

PM must apologise for commenting on Rahul Gandhi's candidature: Congress

Agency New Delhi, April 2
The Congress party has sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's apology for his remarks over party chief Rahul Gandhi choosing to contest also from Wayanad in Kerala as his second seat apparently because the Congress is "scared" that Hindus will punish them for "Hindu terror" remarks and therefore running away to minority-dominated seat. Talking to reporters on Monday, party spokesperson Randeep Singh Surjewala also sought action against him by the Election Commission (EC). Mr Surjewala said PM Modi has committed a "corrupt practice" under Section 123 of the Representation of People's Act besides violating the dignity of the office he holds and every other yardstick that is necessary and impeccable in public life.

"He must apologise to the nation. He has insulted the freedom movement, he has insulted entire southern India, he has insulted the composite culture of India, he has insulted the India that is unified by its multiple cultures as also languages, religions, castes and creeds. The Election Commission must take note of this and take action against Narendra Modi," Mr Surjewala said. Party general secretary KC Venugopal said that PM Modi should apologise to the people of Wayanad for his "most condemnable and divisive" statement on candidature of Gandhi. "By alleging that Rahul Gandhi is contesting form Wayanad on account of residents of a particular religion living there is a disgrace to the high office PM is holding," Mr Venugopal said in a statement. He said Wayanad

reflects the composite culture of various communities and religions who thrive and live together and was land of "lion of Kerala", Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja who had fought against the British. "Prime Minister was not only disrespecting the people of Wayanad but also insulted the freedom movement," he said, adding that Modi "insulted the entire Southern India". "Looking at the imminent defeat, a frustrated and flustered Prime Minister has shed all sense of responsibility of the high office he holds, and broken every constitutional norm and every norm of the public life that a person holding such a high office should uphold by alleging that Rahul Gandhi is contesting Wayanad seat as people of a particular religion live there," the Congress leader said. He said PM Modi must

understand that this country thrives on its all-encompassing behaviour. PM Modi does not know that Wayanad is famous for struggle for freedom against the British by the ruler of Kottayam Royal Dynasty, who not only fought the Britishers but also waged a guerrilla war defeating the British on multiple occasions till he sacrificed himself for India, he said. "Does he even know that Wayanad is also known for the temple of 'Love-Kush'—the sons of Lord Ram and Sita? Does the Prime Minister even know that in Wayanad, particularly in Vythiri, the glass temple of the Jains is famous? Does the Prime Minister know that Wayanad has a large tribal population of eight

different Scheduled Tribes? "Does the Prime Minister even know that Wayanad has nearly 50 per cent Hindu population besides the population of backwards, Scheduled Tribes, Dalits and of many-many other religions where Christians are about 20-21 per cent and Muslims are about 28 per cent? So, it is an ideal ground of combination of various communities and religions who thrive together and live together," he added. PM Modi had said at an election rally at Wardha in Maharashtra that the Congress is running scared that the Hindus will punish them now with the recent court verdict.

Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut Calls for 'EVM Tampering' to Defeat Kanhaiya Kumar, EC Slaps Notice

Agency Mumbai, April 2
The district election officer of Mumbai has issued a notice to Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut for alleged violation of the model code of conduct over his comments against CPI candidate Kanhaiya Kumar. Raut, who is the editor of Sena mouthpiece 'Saamana', said in the publication on Sunday that Kumar should be defeated in the elections even if it means the BJP has to "tamper with EVMs".

Kumar, the former president of the Jawaharlal Nehru University's student union, is contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha poll from Begusarai in Bihar. In his column 'Rok Thok' in the Marathi daily, Raut also said that Kumar, "a bottle of poison", must not reach Parliament. Following his remarks, the Raja Sabha MP was issued a notice on Monday, asking him to respond to it by Wednesday. Further action in the matter will be decided by the Election Commission.

Mumbai city Collector Shivaji Jondhale, who is the district election officer, in the notice said Raut's statement showed "lack of faith in the deployment of EVMs and muddying the electoral process". When contacted, Raut told to the news agency that he will respond to the notice to clarify his stand. "I have received the notice based on what I have written in 'Saamana'. We respect the EC and I will respond to the notice and clarify my stand in the time provided," he said.

Drive to raise voter awareness in Assam

Agency Guwahati, Apr 2

Sabha in Assam will be held in three phases - on April 11, 18 and 23.

turnouts at the polling booths.

The students of IIT-Guwahati have launched a campaign to generate awareness on the voting rights of people, which, they insisted, was necessary to "strengthen democracy and build a healthier nation". The campaign - 'Wake Up and Vote' - is a part of the institute's annual techno-management festival 'Techniche', a press release said here on Monday. The Techniche team, in collaboration with the election office in Assam, aims to mobilize electorates by enlightening them about the importance of exercising franchise in the upcoming the general election. Polling for the 14 Lok

In the last three months, the team has released multiple campaign videos, photos and blogs online to encourage people to come out and vote, the release said, adding that the students have also managed to rope in celebrities to support the cause. 'Wake Up and Vote', now in its final phase, is organising street plays, holding signature and selfie campaigns in the urban areas to reach out to people, it said. "Techniche has taken up this cause multiple times in the past. The 2014 general elections and the 2016 Assam state elections witnessed an enthralling campaign by the students, significantly impacting

"This year, we planned to raise the bar only further with renewed vigour and sincere efforts." Techniche convener Suraj Shelke said. The campaign is aimed at "apprising people of the fact that voting builds a healthier nation and strengthens democracy", Shelke said. "We persist in our continued belief that the triumph of a democracy is in the number of people who are willing to be a part of it," he added.

SC declines urgent hearing on Hardik Patel's plea

Agency New Delhi, April 2

The Supreme Court Tuesday refused to accord urgent hearing to Congress leader Hardik Patel's plea challenging the Gujarat High Court order which rejected his plea to stay his conviction in the 2015 Vispur rioting case. The matter was mentioned for urgent listing before a bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra. The bench also comprising Justices M M Shantanagoudar and Navin Sinha told the counsel appearing for Patel that there was no urgency in hearing the matter as the high court order was passed in August last year.

government had submitted that there were 17 FIRs including two sedition complaints against Patel. The high court had declined the contention of Patel's lawyers that if the conviction was not stayed, it will cause "irreparable damage" as he intended to contest the Lok Sabha election. In the order, the high court noted that a conviction can be stayed only in rare and exceptional cases, and the case did not fall into that category.

Delhi Congress chief Sheila Dikshit meets Rahul Gandhi

Agency New Delhi, April 2

Delhi Congress chief Sheila Dikshit met party president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday triggering fresh speculations on the party's possible alliance with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The meeting, which lasted for around 20 minutes was

also attended by AICC in charge of Delhi PC Chacko. Dikshit, who has been opposing an alliance with the AAP, had said on Sunday that the decision on tie-up for Lok Sabha polls will be declared in a few days. The decision from Rahul Gandhi on an alliance is expected "anytime" now, sources said. Delhi Congress is divided

over the issue with one side claiming that a 4-3 seat sharing formula has been finalised and AAP will be asked to leave three out of the seven parliamentary constituencies in national capital. AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal had however said on Monday that Rahul Gandhi had refused an alliance with his party.

BSP MLA Maulana Jameel joins Cong

Agency Muzaffarnagar, Apr 2

BSP MLA Maulana Jameel joined the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Talking to reporters here, Jameel said he left the Mayawati-led outfit as he felt only Congress could defeat the BJP in the coming elections. The MLA joined the Congress in the presence of AICC general secretary Jyotiraditya Scindia in Delhi on Monday. Jameel was elected on a BSP ticket from Meerapur assembly constituency in 2012.

WhatsApp unveils 'tipline' to tackle fake news

Agency New Delhi, Apr 2

WhatsApp Tuesday unveiled its 'Checkpoint Tipline', where people can check the authenticity of information received as the messaging giant looks to crack down on fake news ahead of the general election in the country. "Launched by PROTO, an India-based media skilling startup, this tipline will help create a database of rumours to study misinformation during elections for Checkpoint - a research project commissioned and technically assisted by WhatsApp," the Facebook-owned company said in a statement.

period. Facebook, which counts India as one of its largest markets with over 200 million users, had faced flak from the Indian government after a series of mob-lynching incidents, triggered by rumours circulating on WhatsApp, claimed lives last year. Under pressure to stop rumours and fake news, WhatsApp had last year restricted forwarding messages to five chats at once. It has also been putting out advertisements in newspapers and running television and radio campaigns offering tips to users on how to spot misinformation. With ensuing general elections, the Indian government had warned social media platforms of strong action if any attempt was made to influence the country's electoral process through undesirable means. Interestingly, the Indian government through proposed changes in IT rules is seeking to make social media platforms more accountable by mandating them to introduce tools that can identify and disable "unlawful content". One of the amendments being mulled in the IT intermediary rules (meant for online and social media platforms) will require them to enable tracing out of such originators of information as needed by government agencies that are legally authorised. However, WhatsApp has so far resisted the government's demand for identifying message originators, arguing that such a move would undermine the end-to-end encryption and the private nature of the platform, creating potential for

serious misuse. In its statement on Tuesday, WhatsApp said Dig Deeper Media and Meedan - which have previously worked on misinformation-related projects around the world - are helping PROTO to develop the verification and research frameworks for India. Meedan has developed the technology to support the verification of rumours and will maintain the database of such content that have been processed. To do so, they have expanded their check platform (developed for recent elections in Mexico and France) and integrated it with the WhatsApp Business API, to receive and respond to messages at scale. "The goal of this project is to study the misinformation phenomenon at scale natively in WhatsApp. As more data flows in, we will be able to identify the most susceptible or affected issues, locations, languages, regions, and more," PROTO founders Ritvij Parrikh and Nasr ul Hadi said. The verification reports PROTO sends back will encourage grassroots-level "listening posts" to send more signals for analysis, they added. Following the project, PROTO also plans to submit learnings to the International Center for Journalists to help other organisations learn from the design and operations of this project. "The research from this initiative will help create a global benchmarks for those wishing to tackle misinformation in their own markets," Fergus Bell, founder and CEO, Dig Deeper Media, said.

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