



ED has become a part of NDA, says Ahmed Patel
page 5



IAF reiterates that it shot down F-16 aircraft of Pakistan Air Force
page 8



Theresa May asks EU for a further Brexit extension till June 30
page 10



Andre Russell goes on the rampage as KKR stuns RCB
page 13

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NEARBY

AAP-Congress alliance talks inch forward

NEW DELHI
Alliance talks between AAP and the Congress for the Lok Sabha election have moved ahead with leaders from both parties meeting over the issue, sources in AAP said on Friday.

DELHI METRO ► PAGE 1

Pak. opens a route for flights out of India

It is over a month since the neighbouring nation shut its airspace following IAF's airstrikes at Balakot

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

In partial relief to airlines, Pakistan has opened one route for west-bound flights from India more than a month after it shut its airspace for all civilian flights following the Indian Air Force's strikes at Balakot.

"Pakistan opened a route for west-bound flights around 5 p.m. on Thursday. The impact of this announcement is yet to be assessed," said a senior official of the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

A decision on opening a passage for planes overflying Pakistan and entering India is yet to be taken.

'One of 11 points'

The route that has been opened passes from near Mumbai and enters southern Pakistan. This is only one of the 11 exit and entry points between India and Pakistan, according to the official.

Since the ban by Pakistan

Opening up

Pakistan's decision to activate one route will help flights from Mumbai to the U.S. and Europe



There are 11 entry and exit points between India and Pakistan

About 220 flights use Pakistan's airspace every day, according to IATA

Pakistan shut its airspace on February 26 for all airlines

By March 27, Pakistan had resumed flight operations from all airports in the country. But transit flights and flights to India, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok remained suspended

on the use of its airspace, several flights within Asia, between Asia and West Asia or Europe or the U.S. were forced to take a longer route, entailing an increase in flight duration and sometimes a halt for refuelling. This led to an increase in operational costs, forcing many airlines to cancel flights or hike fares.

Air India's flights to the U.S. and Europe on Friday

used the route restored by Pakistan. A senior airline official said, "Since the imposition of ban by Pakistan, the flying time for our flights from New Delhi had increased by 1.5 hours and from Mumbai by 30-40 minutes. The new route will save us 8-12 minutes depending on the winds."

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

100 fishermen to be freed, brought to Wagah

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Pakistan will release 100 Indian fishermen on Monday, diplomatic sources on both sides have confirmed. According to the sources, Pakistan's officials have intimated India that the fishermen will be released from prison on April 7 and taken to the Wagah border on April 8.

The move comes a few days after India made a special appeal in a *Note Verbale* sent to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, asking for the release of 385 fishermen and 10 other prisoners.

"There are 385 Indian fishermen whose nationality has been conveyed to Pakistan and

who have been languishing in Pakistan jails. It is requested that urgent and concrete steps be taken to repatriate them to India at the earliest, along with their boats," the Ministry of External Affairs said in the note.

According to the sources, India has been intimated about the release of 100 prisoners on Monday, but Pakistan plans to repatriate a total of 360 prisoners in total, including five others, over this month, in weekly batches of 100.

The last batch of 60 prisoners would be released by April 29. Activists say this release of fishermen is one of the largest such events.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Three-fifths rate economic situation as 'average' or 'bad'

But nearly half of those surveyed want Prime Minister Modi to return to power

Economic contrasts

The Lokniti survey reveals concerns over jobs and income, but also middling support for government

47% of the respondents (50% among youth and 53% among college graduates) say that it has become more difficult to find a job in their areas in recent years. 51% say their household income is insufficient to fulfil needs



"bad", 34% say "good/very good"

33% say the country's economic situation is "average", 25% say it is

Despite a net negative perception of the economy, 46% want the NDA to return to power

LOKNITI TEAM

THE HINDU
CSDS-LOKNITI
Pre-poll Survey 2019

Unemployment has been reported by respondents as a key economic concern in the CSDS-Lokniti-The Hindu-Tiranga TV-Dainik Bhaskar Pre-Poll Survey in 19 States between March 24 and 31, reflecting the indications of an economic slowdown and farm distress across the country.

On the assessment of the state of the economy, 33% of the respondents rated it as "so-so" and 25% rated it as "bad," while 34% termed it "good" or "very good." The 34% is up from 26% in January 2018 and is also much higher than the 19% who described the economy to be in good shape in May 2014 before the Narendra Modi government came to power. While two in every three of those who see the economy as being in a good situation were found to be in favour of giving the BJP government another term, this reduced to 46% among those who rated the economic situation to be "so-so."

But only 36% among the

latter did not favour the regime to return to power.

Over half of the respondents reported that they found it difficult to make both ends meet with their total household income, but this number has reduced from two-thirds of the respondents in the Lokniti survey in May 2018.

'Number of jobs down'

When the respondents were asked whether employment opportunities under the Modi government had increased or decreased during the last five years, close to half (46%) said they had gone down and one in every four (25%) was of the opinion that they had increased. In May 2014, one-third (33%) had reported a decrease in employment opportunities under the UPA and one-fifth (19%) had reported an increase.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

'Sivaganga was also an option for Rahul'

D.J. WALTER SCOTT
SIVAGANGA

Stating that the Congress manifesto had become the principal talking-point nationwide, former Union Minister P. Chidambaram on Friday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi was rattled by the development.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, he said there was a delay in the party leadership fielding his son Karti Chidambaram in Sivaganga as it was one of the seats under consideration for Rahul Gandhi, besides Wayanad and a seat in Karnataka.

INTERVIEW ON ► PAGE 9

As campaigning heats up for the Lok Sabha election, charges fly thick and fast Cong. leaders got money in Agusta deal, says PM

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
DEHRA DUN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday referred to the AgustaWestland helicopter case at an election rally here, saying the top Congress leadership received kickbacks in the UPA-era purchase. Addressing the rally at the Parade Ground, Mr. Modi also accused the Congress of being soft on Pakistan.

"Agencies have investigated persons we brought back from Dubai. On that basis a chargesheet has been filed. I saw in the media that the persons who received kick-



PM Modi speaking at a meeting in Amroha. •PTI

backs in the case and are mentioned in the chargesheet are 'AP' and 'FAM'. The same chargesheet mentions 'AP' means Ahmed Patel and 'FAM' means family," Mr. Modi said.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

Rahul accuses Modi of insulting 'guru' Advani

SHARAD VYAS
CHANDRAPUR

Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of humiliating BJP veteran L.K. Advani.

At a rally here, he said disrespecting one's guru was not part of Hindu culture and those who "ill-treat" their teachers cannot claim to be custodians of the religion. He described Mr. Modi as the epitome of hate, anger and divisive ideology.

"Narendra Modiji is talking of Hinduism, but look at what he has done to his own guru: L.K. Advani. He not



Rahul Gandhi at a rally in Chandrapur on Friday. •PTI

only insulted Mr. Advani but also thrashed him with shoes and shooed him away from the BJP stage. Is this what the Hindu religion teaches? Is this what Hindu philosophy is about?"

COVER-UP: CONGRESS ► PAGE 8

LVB to merge with Indiabulls Housing

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The boards of Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) and Indiabulls Housing Finance (IBHF) on Friday approved merger of the two entities.

The new entity will be known as Indiabulls Lakshmi Vilas Bank. It is not yet clear whether the bank will continue to be headquartered in Chennai.

IBHF, which has a loan book three times bigger than LVB but was unable to get a bank licence, will now have access to the low-cost funds of a bank.

DETAILED REPORT ON ► PAGE 11

SP makes social justice pitch in vision document

Proposes an additional 2% tax on upper caste rich and a new income tax slab for ultra-rich

OMAR RASHID
LUCKNOW

From promising to ban all political messaging that uses the armed forces to proposing to raise an Ahir Armoured Regiment and a Gujarat Infantry Regiment, the Samajwadi Party's vision document for the 2019 Lok Sabha election takes a swipe at the BJP's nationalism narrative.

The party also strongly pushed the message of "mahaparivartan [grand change] with social justice", to pitch the idea of change through the uplift of OBCs and Dalits and proposed an additional 2% tax on the rich, which it claimed was uniformly upper caste.

This marks a remarkable



Akhilesh Yadav releasing the vision document in Lucknow. •RAJEEV BHATT

shift in the political messaging of the SP after the defeats in 2014 and 2017, when the party had contested on the theme of development.

The document, released by SP president Akhilesh Yadav at a press conference here, targeted the "increasingly desperate BJP" for using

the armed forces as "an electoral tool" and accusing "all and sundry of being anti-national". "This pseudo-nationalism threatens our national security more than any other external force," it said.

Welfare programme

The party has proposed a State-specific family welfare programme to look after the families of the armed forces.

The mainstay of the document was the emphasis on "economics of social justice" through social mobility, housing and income to address inequality.

While saying that the "richest 10% of the population (uniformly upper caste)" own more than 60% of the coun-

try's wealth, the SP proposed imposing an additional 2% tax on the total wealth of households owning more than ₹2.5 crore. "This works out to 1.1% of the GDP. We believe it is also time to add a top income tax bracket for the ultra-rich who hide their income using complex structures," the SP said.

If voted to power, the SP-BSP-RLD alliance will demand "that central reservations be immediately updated to reflect the actual caste distribution in the population".

Mr. Yadav said the path to progress and prosperity "cannot come about without social justice" and demanded that the caste-wise census be made public in the country.

Sumitra Mahajan out of the fray

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan on Friday announced that she would not contest the 2019 Lok Sabha poll as she perceived that the BJP appeared hesitant in declaring a candidate for the Indore seat because of her presence. She has represented the Indore seat eight times and is the longest serving woman MP currently in Parliament.

Ms. Mahajan is on a long list of senior party leaders past the age of 75 who have been quietly put out to pasture with regard to electoral politics.

DETAILS ON ► PAGE 8

A folk singer who wants to be an MP

Prahlad Singh Tipaniya will contest on a Congress ticket from Dewas in Madhya Pradesh

SANDEEP PHUKAN
NEW DELHI

If election campaigns mean shrill rhetoric and sharp attacks on political rivals, Prahlad Singh Tipaniya could well stand out for his unique approach.

A stranger to the world of politics so far but a renowned folk singer from the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Tipaniya has been declared as the Congress candidate from Dewas, a reserved seat for Scheduled Castes.

The folk singer, whose mastery of Kabir bhajans is well known, said he will

reach out to his voters through his bhajans.

"I will talk about well-being, compassion and progress through my bhajans," said Prahlad-ji, as he is popularly called, while speaking to *The Hindu* over phone from his ancestral village of Luniyakhedi in Ujjain district.

Banking on bhajans

At a time when election speeches have become more about sharp, personal attacks on rivals, will bhajans be enough to take on his rivals? "You can put me in politics, but can't take



Prahlad Singh Tipaniya

the bhajan out of me. Everyone has a point of view. My view is that while some have a more *ugra* (aggressive) way of putting across their ideas, you can permanently change

someone's mind only when you can convince him with conviction," he said.

A Padma Shri recipient, Mr. Tipaniya, who now spends most of his time talking of Sadguru Kabir Sewa Smarak Shodh Sansthan, has travelled around the world, spreading the message of compassion and fraternity as propounded by Kabir, a 15th century poet who is now regarded as a saint by his followers.

Asked how he plans to handle the divisive discourse during elections, especially with regard to

polarising issues such as religion and caste, he offers Kabir's dohas (couplets) to make a point about ignorance.

"What is the religion of paani (water), hawa (air) or a tree? Don't you know that they exist to serve everyone?" said the folk singer, who retired as a school science teacher.

"If the Sadguru [Sant Kabir] gives me the opportunity to serve the people through politics, then I will do so. I have not yet thought about what will happen if they target me personally," he added.