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REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

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'90-PLUS PER CENT TRACKS IN INDIA SUBSTANDARD': AFI SPOKESPERSON

Athletics Federation of India spokesperson and World Athletics VP Adille Sumariwalla said running tracks in India are substandard. A look...

'WORLD ATHLETICS NOT HAPPY WITH QUALITY'

According to Sumariwalla, the AFI met World Athletics in Tokyo last year where World Athletics Championships took place. WA said that tracks in India did not meet set standards. "WA has called us and said 'you need to get involved.' They showed us some data, which was quite shocking," Sumariwalla said in a press conference on Saturday | P19

'GENUINE VENDORS' TO BE LISTED SOON

Former Indian sprinter claimed that at places, tire rubber is used instead of polyurethane and it is painted on top. He went on to add that they will get 'destroyed' thanks to wear and tear
Vendors responsible for bringing material are 'fly-by-night.' AFI to prepare list of genuine names who can provide good material

NUMBER OF 'CLASS-1' WORLD ATHLETICS - CERTIFIED TRACKS IN INDIA

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHICODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • THIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THIRISSUR • KALABURAGI



Thuraiyur Congress candidate M Lenin Prasath gifting GI-tagged Koppampatti jeerasamba rice to Rahul Gandhi at a poll campaign in Thuraiyur, Tiruchy | M K ASHOK KUMAR



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami during a poll campaign organised at the CODISSIA in Coimbatore | S SENBAGAPANDIYAN

We defeated Bill to defend the idea of India, says Rahul

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai/Vellore/Tiruchy

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused the BJP and RSS of attempting to weaken Tamil Nadu's voice in Parliament through delimitation, and called the AIADMK a "hollow shell" controlled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. The Leader of Opposition was campaigning for Secular Progressive Alliance candidates in Ponneri near Tiruvallur. Later in the day, he addressed meetings in support of alliance candidates in Sholinghur in Ranipet and Thuraiyur in Tiruchy districts.



Modi and Amit Shah believe that Tamil Nadu can be ruled from New Delhi. We believe that the people of Tamil Nadu should decide the future of their state

Rahul Gandhi, LoP

In Ponneri, Rahul said the delimitation bid was designed to reduce TN's share of parliamentary seats and weaken the political strength of southern, small, and north-eastern states. "We defeated the bill yesterday. We defeated the bill to defend the idea of India," he said, referring to the opposition's pushback against the Constitution Amendment Bill on Friday.

In Ranipet, he recalled the Parliament session. "Yesterday, you might have seen what Modi and Shah tried to do in Parliament. They told the nation a lie. They said they were trying to pass Women's Reservation Bill but hidden behind the bill was a diabolical idea. They wanted to change the electoral map of India," he lashed out. "The entire opposition stood like a rock and opposed it." P11

DMK spreads fear as it has no feat to showcase, says PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Coimbatore

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the DMK, with no achievement to showcase and no real issues to raise, has resorted to spreading fear about a reduction in Tamil Nadu's seats in the Lok Sabha. Addressing an election campaign meeting to canvass for NDA candidates in Coimbatore on Saturday, he accused the DMK of reversing its stance, claiming that the centre only proposed what the Dravidian party had sought: to maintain the current proportional representation of seats for each state in the Lok Sabha.



I only wanted the sisters from ordinary families to be able to come to Parliament and Vidhan Sabha in greater numbers. But, this noble effort was derailed

Narendra Modi, PM

A day after the Constitution (Amendment) Bill, failed to get a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, Modi blamed the Congress and the DMK, charging, "Why does it trouble the DMK and the Congress to see ordinary women getting their rights? This one family wants power to remain within."

He said, "In 2023, we passed the Women's Reservation Bill and, on April 16, we took a historic step towards implementing women's reservation in Parliament and legislative assemblies. Personally, I appealed to all political parties to support it. I told them that they may take the credit... I only wanted the sisters from ordinary families to be able to come to Parliament and Vidhan Sabha in greater numbers. But, this noble effort was derailed. DMK, Congress, and their allies made it a target of hatred and petty politics." P11

PM seeks forgiveness from all women of the country as bill to expedite quota fell in LS

Oppn will pay for its women's bill 'sin': Modi

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday berated the Congress-led Opposition for what he called was their 'big sin' of rejecting the Constitutional amendments to operationalise the 33% women's quota in the Lok Sabha the previous day. He said the women of the country would not forget how the Congress and its allies like the DMK, Trinamool Congress and Samajwadi Party opposed the legislation aimed at advancing women's representation in legislative bodies.

His address to the nation came ahead of assembly elections in two Opposition-held states, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where the ruling TMC and DMK were among those that voted against the amendments.

Launching a broadside against the Congress, Modi accused the party of being anti-women and opposed to reforms in the nation-building process. "The Congress inherited the British legacy of divide and rule and spread the canard of North-South divide. They opposed Article 370, triple talaq, PM Jan Dhan Yojna, Aadhaar, digital payments, GST, reservation for the economically weaker section in the general classes and many other efforts made in the larger interest of the nation," he alleged.

The prime minister also criticised the Congress' stance on delimitation, alleging it was fuelling divisions. He said the government had consistently clarified that no state's proportional representation in Parliament would be affected, yet the Opposition refused to relent.



'Insult to statute'

"Opposition parties have committed a sin. They will surely be punished for this. The Opposition insulted our Constitution by defeating the women's bill," Modi said

Describing the Congress, TMC, DMK and SP as dynastic parties, he alleged they resisted the bill out of fear of losing control within their organisations and preventing women outside their families from rising to leadership. "Nari Shakti Vandan Amendment was the need of hour and we made an honest effort to ensure balanced empowerment across the North, South, East and West. But the Congress, which is a parasite on regional parties, spiked them," the PM charged. He accused the Opposition of committing the political crime of opposing amendments aimed at expediting the implementation of the reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies.

Expressing confidence in the country's women, he said, "A woman forgets everything, but not her insult; this insult will always remain in every woman's heart." Describing the Opposition's vote against the bill as "foeticide", Modi said, "Parties like Congress, TMC, DMK, and SP are the culprits. By opposing this amendment, the Congress has attempted to push the future of many regional parties into uncertainty." P13

INDIA bloc for quick rollout of the 2023 Act

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

A day after the historic defeat of amendments to the women's quota bill in Parliament, the opposition INDIA bloc decided to push for the immediate rollout of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, within the existing framework of the 543-member Lok Sabha, while also seeking to counter the BJP's narrative to portray the Opposition in a negative light.

At a meeting chaired by the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, on Saturday, top leaders of the alliance agreed that each constituent party would independently push for the implementation of the Act, while also continuing to raise the issue in public to hold the BJP accountable.

The meeting was also attended by CPP leader Sonia Gandhi, NCP (SP)'s Supriya Sule, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Sanjay Raut, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, and CPI's P Sandosh Kumar, among others.

It was decided that parties in the INDIA bloc will hold press conferences across the country and stress that they support women's reservation, adding Parliament had already passed the bill in 2023. By introducing three new bills, they said the government was trying to change the political map of the country under its guise.

At a press conference after the meeting, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi un-

derlined that the Opposition was not against reservation for women and would support the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, if the government sought to implement it on the current strength of the Lok Sabha.

Speaking to this paper, Congress MP Manickam Tagore said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to clarify when the government will implement the Act. "For the PM, it was a face-palm moment after he failed in pushing through a Constitutional amendment," said Tagore.

While there were suggestions among the parties to hold a joint press conference of the INDIA bloc or write a joint letter to the PM demanding implementation of quota for women in the existing framework immediately, leaders said the upcoming elections in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal may pose a hurdle for such joint action. "INDIA bloc parties will continue with the coordination on this issue, and we are confident that we will be able to do it adequately. A joint letter to the PM may be prepared soon," said a leader.

Speaking to this paper, CPI MP Sandosh Kumar said his party will hold press meets and will urge the PM to immediately convene a special Parliament session to implement the Women's Reservation Act. Reacting to the PM's address, he said Modi deliberately evaded the fact that the Act was already passed by Parliament. P13



'Plot defeated'

"What happened yesterday was a very significant victory for democracy. The conspiracy to alter the federal structure was defeated," Priyanka said

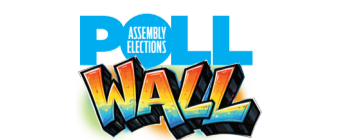
EXPRESS READ

2% DA hike for Central government employees

New Delhi: The Union Cabinet on Saturday approved raising Dearness Allowance (DA) and Dearness Relief (DR) by 2%, benefiting about 50.46 lakh Central government employees and 68.27 lakh pensioners. Its impact on the exchequer would be ₹6,791.24 cr per annum | P13

Sengottaiyan a spy of DMK, says Palaniswami

Erode: KA Sengottaiyan was DMK's mole who wanted to break the AIADMK, said Edappadi K Palaniswami during a campaign rally in Gobichettipalayam on Saturday. "He is not an AIADMK loyalist. He has never uttered even a single word against DMK in the Assembly," he said | P6



THANGAM TALKS HISTORY AND GOVERNANCE | P7

CAN NEW ENTRANTS DENT DMK'S MARGIN IN T'MALAI? | P7

MY BILL ON WOMEN'S QUOTA NOT TAKEN UP: WILSON | P6



IT'S VOTERS' TURN TO MOVE PIECES ON CHATURANGA BOARD

ANTO T JOSEPH

IN Madurai's sanguine chants, hoofbeats are barely muffled. The thunder of the cavalry and horse-drawn chariots flitting across the dusty lanes of Meenakshi's empire, still echoes through time. The past reminds a job half done. When glimpses of a glorious past and the once-mighty civilisation look so overwhelming, everything around you pales in comparison, as if it is mocking the current mediocrity.

Yet, Tamil Nadu stands out in the crowd. The 11.19% real growth of the state economy is not given on a platter. It's hard-earned. Between the floods, the pandemic, and the 'Trump', it's something that the state has meticulously executed. The fact is that the second-largest state economy after Maharashtra, now aiming to go past \$1 trillion by 2030-2031, feeds all hungry school children with a sumptuous breakfast meal, and keeps a constant eye on the Gini coefficient, in search of the perfect equality. Of course, it is a work in progress. There is more to be done.

The present is being built brick by brick on the foundation of a powerful past. Keezhadi, Adichanallur, and Sivagalai, where the past lay in a deep Rip Van Winkle slumber, are not just the relics of a bygone era. This is also a potential catalyst for a neo-Tamil renaissance. They may have ruthlessly throttled many a narrative linked to the Aryan dominance. But the near mundanity of the present continues to sneer at you. As the election juggernaut rolls in, this duality is palpable everywhere. Nasik Dhols and blaring speakers can't mask it. Caste arithmetic is at work, like never before, to earn a quick mandate. Beneath the complacency of the status quo, the discord can't be dismissed as an Opposition narrative. So, is there anti-incumbency? It needn't always be an aversion towards the incumbents; it can also stem from the yearning for *Amrit Kaal*, a new, promised land. How can you blame someone who laps up the green pastures 'sold' on the other side of the fence, especially when the only option is to stay resigned to the grind of incremental growth? P7



Desi maritime insurance pool to protect cargo amid conflict

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

AS the war in West Asia disrupts oil and gas supply—partly due to reduced vessel movement linked to insurance constraints—the government has approved the creation of the Bharat Maritime Insurance Pool (BMI Pool) with a sovereign guarantee of ₹12,980 crore.

The government said the objective of the insurance pool is to ensure uninterrupted and affordable marine insurance for India's shipping sector, while also reducing dependence on foreign insurers, particularly the International Group of P&I Clubs, which dominate the maritime insurance market.

The war has led to many ship-

India raises concerns after ships attacked

The government on Saturday called Iran's Ambassador Mohammad Fathali for a meeting with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to convey New Delhi's "deep concerns" after two Indian-flagged vessels were fired at in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz | P13

owners halting operations. Some insurers have become unwilling to provide coverage due to heightened risks.

According to the government, the BMI Pool will function as a collective of Indian insurance

companies working together to provide marine insurance.

Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said public sector reinsurer General Insurance Corporation of India (GIC Re) will act as the administrator of the pool. GIC Re will contribute ₹400 crore, while public sector general insurance companies will chip in ₹280 crore, with the rest coming from private insurers and oil marketing firms.

"The BMI Pool will cut down the cost of insurance premium by at least 25% as of now," Vaishnaw said.

The pool will provide coverage for Indian-flagged vessels, Indian-controlled ships, as well as ships arriving in or departing from Indian ports.

US extends sanction waiver on Russia oil till May 16

RAKESH KUMAR @ New Delhi

WITH the war continuing in West Asia, the United States has extended its waiver on sanctions for countries importing Russian crude by a month until May 16.

This is the second such relaxation since the escalation of the West Asia crisis, which has disrupted the global crude supply following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

According to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)

under the US Department of the Treasury, Russian oil and petroleum products loaded onto tankers—including those under sanctions—on or before 12.01 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time (9.31 a.m. IST) on April 17 can be purchased and received by most countries until May 16.

The previous waiver, issued in March, had expired on April 11. US Treasury Secretary Scott

Bessent had earlier indicated that the waiver would not be extended. However, the ongoing conflict in West Asia, which is now nearing two months, has significantly disrupted global crude and gas flows, prompting a reassessment. Russian crude is now expected to help offset supply shortages caused by reduced exports from Gulf producers.

The US had also temporarily

waived sanctions on Iranian crude imports for a month. This exemption set to expire on April 19.

As the world's third-largest crude oil consumer, India relies on imports to meet over 88% of its demand. Russia has emerged as India's top oil supplier since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war. Despite criticism from the West that purchasing discounted Russian crude effectively funds the war, New Delhi has continued to purchase crude from Moscow.

