

High turnout marks peaceful Falta repoll; BJP eyes virtual walkover after Jahangir exit

KOLKATA: Electors of West Bengal's Falta voted peacefully on Thursday with over 86.11 per cent polling till 5 pm in a re-election held under the shadow of TMC candidate Jahangir Khan's dramatic withdrawal from the contest two days earlier, a move widely seen as handing over the ruling BJP a virtual walkover in the politically sensitive constituency.

With central forces heavily deployed and long queues visible outside booths through the day, the repoll passed off without major incident, though the political shadow over the constituency

came less from the voting itself and more from the abrupt exit of Khan.

The repoll stemmed from controversy surrounding the April 29 election, when complaints surfaced from several booths, alleging perfume-like substances and adhesive tapes had been applied to EVMs.

The Election Commission subsequently ordered a repoll in Falta even as results for the remaining 293 assembly constituencies had already been declared on May 4, with the BJP scripting a historic victory and coming to power in West Bengal for the first time.



Election officials said 86.11 per cent of the 2.36 lakh electorate had cast their votes till 5 pm, marginally lower than the 86.71 per cent recorded till the same hour in the original polling on April 29. Reacting to the high turnout,

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari thanked the people of Falta and said visuals from the constituency resembled a festival.

"From the visuals, it appears people are taking part in a festival. Such a turnout in a repoll is really unprecedented," he said. Khan's exit significantly altered the political arithmetic around Falta.

The BJP, already projecting confidence of an emphatic victory, sees the constituency as a near-certain addition to its assembly tally after the TMC nominee stepped out of the contest before repolling.

If the BJP wins Falta, its tally for the 2026 Assembly polls would rise to 208, although operationally its Assembly strength would remain 207 following Adhikari's decision to vacate Nandigram after retaining Bhabanipur.

The total electorate in the constituency comprises 1,21,300 men, 1,15,135 women and nine third-gender individuals. Voting began at 7 am and continued till 6 pm.

Around 35 companies of central forces guarded the 285 polling booths, while 30 Quick Response Teams remained on standby after the Election Commission sig-

nificantly strengthened security arrangements for the repoll.

"Polling has remained peaceful in Falta. We have not received a single report of any problem from anywhere in the constituency," a poll panel official told PTI.

Large numbers of voters queued outside polling stations from early morning in a constituency where the campaign had undergone a dramatic transformation over the last fortnight.

Among those waiting outside polling booths, some said the atmosphere felt markedly different this time.

Cockroach Janata Party's X handle withheld, founder starts new account

NEW DELHI: The X account of Cockroach Janata Party, the satirical digital outfit that came up last week and took social media by storm, was withheld in India on Thursday. Soon after, came up another handle - 'Cockroach is Back'.

"This was expected since there were attempts to hack the account yesterday. But this is a self-goal by the government," founder Abhijeet Dipke told PTI.

"I have now started a new account named 'Cockroach is Back' on X," Dipke added. He said the team would pursue the matter legally.

At 3.40 pm, a little over an hour after it started, the 'Cockroach is Back' X handle had 16,800 followers.

Cockroach Janata Party, which according to Dipke had 201,000 followers on X, came following a controversy over Chief Justice of India Surya Kant using "parasites" and "cockroaches" while pulling up a lawyer for his plea seeking senior designation.

The CJI later clarified that he was misquoted and his remarks were directed specifically at individuals entering the legal profession through "fake and bogus degrees".

Cockroach Janata Party came into being a day after the CJI's remarks on May 15. It quickly went viral, attracting support from politicians, activists, artists and a large number of young and

not so young social media users.

While the X account became inaccessible in India on Thursday, the platform's Instagram page remains active with around 14.3 million followers -- and counting. One post on Instagram drew comparisons with the official Bharatiya Janata Party account, which has approximately 8.8 million followers on the Meta-owned platform.

Questioning the action against what he described as a satirical platform, Dipke said the account and the movement had been growing rapidly.

"The X handle and movement has been growing, getting thousands of followers every day... perhaps that is what scared the government," Dipke alleged.

Dipke, who was earlier associated with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), on Thursday posted on X that attempts were also being made to hack the Instagram account. Several other accounts using the 'cockroach' nomenclature remain active on X. These include 'The Cockroach Youth', 'Cockroach News', 'IamCockroach', 'Cockroach Party of India' and 'Cockroach Janata Party (Gen Z)'.

What began as an online satire project has soon evolved into a wider conversation about contemporary protest and the role of humour and meme culture in it.

More than 700 missing persons traced between May 7 and 21 under Gujarat police's Op Milap

GANDHI NAGAR: Gujarat police has traced 701 missing persons between May 7 and May 21 under 'Operation Milap' and reunited them with their families, Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi said on Thursday.

The special drive to trace missing persons has been launched under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and all necessary resources have been made available to the police for this purpose, an official release quoted Sanghavi as saying.

"Police stations across the state traced a total of 701 people between May 7 and May 21 and reunited them with their families. Under Operation Milap, police teams are revisiting forgotten files, tracking digital footprints, analysing old evidence and reaching out once again to families that had

spent years searching for answers," the release said.

The special operation, launched in the first week of May, directed every police commissioner and district superintendent of police in the state to reopen, review and aggressively pursue long-pending missing person cases, the release said.

"A total of 24,767 people have been reported missing across the state since 2007. This is a targeted operation backed by data, technical intelligence and human intelligence with clear guidelines. We are getting success in tracing people who had gone missing even many years ago," said Additional Director General of Police (CID Crime and Railways) Ajay Choudhary.

The operation goes beyond merely locating missing persons as investigators are also trying to expose trafficking



syndicates, runaway networks and criminal gangs allegedly involved in child trafficking and baby-selling rackets, as per police.

One of the most striking cases solved during the operation involved a woman who had been missing for nearly 10 years, the release said.

"A 23-year-old married woman from Padra taluka in Vadodara district had disappeared in 2016 along with her five-year-old son. Her husband had informed police she left for her maternal home but never returned. Under Operation Milap, police again contacted family members. Her husband revealed he had recently seen his wife on social media," it said.

Scanning of social media platforms revealed she was now living in Rajkot with another man and running a Garba class, and her son was now 15 years old. Investigators later found she had left her husband following domestic disputes and remarried in 2016, it said.

"Such cases highlight the complex human stories behind disappearances. There are many reasons behind disappearances, including family disputes, marital

discord, exam stress, failed relationships, economic hardship and criminal exploitation," a senior official said. To strengthen investigations, a detailed 15-point Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been issued to all police stations, the release stated.

The SOP includes reopening case files, contacting complainants, analysing digital and technical evidence, tracking social media activity, checking transport hubs and shelter homes, conducting field visits and questioning suspected traffickers and repeat offenders.

Police personnel have also been instructed to place missing persons' mobile phones under electronic surveillance, track last active locations and examine social media activity on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp.

Son kills father in Latehar

LATEHAR: A man was allegedly killed by his son in Jharkhand's Latehar district, a police officer said.

The victim was identified as Rajkumar Singh, 65, while the accused son was Chandan Singh. Officer-in-Charge of Maneka police station, Prabhat Das, said the victim had on Wednesday night reprimanded his son over a domestic issue in Sinjo village.

Peevd over it, Chandan picked up an axe and attacked his father, the police officer said. After

committing the crime, Chandan escaped, but the police arrested him, he said.

The police have sent the body to Sadar Hospital for post-mortem examination. Family sources claimed Chandan was mentally unsound, and recently he was brought back from Ranchi, where he was under-treatment. He used to turn violent over petty issues, they said, adding that on Wednesday night too, Chandan lost his temper after his father reprimanded him.

Cong, IYC hold blood donation camp on Rajiv Gandhi's death anniversary

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Congress and the Indian Youth Congress on Thursday organised a blood donation camp to mark the death anniversary of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, with party leaders remembering him as the "architect of modern India".

Several senior Congress leaders, including Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav, former MP Sandeep Dikshit, former Delhi Congress president Anil

Chaudhary and Lok Sabha MP Kishori Lal Sharma, attended the programme organised at the party headquarters on Akbar Road.

According to the organisers, around 355 units of blood were donated during the camp.

Indian Youth Congress national in-charge Manish Sharma said Rajiv Gandhi's vision laid the foundation for a technologically advanced and self-reliant India.

"Rajiv Gandhi ji was the

architect of modern India, who worked towards making India strong and self-reliant. The country continues to benefit from his foresight," Sharma said. He said the former prime minister played a key role in expanding the telecommunications network in the country and empowering youth by lowering the voting age to 18 years.

Delhi Youth Congress president Akshay Lakra said Rajiv Gandhi believed science and technology were

essential for the country's progress and worked towards bringing the computer and telecom revolution to India.

"Rajiv Gandhi ji strengthened the Panchayati Raj system and worked for women and youth empowerment. He will always be remembered for his ideas and vision for modern India," Lakra said.

Party leaders and workers also paid floral tributes to the late Congress leader during the programme.

27 Maoists surrender before police in Ranchi



RANCHI: A total of 27 Maoists surrendered before the police here on Thursday in the presence of Jharkhand DGP Tadasha Mishra, and these Naxals will be rehabilitated with full support, officials said.

The ultras, belonging to the banned CPI (Maoist), laid down arms before senior officers of the Jharkhand Police, Jharkhand Jaguar and the CRPF, among other units, they said.

"Twenty-seven Maoists, wanted in a large number of cases, surrendered before the police under 'Operation Navjeevan'. A total of 22 Maoists were killed, 44 arrested and 29 surrendered in 2026. We appeal to the remaining few to return to the mainstream," a senior police officer said.

Mishra said combined efforts by security forces to eliminate extremism will continue in the state, and the 27 Maoists who surrendered on Thursday will be rehabilitated with full support.

"We appeal to those who have not surrendered to shun the path of violence and come to the mainstream," CRPF IG Saket Singh said.

Officials said the surrendered Maoists belong to the group of the last active politburo member of the CPI (Maoist), Misir Besra, who carries a bounty of Rs 1 crore and was

active in the Saranda and Kolhan regions.

Among the surrendered Maoists, seven were 'sub-zonal commanders' including Sagen Aangariya alias Dokol (50), wanted in 123 cases, Gadi Munda alias Gulshan (34), wanted in 48 cases, Nagendra Munda alias Prabhant Munda (50), wanted in 38 criminal cases and Sachin Beg of the JJMP.

Six 'area commanders' also laid down arms. Of the seven, five carried a reward of Rs 5 lakh each, they said.

Security forces also seized a large quantity of arms and ammunition based on information provided by the surrendered Maoists, which included five INSAS and nine SLR rifles, and 2,987 rounds of cartridges, the officials said.

The Besra-led squad was split into two to three groups after security personnel conducted an operation on April 27 in Saranda forest, they said.

Some core members of his squad went with Besra's associate Asim Mandal, who also carries a bounty of Rs 1 crore, another official said.

"Now, around 16 to 17 Maoists remain in Saranda forest. Security forces are making all efforts to trace both Besra and Mandal," said Chaibasa SP Amit Renu.

Calcutta HC orders setting up SIT of CBI to probe hushing up charges in RG Kar rape-murder case

KOLKATA: The Calcutta High Court on Thursday ordered setting up a three-member special investigation team (SIT) of the CBI to probe the developments from the time the R G Kar Medical College's trainee doctor had dinner on the ill-fated night of August 2024 to her cremation.

The young medic was raped and murdered in the hospital on the night of August 9, 2024, which caused an uproar in the state as well as among the doctors' community across the country.

There have been allegations that evidence was destroyed and attempts were made to downplay the incident in its immediate aftermath.



A high court division bench comprising Justices Shampa Sarkar and Tirthankar Ghosh on Thursday said the CBI's joint director, east, will head the team. The other two members of the team would be decided within 48 hours of the court's order.

The bench said that, consid-

ing the social ramifications of the gruesome incident, a three-member SIT would look into charges of evidence destruction and allegations made by the medic's parents that there were attempts to hush up and downplay the incident.

The SIT was directed to probe the developments from the time the trainee doctor had dinner at the hospital till her cremation the next evening. The court directed the SIT to file a comprehensive report by June 25, when the matter will be heard again.

The parents of the doctor moved the high court seeking further investigation into the rape and murder of their daughter, claiming that more than one person was involved in the gruesome crime.

Civic volunteer Sanjay Roy was sentenced to life imprisonment for the rape and murder of the post-graduate trainee doctor at the state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital.

Heatwave conditions persist in lower hills; orange alert for thunderstorm, hail

SHIMLA: Heatwave conditions persisted at isolated places in Una, Bilaspur, Shimla, Solan and Sirmour districts as mercury stayed above three to five degrees above normal due to dry weather.

Una sizzled at 44.3 degrees Celsius, followed by Neri at 41.0 degrees Celsius and Sundernagar at 39.9 degrees Celsius.

The local Meteorological Station has issued an orange warning for thunderstorms accompanied by lightning, hail, and gusty winds, with speeds of 40-50 km/h, in the districts of Chamba, Kangra, Kullu, Mandi, and Shimla for May 22 (Friday).

A yellow alert has also been issued for thunderstorms with lightning and gusty winds at speeds of 30-40 km/h in isolated areas of Una, Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Solan, and Sirmour on May 22, and for all ten non-tribal districts, excluding Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti, on May 23 (Saturday).

The MeT station predicted rain or snow at isolated locations in the higher hills from May 22 to 26, light rain at a few places in the mid-hills from May 22 to 25, and in the lower hills on May 22 and 23.

Key tourist destinations such as Shimla, Dharmsala, and Manali recorded maximum temperatures of 30.5 degrees Celsius, 36.0 de-



grees Celsius, and 28.6 degrees Celsius, respectively. Kalpa, in the Kinnaur tribal district, saw maximum temperatures reaching 26.5 degrees Celsius, which is 5.1 degrees above normal. Minimum temperatures also remained above normal, with Neri being the hottest at night with a low of 27.6 degrees Celsius, followed by Paonta Sahib at 26.0 degrees Celsius and Dehra Gopipur and Palampur at 25.0 degrees Celsius.

In its extended forecast, the MeT Office anticipated above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures from May 22 to June 4, along with below-normal rainfall across the state.

Shaheed Smarak in Ambala Cantonment will inspire younger generation: CM Saini

AMBALA: Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Thursday said that 'Shaheed Smarak' (war memorial) dedicated to the 'First War of Independence' being built in Ambala Cantonment will stand as a symbol of patriotism, valour and sacrifice.

Saini, who inspected the under-construction site of the 'Smarak', said it will not only preserve India's historical heritage, but also serve as a powerful source of inspiration for future generations, especially the youth.

The 'Smarak' is in its final stages of completion. Haryana Minister Anil Vij, senior state government officers, historians, design experts and officers of the departments concerned were also present on the occasion.

During the detailed inspection, the chief minister appreciated the quality of construction, historical representation, and the integration of modern technology. He said the 'Smarak' would be a true tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for India's freedom. Saini said that Haryana has always been a land of brave warriors and martyrs, and the state govern-

ment is continuously working to preserve the memories of freedom fighters and national heroes.

He said that the 'Smarak' will be a unique blend of modern technology, historical facts, and grand architecture, making it a major attraction for tourists and researchers from across the world. During the visit, the chief minister directed officers to complete the remaining work of the 'Smarak' on a priority basis. He stressed that the authenticity of historical facts and the quality of presentation must be ensured so that visitors can experience the true glory of India's freedom struggle. The chief minister said that the 'Smarak' is not just a structure, "but a national centre of patriotic consciousness that will keep the spirit of nationalism alive".

He said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several efforts are being made across the country under the "Azadi Ka Amrit Kaal" to highlight the contributions of freedom fighters for the younger generation, and this 'Smarak' will be an important link in that direction.