











## Uddhav Thackeray tells Muslim delegation secularism at stake



This time, it wasn't a sea of saffron, but white kurtas and beards that descended on Matoshree. About 60 Muslims from Jogeshwari and Versova met Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday. The meeting, an initiative of Jogeshwari corporator Raju Pednekar, saw an interesting exchange of views. Thackeray made it clear that he was a Hindu, but his Hindutva wasn't that of the BJP, related RTI activist Mansoor Darvesh. "We believe in insaniyat [humanity]; in taking everyone along," the former CM said. This election was to save the Constitution and secularism, he told the delegation. He reminded the Muslims that his father Sena chief Bal Thackeray had permitted a Sunni ijtema to be held just behind his house when the Sena was in power in 1997. The Intelligence Bureau had cautioned Thackeray then, saying it could be dangerous, given the historical animosity between him and Muslims. However, the Sena founder had dismissed their fears. On their part, the Muslims told him that they appreciated his work during COVID, and also his refusal to compromise with the BJP. "Sanjay Raut even went to jail, but you didn't bend," businessman Iqbal Chunawala told him. Riyaz Bhamla, businessman and social worker, thanked Thackeray for sanctioning funds for the upgradation of the Oshiwara municipal maternity home, a project taken up by Pednekar. As CM, Thackeray had inaugurated the project. "The new hospital will be a boon to us," Bhamla told him. There were some issues that the delegation raised with him: the lack of Muslim candidates this time ("You should have come earlier," was the reply); the fear that Sena candidates for whom the Muslims would campaign would later defect to the BJP ("I'll make them take a vow in public that they won't"); the absence of Sena programmes in Muslim areas ("I'll set up a committee for this"). Thackeray turned down their request to hold a rally in Jogeshwari for his candidate Amol Kirtikar, saying he was to tour the state, but assured them that his son Aaditya would come to the area. He asked the delegation to attend the last rally of the MVA which would be held in Mumbai on May 17. Incidentally, Amol Kirtikar is the son of Gajanan Kirtikar, whose name featured in the Srikrishna Commission report on the 92-93 riots. Kirtikar had led a rally to the police station which later turned violent, according to the Commission's report, which described this as the first major violent incident of the 1993 phase of the riots in Jogeshwari. In 2008, Kirtikar was acquitted by a special court handling riots cases. But none of this featured in Thursday's meeting. The delegation was charmed by the former CM's "humility". "He listened to us carefully," said Bhamla. Darvesh told him, "Election or no election, we must keep meeting." Chunawala recalled the time when a Sena mayor was elected with the help of the Muslim League in 1973. "It seems those days are back," he told Thackeray. The latter responded by saying that wherever he travels, he finds Muslims supporting him wholeheartedly.

## Sharp fall in Indian tourists to Maldives amid 'India Out' campaign

When compared to figures from the same period in 2023, the number of visitors visiting the Maldives from India fell by about 40% between January and March of 2024. Simultaneously, the overall count of visitors from China increased by more than 200%. The Ministry of Tourism in the Maldives just released its monthly report on visitor arrivals. The information displayed the number of visitors to the island nation from January to March of this year. According to the data, 56,208 Indian visitors traveled to the Maldives in January through March of 2023. The figure fell to 34,847 between January and March of 2024. This represented a 38% decrease from 2023. In the meantime, 17,691 Chinese visitors traveled to the Maldives in

January-March of 2023. The total increased to 67,399 during January and March of 2024, marking a 281 percent peak. Based on the most recent data, China is the top market with an 11 percent share for Maldives tourism, while India is ranked sixth in the top 10. The information is important since, in the past, India was the major source of tourism-related data for the Maldives. In the figure displaying the nationality-wise arrivals of tourists in the Maldives from January to November 2023, Indians came in second only to Russians. In contrast to China, India began to see a rise in immigration in 2020. Up until December of last year, India dominated the Maldives' tourism industry. India's standing began to deteriorate on January 2 of

this year, when it was placed third out of the top 10 nations that account for the majority of the Maldives' tourism market share. On January 21 and March 3, respectively, India's ranking fell further lower to fifth and sixth. The decline in Indian tourism was observed shortly after the Maldives incident in the first week of January, which was sparked by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attempt to advertise Laskhwadeep as a travel destination. Subsequently, Mohamed Muizzu, the president of the Maldives, asked India to evacuate its soldiers stationed there. The fact that fewer visitors are traveling from India and more are coming from China is consistent with Muizzu's policies and agreements, which appear to favor China over India.

## BJP may field Varun against Priyanka

The BJP had replaced Varun Gandhi with Jitin Prasada from the Pilibhit Lok Sabha constituency New Delhi: With the possibility of Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi contesting from the Gandhi bastion, Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, saffron corridors are abuzz with speculations that the BJP could field Varun Gandhi from this high-profile seat. The BJP had replaced Varun Gandhi with Jitin Prasada from the Pilibhit Lok Sabha constituency. After his replacement, talks of parleys between Varun Gandhi and Congress emerged, with some claiming that Congress was considering fielding him from Rae Bareilly. However, sources close to Varun Gandhi revealed that the top BJP leadership was now contemplating making it a "Gandhi vs Gandhi" battle in Rae Bareilly. When asked, BJP officials remained tight-lipped on the issue. It may be recalled that recently, the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee and Rae Bareilly Congress passed resolutions stating that the party should field "Priyanka or any other member of the Gandhi family" from Rae Bareilly. Reports from UP indicated that some top Congress leaders, including Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, rooted for Varun

Gandhi. "We will be happy if Varun Gandhi joins Congress. He is a tall leader and a well-educated politician. His image exudes transparency, and he has relations with the Gandhi family. We want Varun Gandhi to join the Congress now," Chowdhury told the media. Meanwhile, as the BJP replaced Varun Gandhi, the party fielded his mother, Maneka Gandhi, from Sultanpur. While polling in Bareilly is slated for May 20, Sultanpur will vote on May 25. Polling in the Pilibhit Lok Sabha constituency was held today. It was learned that the party began sidelining Varun Gandhi following his alleged anti-party stand on various issues. In 2021, going against the party line, Varun Gandhi demanded the arrest of the perpetrators in the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, where farmers agitating against the contentious farm laws were mowed down by a vehicle driven by BJP leader and Union minister Ajay Mishra's son. He also clashed with the Yogi government in UP following the suspension of the licence of Sanjay Gandhi Hospital in Amethi. There had also been an influential section in the BJP targeting Gandhi, sources revealed. This particular section mounted pressure on the BJP high com-



mand to drop Gandhi and replace him with "any other candidate." Jitin Prasada, who was seeking to contest from Kheri, was brought in by the party to contest from Pilibhit. Earlier, breaking her silence on her son being dropped by the party, Maneka Gandhi had said, "He (Varun Gandhi) was a very good MP, even issue-wise and for his constituency. But I am sure whatever he does will be good for the country." As polling for the first phase kicked off this morning, a section of BJP leaders indicated that this particular phase "could be tricky" for the BJP in UP. It may be recalled that of the eight seats that went to polls on Friday, the BJP had won only three during the last general elections, namely Pilibhit, Kairana, and Muzaffarnagar. Samajwa di Party had won Moradabad and Rampur.

## 'INDI alliance came together to protect corrupts,' says PM Modi in Nanded

Ahead of the second phase of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a public gathering in Maharashtra's Nanded. PM Modi, who is currently on a visit to Maharashtra for election campaigning, is campaigning for Mahayuti's candidates from the parliamentary seat of Nanded Prataprao Patil Chikhlikar. Speaking at the gathering, PM Modi said, "Yesterday, the first phase of polling concluded. I congratulate & express my gratitude to all those who cast their vote and especially the first-time voters. After the polling concluded, the analysis that was done on the booth level and the information that was received confirms that in the first phase, there has been one-sided voting for NDA." Further, taking a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, PM Modi said, like Amethi, Congress will lose its ground from Wayanad also. He said, "Congress ke shehzade unhe bhi Wayanad mein sankat dikh raha hai. Shehzade aur unki toli April 26 ko Wayanad mein voting ka intezaar kar rahe hain... Jaise Amethi se bhagna pada, aap maan ke chaliye wo Wayanad bhi chodenge." Significantly, from Nanded, PM Modi will then travel to Maharashtra's Parbhani. The PM had earlier addressed a public meeting in Maharashtra's Wardha district on Friday. Later, from Maharashtra, PM Modi will then travel to Karnataka for



the election rallies scheduled in Bengaluru and Chikkaballapur. It is pertinent to note that this is PM Modi's third visit to Karnataka this election season. Moreover, at the rally in Palace Grounds today, Modi will campaign for the party candidates in Bengaluru's North, Central, South, and Rural seats. MoS (agriculture) Shobha Karandlaje is contesting from Bengaluru North, while well-known cardiologist Dr. CN Manjunath will be contesting from Bengaluru Rural. It is pertinent to note that both of the seats in Maharashtra (Nanded and Parbhani) and Karnataka (Bengaluru and Chikkaballapur) will go on polls during the second phase of elections.

### Voter turnout crosses 60 percent

Meanwhile, PM Modi earlier on Friday thanked the voters for their wide response during the first phase of the

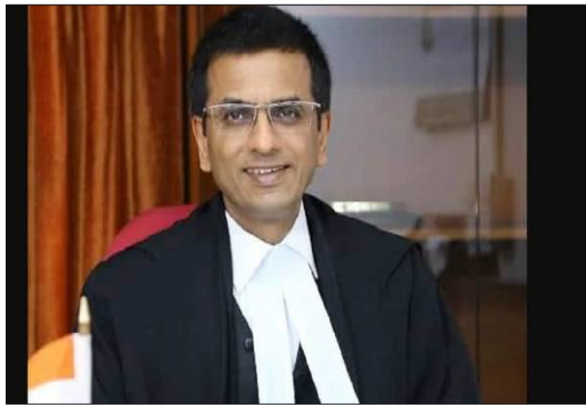
Lok Sabha Election 2024. In a social media post, PM Modi wrote, "First phase, great response! Thank you to all those who have voted today. I'm getting excellent feedback from today's voting. It's clear that people across India are voting for the NDA in record numbers." According to the Election Commission of India, over 60% of voter turnout was recorded until 7 p.m. during the first phase of the elections held across 102 Lok Sabha constituencies and 92 Assembly constituencies in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, where state legislature polls were held simultaneously on Friday. It is pertinent to note that the figure is tentative and is likely to change. In a statement released on the voting turnout percentage during the first phase of elections, the Election Commission of India said, "Polling for the first phase of general elections in 2024 recorded high voter turnout despite the heat wave. Polling remains largely peaceful, with voters from various walks of life participating enthusiastically in a dazzling display of civic responsibility and pride. In the first round of the 2024 general elections, polling has been completed for 10 states and UTs to elect the 18th Lok Sabha, along with polling for the state legislative assemblies of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The Commission thanked voters of Phase 1 and the entire election machinery."

## Amit Shah on why BJP did not ally with Naveen Patnaik's BJD in Odisha



Union Home Minister Amit Shah urged the people of Odisha to give the BJP a chance in the Lok Sabha elections. The BJP had last month confirmed that it was contesting the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls alone in Odisha. In an interview with India Today TV, Amit Shah spoke about why the BJP chose not to ally with Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik-led Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha. "Our party workers strongly believed that for Odia language, culture, and for pride of Odisha, the BJP should fight separately. So went with their beliefs," Amit Shah said. He added, "We urge the Odisha public to give the responsibility of state's growth to BJP under the PM Modi leadership. Wherever PM Modi has emerged victorious, the growth rate has gone up by a huge margin." The alliance talks between the Biju Janata Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party had failed, with both parties deciding to contest the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections alone. After the deal was off the table, Odisha BJP president Manmohan Samal said the saffron party did not agree with the BJD government on many issues about the "interests of Odia people", like "Odia Asmita" and "Odia glory".

## 'Significant overhaul': CJI Chandrachud lauds India's new criminal justice laws



Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said on April 20 that India's criminal justice system is about to undergo a major transformation, hailing the passage of the new legislation as a turning point for society. He stated that the new laws will be successful if "we as citizens adopt them" during a conference on "India's Progressive Path in the Administration of Criminal Justice System." Chief Justice of India (CJI) Chandrachud stated that the recently passed legislation has brought India's criminal justice system into the modern era. Additionally, he stated that much-needed upgrades have been made to safeguard victims' interests and effectively conduct offence investigation and prosecution. "The enactment of these laws by Parliament is a clear indication that India is changing and on the move, and needs new legal instruments to deal with the current challenges," the CJI said. Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, Attorney General R Venkataramani and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta were also present at the conference. Retired judges write to CJI against attempts to 'undermine' judiciary new regulations. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Act, which aim to totally restructure the nation's criminal justice system, were just passed and will take effect on July 1. That being said, the clause pertaining to hit-and-run incidents involving automobile drivers would not take effect right now. On December 21, the three laws were approved by Parliament, and on December 25, President Droupadi Murmu granted her consent.

## Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces post hit in airstrike, US denies involvement



Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a state-sponsored umbrella organisation comprising 67 different armed factions, said there was a huge explosion at its command post in a military base located about 50 km

from Baghdad. Iraqi security sources said the blast was a result of an airstrike. "The blast has caused material damage and injuries," the Reuters news agency quoted the PMF as saying in a statement, adding that a team was investigating. According to officials at a nearby hospital, the explosion at the Kalso military base killed at least one PMF fighter and injured six others. While the security sources said it was not known who was responsible for the airstrike, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) denied Washington's involvement, saying "the United States has not conducted air strikes in Iraq today". In a post on X, the US CENTCOM said

on Saturday, "We are aware of reports claiming that the United States conducted airstrikes in Iraq today. Those reports are not true. The United States has not conducted air strikes in Iraq today." Israel carried out an attack on Iranian territory on Friday, sources said, days after Iran struck Israel with a barrage of drones and missiles. The PMF started out as a grouping of armed factions, many close to Iran, that was later recognised as a formal security force by Iraqi authorities. Factions within the PMF took part in months of rocket and drone attacks on US forces in Iraq amid Israel's Gaza campaign but halted attacks since early February.

## Delhi Court reserves verdict on Manish Sisodia's bail plea

A Delhi court on Saturday reserved its judgement on the bail plea filed by former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, who was arrested last year in connection with the Delhi excise policy case. Sisodia has sought bail in both the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) cases filed against him. Special Judge (PC Act) Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court said that the order will be pronounced on April 30. Sisodia has been in custody since February 26, 2023. He is being probed by both the CBI and the ED in relation to the Delhi excise policy case. The case involves allegations that Delhi government officials had connived to grant liquor licenses to certain traders in exchange for bribes. The accused officials are alleged to have tweaked the excise policy to benefit certain liquor sellers. Pertinently, Sisodia was earlier denied bail by the Supreme Court on October 30, 2023. At the time, however, the apex court had said he could file a fresh bail plea if the

trial proceeded at a snail's pace. Public Prosecutor Pankaj Gupta appeared for CBI today and argued that Sisodia does not satisfy the triple test for bail. Gupta said that Sisodia in an influential politician and it was on his instance that the other co-accused committed the offence. "This is a clear case of destruction of evidence. He is the main accused in the case. It was based on his directions that other accused committed the offence. Documents and evidence in the case are still missing," Gupta said. He also cited former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to say that corruption in the cancer for the society. Sisodia's lawyer Vivek Jain said that he will give a written note for his rejoinder in the case. The ED was represented by its special counsel, Zoheb Hossain. In the previous hearing, Sisodia's lawyer Vivek Jain had objected to repeated adjournments in the case. Jain had pointed out that Sisodia has remained in jail for over a year now following his arrest in the Delhi excise policy case even though the Supreme Court has said that the trial



in the case should proceed expeditiously. "This is going indefinitely. The Supreme Court has said... We moved the application in February. The case has been adjourned four times. The applicant has been in jail for over a year," Jain argued. Meanwhile, the ED and CBI have maintained the delay in the trial was on account of Sisodia and other co-accused, and not the prosecution. Both the agencies have also said that Sisodia was the key person behind the formulation of the Delhi excise policy which favoured certain traders and that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) received kickbacks in return.

## Congress Under Fire As Leader Alleges 'Love Jihad' After Daughter's Murder

The gruesome murder of a Karnataka corporator's daughter has become the latest flashpoint between the Congress and the BJP. The Congress leader's daughter was stabbed seven times by a former student of the college she was attending in Hubballi. Cops suspect that he murdered her because she rejected his advances. Neha Hiremath, 23, was a first-year student of Master of Computer Applications and Fayaz Khondunaik was earlier her classmate. According to a senior police officer, Fayaz, who stabbed her multiple times, claimed during interrogation the two had been in a relationship but she had been avoiding him of late. The issue has snowballed into a political slugfest between the ruling Congress and the opposition BJP. While the ruling party has tried to project it as an incident from a personal angle, the BJP has said it shows the deterioration of law and order in the state. Union Minister and Dharwad Lok Sabha BJP candidate Pralhad Joshi suspected that there was a love jihad angle behind the incident. There is a complete deterioration of law and order under the Congress regime, he alleged, urging Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to stop minority appeasement politics and special treatment to a "particular community." However, Home Minister G Parameshwara said there was no "love



jihad" angle as of now. What has exacerbated the state government's troubles is the girl's father also calling the crime a 'Love Jihad' case. Niranjan Hiremath, a Congress corporator, claimed that the accused had planned to "trap his daughter". "The gang had conspired for a long time. They had planned either to trap her or to execute her. They have been threatening her in that backdrop. However, the girl had not heeded to their threats," Mr Hiremath told the media. "The whole state and country witnessed what happened to my daughter. If they say that it is personal, what is personal in this? Are they my relatives?" he added. Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi also launched a scathing attack on the Congress government in the state saying that the

C in the party's name stands for "corruption, criminality, and communal violence." "For any government, it is a salient duty to ensure that our children acquire the proper moral and ethical lessons in schools. Even the people should have requisite awareness in this regard." "People should have the belief that the law and machinery of a state will ensure that those who do wrong are brought to book. However, the Congress has failed abjectly in this regard (in Karnataka)," she added. The Congress retorted by saying that the state has the best law and order and the BJP was trying to impose the Governor's rule in Karnataka. "The BJP is trying to threaten us... Karnataka has the best law and order... They want to tell voters that they're going to impose Governor's rule. That's what R Ashoka (BJP leader and Leader of the Opposition) is trying confidentially. They want to place the state under the Governor's rule, that's why they are doing all this drama. But they can't do that. It's impossible," Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said. A large group of right-wing activists have also been protesting outside Hubballi's Vidyannagar police station and shouting slogans. Similar protests, calling for severe punishment for the Muslim accused, have been reported in various other places.





