue workers reached the site and shifted the victims to the local hospitals, the rescue service said, adding that three injured were in critical condition.

## 28 pro-government fighters killed in Syria

AGENCIES  
BEIRUT, APRIL 19

At least 28 pro-government fighters were killed in suspected attacks by Islamic State militants in Syria, a war monitor said on Friday.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said 22 Syrian soldiers and allied fighters were killed in an attack on a military bus late Thursday night. Seven other people were injured in the attack near the town of al-Taybah in the eastern part of the country. Six Syrian soldiers were killed in another attack in the eastern Syrian province of Deir al-Zour, the watchdog said. No group has claimed responsibility but the Observatory said the Islamic State group was likely behind the attacks. The extremist militant group once controlled large swathes of land in western and northern Iraq plus parts of Syria. It was defeated in late 2017 but cells are still active in both countries.

## G7 meeting to end with debate on China and global issues

AGENCIES  
CAPRI, APRIL 19

The spring meeting of the foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) economically strong democracies is set to end on Friday with discussions on the situation in the Indo-Pacific region and global issues such as food, energy and cybersecurity.

In view of China's increasingly aggressive behaviour in the Indian Ocean and Pacific region, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock had already stated at the start of the meeting that the effects are not only being felt by the G7's Pacific countries - the United States, Canada and Japan - but also in Europe.

The G7 meeting is being held on the Italian Mediterranean island of Capri.

Lok Sabha Elections 2024

## Election Expenditure Observer reviews Election preparedness in 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency

JINNEWS SERVICE  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 19

In order to review the preparations for smooth conduct of upcoming Lok Sabha Elections-2024 in 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency, the Election Expenditure Observer for the Srinagar PC, Sambit Mishra today chaired a meeting at Meeting Hall of the DC Office Complex, here.

District Election Officer (DEO) Srinagar, Dr. Bilal Mohi-Ud-Din Bhat, who is also the Returning Officer (RO) for 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency was present on the occasion.

At the outset, the Election Expenditure Observer held an extensive interaction with Assistant Returning Officers (ARO), Assistant Expenditure Observers, Accounting Teams, Bankers and reviewed the preparedness measures undertaken for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in the district.

The DEO Srinagar apprised the Election Expenditure Observer regarding the preparations made for free, fair and peaceful conduct of the Lok Sabha Elections in the 02-Srinagar Parliamentary Constituency. He also briefed him about the teams constituted to monitor expenditures of the candidates contesting



and stressed the prompt reporting of ECI violation with respect to election expenditure booking. He also underscored the efficient monitoring of the social media in order to contain any misuse of election expenditure by the contesting candidates in the district.

While expressing satisfaction over the election preparations in Srinagar District, the Election Expenditure Observer enjoined upon the Officers to work with added zeal and unwavering dedication to uphold sanctity of the election process and safeguarding the democratic spirit. He also urged them to document any MCC violation and promptly inform the Election Observer regarding the same, if any.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Returning Office 19-Hazratbal), Syed Ahmad Kataria; Additional Deputy Commissioner (Returning Office 24-Zadibal), Dr. Khalid Hussain Malik; Deputy District Election Officer, Mir Imtiyaz Ul Aziz, Nodal Officer Election Expenditure Monitoring, Javid Maqbool Khanday, Assistant Returning Officer of all 8 Assembly Segments of Srinagar District and other Officers associated with FSTs SSTS and Expenditure Monitoring Teams attended the meeting.

The Elections as per the laid guidelines of Election Commission of India (ECI).

On the occasion, the Election Expenditure Observer reviewed the preparations and the status of Expenditure monitoring teams in all Assembly Segments. He briefed the concerned Officers about their role and responsibilities and

emphasized the importance of maintaining proper records of the accounts and expenditure booking by the contesting candidates as per the ECI guidelines.

The Election Expenditure Observer emphasized the need of coordination among various monitoring teams for effective expenditure oversight

## Lok Sabha Elections 2024: DEO B'la presides final training session on Expenditure Monitoring

JINNEWS SERVICE  
BARAMULLA, APRIL 19

In an endeavour to ensure transparency and fairness in the electoral process during the General Elections to Lok Sabha 2024, the District Election Officer (DEO) Baramulla, Minga Sherpa today presided over the final training session for Election Expenditure Monitoring Teams, Video Surveillance Teams (VSTs), and Video Viewing Teams (VVTs) at Dak Bunglow here.

The session was attended by the Additional District Development Commissioner, Baramulla, Syed Qamar Sajad; Nodal Officer Expenditure Monitoring, Baramulla, Deputy District Election Officer, all members of the Election Monitoring Cell, accounting teams, video surveillance teams, and video viewing teams and the officials from the election department.

The session focused on the role of each individual in enhancing the efficacy of expenditure monitor-



ing mechanisms during the electoral process to provide a level playing field for all candidates contesting the General Elections to Lok Sabha 2024 for the 1-Baramulla Parliamentary Constituency seat.

Speaking during the session, the DEO underscored the paramount importance of adhering to the stringent guidelines and protocols of the Elec-

tion Commission of India to curb any potential malpractices related to election expenditure.

Meanwhile, Minga Sherpa elaborated on the function and responsibilities of VSTs, VVTs, and Assistant Expenditure Observers stationed at each assembly segment, emphasizing their crucial role in assisting the Expenditure Monitoring team in accurately

assessing the expenses incurred by candidates during rallies and other political activities within those specific assembly segments. The DEO instructed the attendees to thoroughly go through the handbook published by the ECI regarding the MCC guidelines, emphasizing the importance of strict adherence to these guidelines while carrying out their duties.

Lok Sabha Elections 2024

## DEO Kupwara reviews preparations for LS polls

JINNEWS SERVICE  
KUPWARA, APRIL 19

The District Election Officer (DEO) Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan on Friday convened a meeting of EROs and other officers to review the preparations for upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the district.

The meeting discussed various aspects of the preparations including availability of drinking

water, electricity and toilet facilities for camping locations/ identified buildings for accommodation of Para-Military Security forces to be deployed for the LS Polls in Kupwara district.

The DEO on the occasion directed Ex. Engineer PDD and Ex. Engineer PHE to ensure the availability of electricity and water supply for all the camping locations/buildings as per

requirement in consultation with concerned AROs. She fixed a deadline of April 23 for providing electricity and water supply connections and their necessary extension as per requirement to all identified locations.

The pivotal meeting focused on ensuring effective coordination and addressing any concerns regarding the necessary facilities.

The DEO said that the District Administration is committed to take all necessary measures for successful conduct of 'free, fair and participative elections.'

The meeting was attended by SSP Kupwara, SSP Handwara, ADDC Kupwara, ADC Handwara, AROs, Dy.DEO, ARTO, Officers of Para-Military Security Force and other concerned officers.

## Lok Sabha Elections 2024: Expenditure Observer for Anantnag-Rajouri PC visits Shopian

JINNEWS SERVICE  
SHOPIAN, APRIL 19

Election Expenditure Observer, Anantnag-Rajouri Parliamentary Constituency, Shyam Manohar Singh today visited Shopian and chaired a review meeting with Nodal officers on expenditure monitoring and other Election preparedness in the Zainapora Assembly Constituency.

The District Election Officer (DEO) Shopian, Fazl Lul Haseeb at the outset briefed the Election Observer about functioning of expenditure monitoring teams viz. Flying Squads, Static Surveillance Teams, District Election Control Room, details of permissions for political campaigning, District Election Management Plan, SVEEP activities, security, and other related election issues.



He said, teams are already working on the ground to keep check on election campaigning in relation to expenditure monitoring of all political parties and candidates of the constituency, and all arrangements are in place for smooth conduct of elections in a free and

fair manner. Nodal Officer, Expenditure Monitoring also briefed about the expenditure monitoring system in place and position of expenditure booking party wise.

Expenditure Observer, on the occasion asked for making an orientation programme for independent

candidates on expenditure booking for campaigning.

Later, the Observer visited the Strong Room also.

The meeting was attended by ADDC, Dr. Nasir Ahmad Lone; ADC, Dr. Zakir Hussain Faaz; AROs, Nodal Officers and other concerned teams of expenditure monitoring.

Lok Sabha Elections 2024

## DC Baramulla visits 9-Uri AC; ensures AMFs at Polling Stations

JINNEWS SERVICE  
BARAMULLA, APRIL 19

In view of the General Elections to Lok Sabha, the District Election Officer (DEO) Baramulla, Minga Sherpa today conducted a comprehensive inspection of various polling stations within the sub-division Uri.

The purpose of the visit was to ensure that all polling stations have Assured Minimum Facilities (AMF) as per the ECI guidelines. The DEO conducted a thorough assessment of infrastructure and amenities at each location to ensure a seamless and efficient voting experience for voters.

During the visit, the DEO inspected several polling stations in the border villages and conducted a comprehensive assessment of various essential aspects such as availability of ramps, sanitation facilities, provision of drinking water,



and electricity supply—all of which fall under the Assured Minimum Facilities (AMFs), to be provided to the poll parties as per the ECI guidelines.

To foster a conducive environment for conducting free, fair, and transparent elections, the DEO emphasized the importance of providing adequate facilities to both voters and the polling staff.

Meanwhile, Minga Sherpa praised the dedication and efforts of all the stakeholders involved in the preparations and

urged for continued cooperation to guarantee the success of the electoral process.

Furthermore, the DEO visited and assessed the arrangements at the Distribution Center in Uri, where from the poll parties and election materials would be distributed to the individual polling stations of the assembly constituency during the Lok Sabha Elections.

The DEO was accompanied by ARO 9-Uri Assembly Segment, Javid Ahmad Rather and other Officers during the visit.

Lok Sabha Elections 2024

## DEO Budgam reviews Law & Order, Transport & communication plans

JINNEWS SERVICE  
BUDGAM, APRIL 19

The District Election Officer (DEO) Budgam, Akshay Labroo chaired a joint security meet to take detailed assessment of law and order situation for the smooth conduct of ensuing Lok Sabha Elections-2024 in the district.

At the outset, the DEO called for maintenance of seamless coordination among all civil and security officers for smooth conduct of elections in the district.

He said that all necessary arrangements are being put up for the dispatching of EVMs to designated locations, and all arrangements of security and safety of EVMs have been made as per the guidelines of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The DEO said that arrangements including electricity, water and washroom facility for CAPF camp sites are being monitored person-



ally by SSP Budgam and shall be ensured as per the requirements and extant guidelines in all areas.

The transportation and communication plan were also flagged at the district level for arrangements for all size vehicles including availability of additional vehicles.

The DEO stressed on making adequate arrangements at all polling stations including creation of women and PWD polling stations at all identified locations.

He also assessed the formation and functioning of flying squad Teams (FSTs), static surveillance teams (SSTs), video surveillance teams (VSTs) and other designated teams in the

district.

SSP Budgam, Al Tahir Gillani deliberated on the status of deposition of arms license, security deployment of EVMs, polling stations and deployment for security of contesting candidates and other security related issues.

He said that all security arrangements are being made in a coordinated way across all areas of the district.

SSP Budgam, Al Tahir Gillani, Nodal Officer, Law and Order, (ADC), Mehrajuddin Shah, Commandants of different central and para military forces, Nodal Officers, AROs and other concerned were also present in the meeting.

Participants of the event lauded the initiative and expressed their support for the continuation of such programs to further educate and empower every voter. Various members, including the SVEEP Coordinator, also shared their insights and thoughts during the event.

In a similar effort to create awareness and promote voter education, an awareness program under the SVEEP initiative was successfully organized at HS Gulistaan zone Tral.

These initiatives underline the commitment to fostering a well-informed and actively engaged electorate, ensuring the democratic process thrives through increased participation and awareness.