

# Cong claims over 19L voters deleted during SIR, walks out of assembly

**RAIPUR:** The opposition Congress on Thursday alleged that over 19 lakh names were deleted from the electoral rolls in Chhattisgarh during the Special Intensive Revision exercise and demanded a discussion on the issue in the state assembly.

After the Chair rejected their demand, Congress members staged a walkout from the House.

Raising the matter during Zero Hour, Leader of the Opposition Charandas Mahant claimed that more than 19.13 lakh names had been removed from the electoral rolls during SIR.

These are the people of Chhattisgarh whose names have been deleted, he said. They are residents of the state, but their whereabouts are unknown, Mahant said.

Interrupting him, senior BJP MLA Ajay Chandrakar argued that the issue does not fall under the jurisdiction of the assembly and should not be placed on record. Mahant, however,



reiterated his concern, questioning the "sudden disappearance" of such a large number of voters.

"Have 19 lakh people vanished, died, or left the state? When so many people are missing, is this not an issue? Neither the police nor the government seems concerned," he said, seeking discussion on the issue by moving an adjournment

motion notice. Chandrakar insisted that the SIR process does not involve the state government, as it is conducted by the Election Commission of India, a constitutional authority.

Discussion on the functioning of a constitutional body cannot be taken up in the legislature, he said. BJP member Dharam-

jeet Singh alleged that the Opposition was raising the matter in the House because it had no substantive issues.

The Chair disallowed the adjournment motion, stating that the matter pertains to the Election Commission of India. Dissatisfied with the decision, Congress members walked out of the House.

# Delhi Cong demands probe into Palam fire, flags delays, fire dept shortages

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav wrote to the Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu on Thursday, demanding the constitution of a committee to inquire into the Palam fire incident, which claimed nine lives.

According to an official statement, Yadav, in his letter, said the "heart-wrenching" loss of lives could have been avoided with timely and efficient rescue operations.

He urged Sandhu to order a thorough investigation into the incident and take steps to curb the rising number of fire-related mishaps in the na-

tional capital, the statement read. Citing data, he said 4,652 people died in fire incidents in Delhi between 2016 and 2025, while 24 deaths have been reported in 2026 so far.

Yadav alleged that delays in emergency response aggravated the Palam tragedy. "Fire tenders reached the spot after nearly an hour, and hydraulic machines did not open in time, leaving victims with no escape," he said.

He also flagged an acute shortage of manpower and equipment in the fire department, claiming that only half the required number of water ten-

ders and specialised machinery were available at the site.

"There has been no recruitment of Fire Station Officers since 2012. A total of 70 fire stations have a requirement of 90 station officers, while currently there are only 18 station officers, out of which 12 are going to retire soon," Yadav alleged.

On Wednesday morning, nine members of a family, including a 70-year-old woman and three young girls -- one just three years old -- were killed after a massive fire that swept a four-storey residential building in southwest Delhi's Palam.

# Leaders of NDA allies BJP and AGP switch sides to secure nomination for Assam polls

**GUWAHATI:** An 'exchange' of probable candidates for the Assam Assembly elections has been going on between NDA constituents BJP and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), with leaders quitting one party to join the other for the sake of party nomination.

Two leaders of the BJP and one of the AGP have joined the other party in the run-up to the April 9 assembly election to strengthen the chance of being nominated as candidates.

The latest such case involves Bhupen Roy, whom the saffron party named as the candidate for Abhayapuri constituency, days after he defected from the AGP.

While the BJP will field candidates in 89 seats, the AGP in 26, and the third partner of the coalition, the Bodoland People's Front, will nominate in 11.

With the allies contesting the polls under a seat-sharing arrangement, it had become known that the BJP would contest in Abhayapuri after the AGP refused to leave the bordering Bongaigaon seat.

Bongaigaon is currently represented by AGP's Diprimayee Choudhury, who was elected in the 2024 bye-election after the incumbent MLA and her husband Phani Bhusan Choudhury won the Lok Sabha polls from Barpeta constituency as an NDA candidate.

Phani Bhusan had been undefeated from Bongaigaon since 1983, making him the longest-serving MLA in the state so far.

Roy decided to switch sides to the other NDA ally in order to ensure that he became the ruling alliance's candidate in the constituency.

Meanwhile, at least two BJP leaders have joined the AGP with the hope of securing the alliance's nomination for the state polls.

Basanta Das of Naoboo-icha joined the regional

outfit on Thursday, while Prakash Das had entered the AGP fold earlier this week, seeking to secure nomination from the Hajo-Sualkuchi seat.

Both these constituencies have been left for the AGP under the seat-sharing arrangement.

The chief executive councillor of Kamatapur Autonomous Council, Jibesh Roy, also joined the AGP on Thursday. He is viewed as a ticket contender for the Bilasipara constituency.

A former Congress leader from Binnakandi, Sahabuddin Majumdar, also entered the AGP fold, with the hope of securing nomination from the seat.

The AGP and BFP are yet to declare their candidates for the elections. The BJP has named its candidates for 88 seats in the first list.

Elections for the 126-member Assembly will be held on April 9, with counting of votes on May 4.

# Rain lashes parts of Punjab, Haryana; temperatures drop

**CHANDIGARH:** Rain lashed many parts of Punjab and Haryana on Thursday, leading to a sharp dip in the maximum temperatures.

According to the Met here, Chandigarh, Ambala, Hisar, Rohtak, Bhiwani, Gurugram, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala, Rupnagar, Mohali and Sangrur were among other places which received rain.

It rained throughout the day in Chandigarh, the common capital of the two states, which recorded a maximum temperature of 20.8 degrees Celsius, eight notches below normal limits. In Haryana, Ambala recorded a maximum of 25.8 degrees Celsius, four notches below normal.

Rohtak recorded a high of 20.7 degrees, down ten notches below normal, while Hisar recorded a maximum of 23.2 degrees, eight notches below normal.

# CM Nitish launches projects, schemes worth Rs 445 Crore in Munger, Lakhisarai districts

**MUNGER/LAKHISARAI:** Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday launched development projects worth around Rs 445 crore in Munger and Lakhisarai districts during his 'Samridhi Yatra'.

He also reviewed ongoing schemes and projects in both districts, according to an official statement.

According to a statement by the Chief Minister's Office, "Kumar launched 78 development projects/schemes worth Rs 119 crore in Munger district. These include the inauguration of 52 schemes costing Rs 87 crore and foundation stones for 26 schemes/projects worth Rs 32 crore".

He inaugurated the District Industries Centre office building and inspected beautification work at Kashtaharni Ghat along the banks of the Ganga, asking officials to further develop the area for devotees' convenience.

Kumar also inaugurated a district-level Resource and Training Centre at the



Munger Animal Hospital campus under the Dairy, Fisheries and Animal Resources Department.

Later, in Lakhisarai, he launched projects worth around Rs 326 crore, including the inauguration of 117 projects costing Rs 118 crore and foundation laying for 144 projects worth Rs 208 crore.

The chief minister also visited the Kajra Solar Power Plant, inspected its control room and reviewed the hybrid energy management system.

Kumar inspected stalls set up by various depart-

ments showcasing development schemes within the Kajra Solar Power Plant premises.

The CM appreciated the products and work of Jeevika Didis (women associated with self-help groups).

Others who were present on the occasion included Union Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan, Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, Water Resources Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary, Education Minister and Sunil Kumar and senior officials of the state government.

# 11 Naxalites with Rs 68L bounty surrender in Maha

**GADCHIROLI:** Eleven Naxalites including five senior cadres on Thursday surrendered in eastern Maharashtra's Gadchiroli, police said, claiming that the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has almost come to an end in the district.

The Maoist cadres, which included six women, were carrying a total reward of Rs 68 lakh on their heads. They surrendered before police and Central Reserve Police Force officials, said a release from Gadchiroli Police. As many as 123 armed Maoists have surrendered in the district, which borders Chhattisgarh, over last one year, police said.

The Naxal movement, once active in all 10 sub-divisions of the district, is now confined only to the border areas of Bhamragad sub-division, claimed the release. The cadres who turned themselves in on Thursday were identified as Divisional Committee Member (DVCM) Soni alias Bali Vatte Mattami (45), Area Committee Secretary Budari alias Rambatti Mattami (40), Sukhlal Koksa (31), Shanti alias Somari Telami (28), Yamunakka alias Rukhmakka Pendam (60), Ganesh Kowasi (21), Minako alias Jamani Mattami (22), Dhanu Velanje (38), Sunita alias Vange Hoyam (25), Ramesh Madavi (28) and Kishor Vasam (33). The Naxal movement received a major blow last October when Mallojala Venugopal Rao alias Bhupathi along with 61 senior cadres surrendered before Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Gadchiroli, the police noted.

# Police hands over helmets to violators for ferrying children without headgear

**SHILLONG:** Meghalaya Police on Thursday handed out nearly 400 helmets to violators instead of fining them for riding with children without helmets in East Khasi Hills district, an officer said.

The helmets were distributed during a special enforcement drive conducted by the district traffic police, targeting parents ferrying minors on motorcycles and scooters without protective headgear, they said.

East Khasi Hills district SP (Traffic) K Prasad said the initiative was aimed at promoting awareness and ensuring the safety of children rather than resorting to immediate penal action.

"We found that many parents were either unaware or casual about the importance of helmets for children. Instead of penalising them straightaway, we decided to counsel them and provide helmets so that the children are protected," Prasad told

PTI. He said children are among the most vulnerable road users, and even minor accidents can lead to serious injuries if proper safety gear is not used.

"Enforcement is important, but awareness is equally crucial. This initiative is about saving lives and instilling a habit of safety among families," he added.

Police officials said the drive was carried out along key routes, especially during school hours, when a large number of children are transported on two-wheelers.

Along with distributing helmets, traffic personnel also sensitised parents about road safety rules and the risks of riding without protective gear.

Officials indicated that while such awareness campaigns will continue, stricter action may be taken against repeat offenders to ensure compliance with safety norms.

# Always had faith in Judicial system, says Elvish Yadav

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Thursday quashed an FIR against Elvish Yadav who was arrested for allegedly using snake venom at a rave party in Noida, prompting the YouTuber to say he always had faith in the judicial system.

However, he asked who would compensate for the harassment he and his family faced.

Yadav was booked in November 2023 and arrested on March 17, 2024 by the Noida Police in connection with a probe into the suspected use of snake venom as a recreational drug at a rave party in Noida. He was among six people named in an FIR lodged at Sector 49 police station on November 3, 2023. The Supreme Court on Thursday quashed the FIR and subsequent proceedings against Yadav and said the case cannot be sustained in law.

A bench of Justices M M Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh said it was confining its consideration to two specific questions -- the applica-

bility of Section 2(23) of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985, and the validity of proceedings under Section 55 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The top court, however, granted liberty to the competent authority to initiate appropriate proceedings in accordance with law by filing a proper complaint under Section 55 of the Wildlife Protection Act.

The case against Yadav was registered on November 22, 2023, and he was arrested on March 17, 2024.

The apex court said offences under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) invoked in the FIR against Yadav were based on an earlier FIR registered in Gurugram, in which a closure report has been filed. The bench noted that no recovery had been made from Yadav himself, with the chargesheet only alleging that he placed orders for snake venom for recreational purposes through his friends, who are co-accused in the case.

# Unseasonal rains lash parts of Guj; more showers likely till Mar 21

**AHMEDABAD:** Several parts of Gujarat witnessed unseasonal rains on Thursday, with the meteorological department forecasting more showers in the next few days due to a western disturbance in the Arabian Sea. Rainfall was recorded in talukas spread across Rajkot, Junagadh, Amreli, Devbhumi Dwarka, Kutch, Surendranagar, Jamnagar, Morbi, Patan, Porbandar and Botad districts, as per the data shared by the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC).

In 12 hours ending at 6 pm on Thursday, Rajkot and Bhesan talukas in Junagadh received the highest rainfall of 35 mm, followed by 22 mm at Bagasara taluka in Amreli, it said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a forecast of light to moderate rainfall accompanied by thunder in parts of the state till 8.30 am of Saturday. "Light to moderate rains or thunderstorms are likely in districts of Banas-



kantha, Sabarkantha, Aravalli, Panchmahal, Dahod, Mahisagar, Chhota Udepur, Amreli, Bhavnagar and Kutch. Dry weather is very likely in the remaining districts of the region," an official release said. The rains also brought some respite from simmering heat.

Ahmedabad recorded the maximum temperature of 35.2 degrees Celsius on Thursday, 1.6 degrees Celsius below normal, while the minimum temperature rose to 22.5 degrees Celsius. Similar trends were ob-

served in Vadodara and Gandhinagar, where days were slightly cooler but nights remained warmer than usual.

Surat's maximum temperature on Thursday was 33.8 degrees Celsius, 2.3 degrees Celsius below normal. Considering the changing weather conditions, the state agriculture department issued a special advisory suggesting precautionary measures to protect harvested and standing crops from potential damage.

**KOLKATA:** Hours after attacking the Election Commission for overnight transfers of top bureaucrats and IPS officers in poll-bound West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday again wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, expressing "deep shock" over the functioning of the poll panel.

In a strongly worded letter, her eighth to the CEC, Banerjee alleged that it had "crossed all boundaries of decency and constitutional propriety".

The CM accused the poll panel of acting with "apparent bias" since the commencement of the Special Intensive Revision process and ignoring concerns raised by the state government.

"I am deeply shocked by the functioning of the Election Commission of India, which, in my view, has crossed all boundaries of decency and constitutional propriety. The ECI has acted with apparent bias, showing little regard for ground re-

alities or the well-being of the people," she wrote.

The chief minister also referred to her government's move to approach the Supreme Court over the issue, stating that the court had acknowledged the concerns and issued directions that are currently being implemented.

Banerjee alleged that the EC had "unilaterally" transferred several senior state officials, including the chief secretary, home secretary, DGP, and multiple district magistrates and police officers, soon after the announcement of assembly polls.

"These large-scale transfers have been effected immediately following the announcement of elections, without any cogent reasons and in the absence of any allegation of violation of electoral rules or the Model Code of Conduct," she said.

She further claimed that the transfer of district election officers during the ongoing revision of electoral rolls appeared to be "driven



by a clear mala fide intent", raising concerns about the disposal of pending cases.

Questioning the deployment of state police officers as observers in other poll-bound states, Banerjee termed the move "arbitrary" and "a misuse of authority", alleging it reflected "serious overreach" by the Commission.

The chief minister also warned

that the sudden removal of senior officers could adversely impact governance, disaster response and law and order, particularly during the storm-prone months of March and April.

"Such biased, hasty and unilateral decisions are unprecedented and do not augur well for a healthy democracy. They undermine the spirit of cooperative federalism," she said.

# BJP releases first list of 88 candidates

**NEW DELHI:** The BJP on Thursday released its first list of 88 candidates for the Assam assembly polls, including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma from Jalukbari seat. The party named former Congress leader Pradyut Bordoloi as its candidate from Dispur assembly seat. Bordoloi joined the BJP in the presence of Sarma and other party leaders here on Wednesday.

According to the list, Bhupen Kumar Borah, who also joined the BJP recently after leaving the Congress, will contest from Bi-

hpura seat. Madhavi Das will enter the fray from Birsing-Jarua, Jyotsana Kalita from Chamaria and Nilima Devi from Mangaldai.

The first list of candidates was finalised by the BJP's Central Election Committee at its meeting presided over by party president Nitin Nabin here on Wednesday evening.

The meeting was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other members of the BJP poll body.