

SC rejects return to ballots, says distrust of EVMs 'blind'

Refuses 100% Verification Of VVPAT Slips

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New Delhi: Supreme Court on Friday dismissed doubts about hacking and manipulation of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), termed pleas

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for return to the paper ballot system as "foible and unsound" and rejected the prayer for giving voters physical access to VVPAT slips, and for 100% counting of paper slips.

The court was unequivocal in attesting to the integrity of EVMs, saying the possibility of hacking or tampering was unfounded. "...The suspicion that EVMs can be configured/manipulated for repeated or wrong recording of vote(s) to

LOSING CANDIDATES CAN ASK FOR EVMs TO BE CHECKED

- SC directs **symbol loading units (SLUs)** — memory units used to load poll symbols in VVPAT machines — to be sealed & stored in strong rooms for 45 days after results. To facilitate checks if discrepancy alleged later
- Candidates who stand 2nd and 3rd can ask for engineers of EVM manufacturers to **check microcontroller chips (in 5% of EVMs per assembly segment)** of each LS constituency. Requests to be made within 7 days of results. Candidates to pay for it, will get money back if EVM is faulty
- SC asks EC to explore if VVPAT slips can be counted electronically and if each party can be assigned a unique **bar code** alongside symbol on VVPAT machine

favour a particular candidate should be rejected," it said.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, however, passed directions to further strengthen the integrity of the system and said like EVMs, symbol loading units shall be sealed and secured after symbols have been loaded in VVPAT (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail) machines.

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“Unless substantial evidence is presented against EVMs, the **current system will have to persist with enhancements**. Regressive measures to revert to paper ballots or any alternative to EVMs that do not adequately safeguard interests of Indian citizens have to be eschewed. Repeated and persistent doubts and despair, even without supporting evidence, can have the contrarian impact of creating distrust

—SC bench of Justices **Sanjiv Khanna** and **Dipankar Datta**

...**Blindly distrusting a system** can lead to unwarranted scepticism... a trend has been fast developing of **certain vested interest groups** endeavouring to undermine the achievements... of the nation, earned through the hard work and dedication of its sincere workforce

—Justice **Dipankar Datta** (in separate concurring judgment)

Tight slap for oppn, says PM; VVPAT fight continues: Cong

PM Modi Friday said the SC verdict was a "tight slap" to the Congress-led opposition which must "apologise" for creating distrust against EVMs. Addressing rallies in Bihar, Modi said EVMs ended the opposition's game of both capturing, so they "com-

mitted the sin" of sowing doubts about EVMs.

Responding to the PM's attack, Congress said it was "not a party, directly or indirectly" to the pleas in SC, but added that its "campaign on greater use of VVPATs to increase public trust" will continue". P14

Water storage in key S India reservoirs at 17%

New Delhi: Looming water shortage continues to stare at southern India as level of storage of 42 key reservoirs in five states — Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu — has collectively reduced to 17% of the reservoir capacity, bringing the level to lower than the storage during the corresponding period last year. Individually, Kerala's reservoirs have, however, better storage than last year.

Data released by the Central Water Commission (CWC) shows that these reservoirs had 8.8 billion cubic meters (BCM) of water as on Thursday (April 25) against a total storage capacity of 53.3 BCM.

The storage during the corresponding period of last year was 29% of total capacity whereas average storage of the last 10 years during corresponding period was 23% of the total live storage capacity of these reservoirs.

"Thus, storage during current year (17% of total capacity) is less than the storage of corresponding period of



AFP

DRY SPELL

last year and is also less than the average storage of last ten years during the corresponding period," said a weekly bulletin on status of the country's 150 key reservoirs, spread over five regions, monitored by the CWC.

Though water level in reservoirs of

other regions, except the eastern region, too declined compared to the live storage during the corresponding period last year, reservoirs in the southern region showed the steepest fall.

Overall, 150 reservoirs across the country collectively had 53.3 BCM of waters which was 30% of the total live capacity of 178.7 BCM on Thursday. Reduction in water level at this time of the year is, however, not unusual, but its sharp decline this year is quite worrisome as monsoon is still more than a month away from the country's mainland.

"The overall higher decline in reservoirs across India is attributed to below average monsoon rainfall last year. Less monsoon rains means less storage in these reservoirs during the rainy season and more withdrawal of water during the post-monsoon phase, both for drinking and irrigation purposes," said an official.

He said the forecast of 'above normal' monsoon rainfall this year would, however, bring relief.

Will agree to truce if independent Palestinian state established: Hamas

ISTANBUL, Apr 25 (AP)

A TOP Hamas political official told 'The Associated Press' that the Islamic militant group is willing to agree to a truce of five years or more with Israel and that it would lay down its weapons and convert into a political party if an independent Palestinian state is established along pre-1967 borders.

The comments by Khalil al-Hayya in an interview on Wednesday came amid a stalemate in months of talks for a ceasefire in Gaza. The suggestion that Hamas would disarm appeared to be a significant concession by the militant group officially committed to

Israel's destruction.

But it's unlikely Israel would consider such a scenario. It has vowed to crush Hamas following the deadly October 7 attacks that triggered the war, and its current leadership is adamantly opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state on lands Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war. Al-Hayya, a high-ranking Hamas official who has represented the Palestinian militants in negotiations for a ceasefire and hostage exchange, struck a sometimes defiant and other times conciliatory tone.

Al-Hayya said Hamas wants to join the Palestine Liberation Organisation, headed by the rival Fatah faction.

Sri Lanka to hand management of China-built airport to India, Russia cos

Colombo: Sri Lanka will hand over management of its \$209 million Chinese-built airport to two Indian and Russian companies, a cabinet statement said on Friday, as the island nation attempts to reduce losses from its state enterprises. Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, funded by China EXIM Bank, has stoked controversy since its opening in 2013 due to a low number of flights, environmentally sensitive location and persistent financial losses.

The airport's management will be handed over to Shaurya Aeronautics (Pvt) Ltd. of India and Airports of Regions Management Company of Russia for 30 years, a cabinet statement said, without mentioning the deal value.

Sri Lanka is negotiating with China EXIM Bank to restructure the airport loan, part of \$4.2 billion borrowed for other infrastructure projects. The airport was built during the tenure of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa who shifted the country closer to China. REUTERS

Baloch National Movement launches campaign against human rights abuses by Pak

CAMBRIDGE, Apr 26 (ANI)

IN AN effort to spotlight the struggle of the Baloch people and the human rights violations inflicted by the Pakistani state, the Baloch National Movement (BNM) has extended its advocacy to the historic city of Cambridge, UK.

Led by the Cambridgeshire unit of the Baloch National Movement UK Chapter, the campaign seeks to raise awareness within the Cambridge community regarding the adversities faced by the Baloch

population in Pakistan.

BNM activists are actively engaging with local residents, students, and authorities to garner support for their cause and to prompt the international community to take heed of the injustices endured by the Baloch people.

Following successful campaigns in prominent cities like London, Leeds, Newcastle, and Manchester, the expansion to Cambridge marks a pivotal stride in amplifying the voices of the Baloch people on a global scale.

Over 63% turnout in phase-II LS polls

Highest 79.46% polling in Tripura Mah records 57.83% voting

NEW DELHI, Apr 26 (PTI)

OVER 63 per cent polling was reported in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections covering 88 seats across 13 States amid few complaints of EVM glitches and bogus voting in some states.

Voters in some villages of Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, Rajasthan's Banswara and Maharashtra's Parbhani were boycotting the polls over various issues but were later persuaded by authorities to cast their franchise.

Polling for the second stage of the seven-phase elections started at 7 am and ended at 6 pm. Several states experienced intense heat conditions. The first phase of polling was held on April 19 in 102 seats across 21 States and Union Territories.

The Election Commission (EC) said polling remained largely peaceful. The tentative figure at 8 pm of voter turnout was 63.50 per cent. It is likely to go upwards when reports from all polling stations are obtained, the EC said, adding voters reaching polling stations



Voters wait in a queue at a polling station to cast their votes for the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Kozhikode on Friday.

(PTI)

GARIABAND, Apr 26 (PTI)

A JAWAN of the Madhya Pradesh Special Armed Force deployed on poll duty died allegedly by suicide by shooting himself with his service rifle in Chhattisgarh's Gariaband district on Friday,

Jawan on poll duty in C'garh kills himself

police said.

Gariaband falls in the Mahasamund Lok Sabha constituency where polling is underway in the second phase of the general elections.

The incident took place

around 9.30 am at a Government school in Kudedadar village under Piparchhedi police station limits where security personnel on poll duty have been stationed, a police official here

till the end of polling hour are allowed to cast their vote.

The National Democratic alliance (NDA) under Prime Minister Modi is seeking a stronger majority for a third consecutive term, while the constituents of the Opposition I.N.D.I.A. bloc are hoping for a rebound after facing reverses in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

Election Commission data showed the highest voting percentage was recorded in Tripura which registered 79.46 per cent polling, followed by Manipur at 77.32 while the turnout of 57.83 per cent was recorded in eight constituencies in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh recorded 54.85 per cent and Bihar 55.08 per cent voting turnout.

Polling was held in all 20 seats of Kerala, 14 of the 28 seats in Karnataka, 13 seats in Rajasthan, 8 seats each in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, 6 seats in Madhya Pradesh.

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said. Head Constable Jiyal Pawar allegedly shot himself with his service rifle in a room at the school, he said.

He was in the reserve team and was not deployed for active poll work. Pawar belonged to Battalion no. 34 of MP Special Armed Force.

'Initiate trade talks with India for Pak's economy'

■ **By Sajjad Hussain
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ISLAMABAD, Apr 25 (PTI)

PROMINENT Pakistani business leaders have urged Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to initiate trade talks with India which would greatly benefit the cash-strapped country's economy.

In Lahore, Punjab province Assembly Speaker Malik Ahmad Khan said on Thursday that enmity with India needs to be ended and talks for the resumption of trade between the two countries should be initiated.

Khan's call for the restoration of trade ties with India

came a day after Pakistan's business leaders urged Sharif to initiate trade talks with India during an interactive session in Karachi.

The India-Pakistan bilateral ties nose-dived and the trade between the two countries stopped after India abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, revoking the special status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcating into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019.

India has repeatedly told Pakistan that Jammu and Kashmir "was, is and shall forever" remain an integral part of the country.

Indian Army unveils selfie point at Hombotingla Pass ahead of 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas

KARGIL, Apr 25 (ANI)

IN A tribute to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, a new selfie point was unveiled at Hombotingla Pass in Ladakh on April 24.

This initiative, a joint effort by the Indian Army and the Tourism Department of Kargil, honours the valour and sacrifice of the soldiers who fought in the Kargil War.

With the resounding slogan 'I Love Indian Army,' the site offers breathtaking views of Kargil Town and the Mighty Batalik Sector, serving as a reminder of the sacrifices made in the defence of the nation.

The inauguration of this selfie point serves as a tribute to the indomitable spirit of our soldiers and aims to promote



tourism and patriotism in the region. Located amidst the majestic Zaskar ranges of Kargil, this selfie point will serve as a powerful symbol of unity

and appreciation for the Indian Army.

Featuring the hashtag #KVDRajatJayanti, the Selfie Point invites visitors to capture

and share moments of reverence for the bravery and sacrifice of our soldiers.

With panoramic views of the rugged terrain and the serene beauty of the surrounding landscapes, the selfie point offers a unique opportunity for tourists to immerse themselves in the rich history and natural splendour of the region.

The inauguration ceremony, attended by veterans, school and college children, leaders and members of religious communities, was a poignant reminder of the courage and valour displayed by our armed forces during the Kargil war.

In addition to honouring our heroes, the selfie point also aims to promote tourism in Kargil and showcase the region's cultural heritage and hospitality.