

UDF unveils Kerala manifesto with focus on welfare rights, jobs and social harmony

KOCHI: The Congress-led UDF on Thursday released its manifesto for the April 9 polls to the Kerala Assembly, outlining key welfare measures and development plans for the state.

The document states that welfare pensions are not charity but a right, and promises a law to guarantee pensions as a legal entitlement. The manifesto was released in Kochi, where Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy handed it over to Congress leader V D Satheesan.

A major highlight is the "Indira Guarantees" announced by Rahul Gandhi. These include free bus travel for women, Rs 1,000 monthly assistance for college girls, a Rs 3,000 social welfare pension, Rs 25 lakh free health insurance per family, and interest-free loans up to Rs 5 lakh for young entrepreneurs.

A separate department for senior citizens' welfare has also been promised.

The manifesto focuses on economic growth through projects like Mission Samudra to develop Kerala as a port-based economy, expansion of the aviation sector, and the creation of 10,000 high-revenue enterprises.

It also proposes a Job Watch

Tower to track employment trends and a Tribal University in Wayanad, along with financial and mentorship support for startups.

To address poverty, the UDF has promised the launch of the "Nava Ashraya" scheme, food security through Indira Canteens, and free ration for vulnerable groups.

Youth empowerment will be promoted through "Yuvashree" groups, while additional support has been assured for differently-abled persons and transgender communities.

The manifesto places strong emphasis on peace and unity, proposing a Ministry of Tolerance to promote communal harmony and a Social Harmony Department to prevent political violence and ensure peaceful coexistence.

In the labour sector, fuel subsidies will be increased to Rs 700, and wages of Anganwadi and school meal workers will be revised.

In healthcare, free dialysis for BPL patients, higher budget allocation, affordable treatment, and hospital beds as a right have been assured. Schemes like the Karunya Fund will also be revived.



The document also highlights education reforms, including scholarships, anti-ragging systems, and measures to end discrimination.

Employment opportunities will be expanded through global investments and improved recruitment systems, along with a campaign against drug abuse.

Housing schemes aim to provide homes to five lakh people within five years, while agriculture policies include a special budget, better support prices, and quick resolution of

farmers' issues.

Fishermen will receive subsidies and protection of rights, and SC/ST communities will benefit from land distribution and targeted welfare measures.

Tourism will be promoted as an industry, and traditional sectors like coir and handloom will receive support. Infrastructure plans include a high-speed rail corridor and metro expansion, along with sports programmes to prepare athletes for the Olympics.

Jogi convicted in murder case of NCP leader; HC orders surrender in 3 weeks

BILASPUR: Nearly 23 years after the murder of NCP leader Ramavtar Jaggi, the Chhattisgarh High Court on Thursday convicted former CM Ajit Jogi's son Amit Jogi in the case, and directed him to surrender within three weeks, the CBI's counsel said.

A trial court had in 2007 acquitted Amit Jogi, president of the Janata Congress Chhattisgarh (J), founded by his late father.

The HC, however, reopened proceedings in the 2003 murder case last month following directions from the Supreme Court on an appeal by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The SC in November last year said though the CBI had filed the application after a significant delay, it was equally true that "the charges against respondent Amit Jogi were very grave, involving a conspiracy to murder a member of a rival



political party". On Thursday, a division bench of Chhattisgarh High Court's Chief Justice Ramesh Sinha and Justice Arvind Kumar Verma set aside the acquittal of Amit Jogi, convicted him and issued the surrender directive, CBI counsel Vaibhav A Goverdhan told PTI.

Reacting to the HC's order, Amit Jogi said injustice was done to him as he was previously acquitted and

now declared guilty without being allowed to be heard. He expressed hope that the truth would prevail and that he would get justice from the Supreme Court.

"Dear friends and well-wishers, today the Hon'ble High Court accepted the CBI's appeal against me in just 40 minutes, without giving me an opportunity to be heard. I regret that a person who had been acquitted by a court has now been declared guilty without even a single chance for a hearing. This has never happened before," he said in a post on X.

"The court has given me three weeks to surrender. I believe a grave injustice has been done to me. I have full faith that I will receive justice from the Supreme Court. I have complete trust in the judicial system and will move forward with peace, faith, and patience. Truth will ultimately prevail," he added.

Delhi up for another artificial rain; IIT Kanpur reviewing past findings

NEW DELHI: Delhi may witness another cloud-seeding trial this summer, according to an official familiar with the matter. Two rounds of cloud-seeding trials were conducted in the national capital late last October. The trials came following a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Delhi Environment Department and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, signed on September 25, 2025.

The experiment, however, failed to cause any rain in the city.

IIT Kanpur, in a statement, attributed the failure to low moisture levels in the clouds.

The institute, however, said that the observations from the trials would strengthen planning for future operations and help

them identify the ideal conditions.

Cloud seeding is a weather modification technique designed to enhance a cloud's potential to produce rainfall. It involves dispersing substances such as silver iodide and other compounds into clouds to trigger changes, promoting the formation of ice crystals or raindrops.

As part of the trial last year, each time, eight chemical flares containing silver iodide and sodium chloride were released.

In the wake of the experiment, the Delhi government released a report, claiming that the trials helped reduce particulate matter at targeted locations.

Now, IIT Kanpur has approached the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for a renewed per-

mission for another trial.

"IIT Kanpur is going through the findings and studies that they got from the last two trials, following which a further trial might be planned this summer, though the final time will be decided by IIT Kanpur. The final findings will be shared with the government at a later stage by the institution," the official said.

The Economic Survey of Delhi 2025-26, released on March 23, also mentioned that more cloud-seeding trials will be conducted in consultation with the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The trials have been envisioned as part of a short-term emergency measure for artificial rainfall generation to disperse and reduce ambient air pollution levels, the survey said.

Unseasonal rains lash Pune city; tree fall claims flower seller's life

PUNE: A 60-year-old woman was killed on Thursday in Sinhagad Road area after a tree fell on her as the city was lashed by unseasonal rains, a Fire Brigade official said. The deceased was identified as Ranjana Navnath Giri, resident of Anandnagar in Sinhagad Road area who sold flowers and garlands from a makeshift stall under an old peepal tree. "Due to the gusty winds and rain, the tree collapsed this afternoon. She was injured and admitted to hospital, but died during treatment," the official said. There were several incidents of tree fall or uprooting in the city while some areas also reported hail showers. Dhayari, Sinhagad Road, Kharadi, Balajinagar, Hadapsar, Lohegaon, Bibewadi, Sadashiv Peth and Kothrud witnessed heavy rainfall.

IAF's Tejas fleet set to resume flights next week after 2-month grounding

NEW DELHI: The Indian Air Force's Tejas light combat jets are set to return to the skies next week, two months after the entire fleet was grounded following an accident involving one of the aircraft at a frontline airbase.

D K Sunil, the Chairman and Managing Director of the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), the manufacturer of the jets, said the entire fleet of 34 Tejas will fly most likely from April 8 as the glitch found on-board the aircraft's software has been resolved.

"All the Tejas jets are set to fly again from next Wednesday," he said.

The fleet was grounded in the first week of February after one Tejas jet sustained damage to its airframe after it overshot the runway at the airbase following a suspected brake failure.

The IAF had also or-

dered a comprehensive scrutiny of the jets following the accident.

On delays in delivery of Tejas Mark 1A variant to the Indian Air Force (IAF), Sunil said HAL will be able to deliver over 20 jets by December and that six of them could be supplied soon as the final tests of radar, avionics and missile-firing systems were currently underway.

The delivery of the jets is facing delays primarily due to GE Aerospace missing several deadlines for supply of its F-404 aero engines to power the jets.

To a question on IAF flagging certain issues relating to performance of the jets, the HAL CMD said a project review committee in May is expected to clear the jets for deliveries.

US defence major GE Aerospace has delivered five jet engines to the HAL and the sixth one is expect-



ed to be supplied in the next few days.

It is also learnt that the HAL has imposed penalties under the provision of Liquidated Damages on GE Aviation for delay in deliveries of the engines for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft Mark 1A. The penalties are being imposed on GE Aerospace as per the contract. In February 2021, the defence ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with the HAL for the procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A jets for the IAF.

The defence ministry in September last year sealed

another deal worth Rs Rs 62,370 crore with the HAL to procure 97 Tejas MK-1A light combat aircraft for the IAF.

Tejas is a single-engine multi-role fighter aircraft capable of operating in high-threat air environments.

It has been designed to undertake the air defence, maritime reconnaissance and strike roles.

The IAF is looking at inducting the warplanes as the number of its fighter squadrons have gone down to 29 from officially sanctioned strength of 42.

LDF, CM Vijayan Modi's 'B-team': Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi on Thursday accused the ruling LDF in Kerala and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan of being Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "B-team" and of secretly joining hands with the BJP, desperate to stay in power in the state.

Priyanka, speaking at a corner meeting in Puthanthopu in Thiruvananthapuram as part of the Congress-led UDF poll campaign for the Kerala assembly elections, alleged that Modi "bowed down" before the US and Israel in connection with the West Asia conflict, and as a result

created a situation where India will also suffer along with other nations.

"Our PM is a coward who has no spine and is compromised. We are paying every day because he does not have the guts to stand up for India..." she alleged.

She reiterated her allegations at UDF public meetings in Kollam and Kowdiar in Thiruvananthapuram.

In her speeches at the public events, she also alleged that Modi's policies have not provided safety and security to Indians stranded in the Gulf region during the conflict there.

Priyanka also accused the LDF and Chief Minister

Pinarayi Vijayan of being Modi's "B-team".

"Think about it. Name one leader who has stood up and expressed himself or herself against Narendra Modi and not been attacked either by the Enforcement Directorate, the Income Tax department, the CBI or his other agencies," she said.

Priyanka said that it makes her laugh when the Kerala CM says he is fighting the PM as there is not a single case against Vijayan nor are any central agencies after him.

She alleged that the Kerala CM was compromised, just like the PM.

"Your chief minister

bows before Narendra Modi to protect himself and his corruption, while our PM bows before the US and Israel to protect himself. So, whether it is India or Kerala, we are ruled by cowards," she alleged.

The Congress leader claimed that the PM has handed over India's energy security to the US, which decides from where and how much the country should buy oil.

She also questioned why no Left leader in Kerala has been attacked by the PM and contended that Modi was silent with regard to the alleged misappropriation of gold from Sabarimala.

Manipur CM directs officials to ensure smooth movement of people across state

IMPHAL: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Thursday directed officials to take firm action against disruptive elements to ensure safe and uninterrupted movement of people across the state. Chairing a high-level review meeting with senior officials at the secretariat, Singh stressed the need to strengthen measures for safety and security along National Highways.

The meeting followed his discussion with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Wednesday, during which the law and order situation in the state was reviewed, and the acceleration of the peace process was urged.

ED files 2nd supplementary chargesheet in PMLA case against Arvind Joshi, others

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED), Bhopal Zonal Office, today said that it has filed a second supplementary chargesheet in the matter of Arvind Joshi and others under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

The ED initiated the investigation based on a case registered by the Special Police Establishment, Lokayukta, Bhopal, against late Arvind Joshi and Tinoo Joshi (both former IAS officers of the Madhya Pradesh cadre) for alleged possession of movable and immovable assets worth Rs. 41.87 crore, which were disproportionate to their known sources of income.

There were widespread allegations, complaints, and evidence indicating that Arvind Joshi and his wife Tinoo Joshi misused their official positions and indulged in corrupt practices.

The ED investigation revealed that Arvind Joshi and Tinoo Joshi had amassed substantial movable and immovable assets in their own names as well as in the names of their family members.

Further investigation established that the Joshis had also acquired properties in the names of unrelated persons and intentionally created third-party interests to obscure the ownership trail of these as-

sets. This pattern of layering of proceeds of crime has been established through evidence collected during the course of the PMLA investigation.

Earlier, the ED had issued three Provisional Attachment Orders, attaching illegally acquired properties of Arvind Joshi and his family members worth Rs. 8.60 crore.

Subsequently, another Provisional Attachment Order was issued on January 28, 2026, attaching properties worth Rs. 5 crore belonging to late Arvind Joshi and his family members, which were acquired from proceeds of crime.

Allegations against Praful Patel, Tatkare 'unfounded, speculative': Parth Pawar

MUMBAI: Amid allegations that Praful Patel and Sunil Tatkare tried to take over the NCP after the death of then Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, his son Parth Pawar on Thursday said that the reports targeting the two senior leaders were "baseless and speculative".

Such narratives were "nothing but fiction", he said in a statement, and claimed that attempts were being made to drag these respected leaders into "manufactured controversies".

Patel and Tatkare have demonstrated decades of commitment and leadership which continue to guide the party, said Parth, adding, "Such unfounded allegations are deeply



unfortunate and must be called out."

Parth's statement came amid speculation that his mother and deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar was upset with Patel and Tatkare.

NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar claimed last week that Sunetra Pawar had written to the Election Commission of India on March 10, intimating the poll body

about her appointment as party president and stating that any earlier communication received from the party after her husband Ajit Pawar's death in an air crash on January 28 should be ignored.

As per the political grapevine, Sunetra Pawar was not convinced by the clarification Patel and Tatkare gave regarding a letter sent to the ECI before she took over as party chief.

Patel and Tatkare had written to the ECI on February 16, informing that the party constitution had been amended and all powers given to working president Praful Patel, Rohit Pawar claimed, alleging that they were trying to seize control of the party.

India urges protection for UN Peacekeepers following UNIFIL incident

NEW DELHI: India, the longest and largest troop-contributing country to United Nations peacekeeping missions, on Thursday stressed that the "invulnerability of UN missions" must be ensured and the safety and security of its peacekeepers must be guaranteed.

Reaffirming its commitment to UN peacekeeping operations, the External Affairs ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal highlighted the importance of protecting Indian personnel following recent attacks on United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) troops in Lebanon.

Jaiswal said that India currently has around 600 troops serving in UNIFIL.

Describing India's long-standing peacekeep-

ing efforts, he added, "India, the largest troop-contributing country to UN peacekeeping missions, has had its contribution well noted and regarded for global peace and security."

He further stated, "We had also issued a statement condemning the recent attacks on UNIFIL in which several troops, unfortunately, lost their lives. Once again, we would like to emphasise that the invulnerability of UN missions must be ensured, and the safety and security of our peacekeepers must be guaranteed."

India has a long history of participating in UN peacekeeping efforts, with its personnel serving across multiple missions worldwide. The country has repeatedly called for



enhanced protection for peacekeepers to allow them to carry out their mandates effectively without facing threats to their lives.

The statement by India follows the death of an Indonesian peacekeeper in a "roadside explosion" in southern Lebanon, according to UN peacekeeping chief Jean-Pierre Lacroix, citing an initial investiga-

tion. This was the second fatal incident in 24 hours. Another Indonesian peacekeeper was killed on Sunday when a projectile of unknown origin exploded in Adchit Al Qusayr, southern Lebanon.

In a separate statement, the UNIFIL said the explosion was of "unknown origin" and destroyed the peacekeepers' vehicle near Bani Hayyan. A third peacekeeper was "severely" injured, and a fourth was also hurt.

UNIFIL said investigations have been launched to determine the circumstances of both incidents. The findings of an initial investigation into Monday's explosion "point to a roadside explosion striking the convoy," Lacroix told the UN Security Council. Stéphane Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, added that the deaths "most likely" resulted from an improvised explosive device (IED). Speaking about Sunday's incident, Dujarric said it was likely caused by "an explosive that landed in the position that the Indonesians were holding."