

Democracy is in danger: Ex-PM Manmohan Singh



Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh addressing the 'Jan Aakrosh' rally at Ramleela Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday.

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29/-/Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh today sought support for the Congress and its president Rahul Gandhi, saying the democracy of the country is in danger with the Modi government consistently undermining its Constitutional institutions. Launching an all-out attack on the government, he said it has failed to fulfill all its promises it made before coming to the power and it's the time it should give an account of its works to the people of the country. The former Prime Minister claimed the anger among all sections of the society has shot up in the last four years due to the rising threat to the safety and security of the people and the vanishing employment opportunities, which has left the youths worried. Singh said the

permissiveness is on the rise across the country, the law and order situation is bad and the atrocities against the minorities, the Dalits and the women are rising, but the Modi government seems hardly perturbed. Accusing the Modi government of thwarting the Opposition's 'No Confidence Motion' in Parliament, Singh said it did everything possible and conspired to stop it from being taken up in Parliament. "It is clear from this that if the Parliament does not function, it can pose danger to the democracy in the country. Democracy is a gift of the India's Constitution and we should all strive to strengthen it. The former prime minister said what has happened in the banking sector with Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi having taken thousands of crores of loans

and run away from the country is for everybody to see. "This is affecting the health of our banks," he said. He said the price of crude oil across the world was falling while in India the prices of petrol and diesel were constantly rising. He asked why this government was not working towards reducing the oil prices, which have put common man in great distress. "The time has come that we support Rahul Gandhi in making this country a better place," he said. Talking about unemployment, he said it was on the rise as the Modi Government has not created the much-promised two crore job opportunities, leaving youths and students, who had taken study loans, a worried lot in absence of jobs. (PTI)



A Congress supporter waving party flag during the 'Jan Aakrosh' rally at Ramleela Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday.

Bengal panchayat polls: CPM a shadow of its past

KOLKATA, APRIL 29/-/Once a formidable force in Bengal politics, the CPI(M) is now just a shadow of its past as it struggles to hold on to its ground with the BJP fast replacing it as the main opposition to the ruling TMC. The CPI(M) led Left Front, known as the main architect of the Panchayati Raj system since its inception in 1970, used to register hands down victory in most of the zilla parishads of the state. But this time it has been struggling to find candidates to file nominations in several seats. "It is true that in most of the places we have not been able to file nominations. One of the reasons is violence by the Trinamool Congress but there are several places where we had a tough time in finding candidates," a senior CPI(M) leader told PTI on condition of anonymity.

According to the list of nominations filed by various parties for the panchayat polls, the TMC is way ahead of its rivals in all the three segments of the panchayat polls - gram panchayat, panchayat samiti and zilla parishad. CPI(M) politburo member and MP Mohammed Salim said the number of party candidates should not be measured only in terms of

nominations filed, as the CPI(M) is fighting as a Left Front constituent and in several seats it has extended support to secular and democratic independent candidates. The single phase polls will be held at 48,650 seats in 3,358 gram panchayats, 9,217 seats in 341 panchayat samitis and 825 seats in 20 zilla parishads on May 14. The TMC has filed 1,000 nominations for the zilla parishads, followed by the BJP with 782 nominations. The CPI(M) and the Congress have filed 537 and 407 nominations respectively after scrutiny. For the panchayat samitis, the TMC has filed 12,590 nominations, followed again by the BJP, which has filed 6,149 nominations. The figures for the CPI(M) and the Congress are 4,400 and 1,740 respectively after scrutiny. TMC Secretary General Partha Chatterjee said the party is not bothered about the BJP's rise and said the Left should decide whether they are serious about fighting the BJP or not. "On one hand the CPI(M) is saying it is against the BJP but at the same time we are seeing that CPI(M) cadres are joining the BJP to fight us. This only exposes the double standards of the CPI(M)," Chatterjee said. (PTI)

Cong rally to mourn one family's loss of power: Shah

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29/-/Hitting out at the Congress over its 'Jan Aakrosh' rally, BJP president Amit Shah today said it was in fact a 'Parivar Aakrosh' rally that highlights increasing irrelevance of a dynasty and their courtiers, who have been sent out of power from one state after another in elections. The Congress has organised a 'Jan Aakrosh' rally in the national capital today to highlight 'failures' of the Modi government. In a series of tweets, Shah took a dig at Congress chief Rahul Gandhi and hoped that Gandhi would apologise to the nation for his party's efforts to trample over every possible institution in the country just because of its "power hungry" nature.

The country is tired of these "negative" and "arm-twisting" tactics of the Congress, he said. During the rally, Shah said, "abject India hatred" would be on display as the Congress cannot digest that 125 crore Indians have seen through their "anti-development and highly divisive politics" and it efforts to create divisions are fully exposed. A dynasty and their courtiers, who were sent out of state after state by 'Jan Aadesh' now pretend to represent 'Jan Aakrosh'. Today's Congress rally is nothing but a Parivar Aakrosh Rally which highlights their increasing irrelevance," he said. If the Congress wants to see 'Jan Aakrosh' (people's anger), they should see the results of election after election, where it has

been comprehensively defeated across the length and breadth of India, he said. "People are not tolerating Congress' lies, empty promises, corruption and communalism," he said. If the Congress really wants to know why there is 'Jan Aakrosh', they should answer why did they disallow Parliament to function and why it has prevented the formation of an OBC commission that gives justice to backward sections," Shah said. The BJP president also posted the link of a story, which said all villages in the country have now been electrified, and claimed that while the entire nation is celebrating power for every single village, the Congress is "mourning" the loss of power for one family. (PTI)

Trafficking cases rising as people reporting more: Minister

KOLKATA, APRIL 29/-/West Bengal has registered a rise in the number of trafficking incidents. That isn't the case, in the past few years, we have seen more people mustering courage to talk about their plight," she asserted. Panja was speaking at the seventh edition of 'Anti-Trafficking in Persons Conclave', hosted recently by the US consulate in Kolkata, in association with Delhi-based NGO Shakti Vahini. Lauding Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for the

internationally acclaimed Kanyashree scheme, the minister said over 47 lakh girls have benefited from the more. Sharing his experiences, Shrikumar Bandopadhyay, the IG of Sasnaratra Seema Bal, Siliguri frontier, said the porous international borders often make it easy for traffickers to escape law. "We visit schools in remote areas to generate awareness among the youths about the safe use of social media and the risks of giving in to

temptations," he said. "In the past two years, we have rescued at least 150 victims from the clutches of traffickers," he stated. Ravi Kant, the founder of NGO Shakti Vahini, said the conclave gave all stakeholders a chance to brainstorm ways to tackle the global menace. "The two-day meet is a great occasion to strengthen our fight against forced labour and human trafficking. It is time that all stakeholders unite to end the menace once and for all," he added. (PTI)

Blast at India-developed hydroelectricity project in Nepal

KATHMANDU, APRIL 29/-/A bomb exploded today at the office of a hydroelectricity project being developed with Indian assistance in eastern Nepal, an official said, weeks before its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The compound wall of the 900 MW Arun III Hydroelectric Power Plant's office in Tumlingtar area, nearly 500 km from here, was damaged in the explosion, said Siva Raj Joshi, Chief District Officer of the Sankhuwasabha district. The project is slated to come into operation by 2020.

The blast comes at a time when preparations are going on to lay foundation stone of the project by Modi during his official visit to Nepal on May 11. No one was injured in the blast and an investigation has been launched, he said. However, no one has claimed responsibility of the blast, he added.

A Project Development Agreement (PDA) for Arun III was signed with India's state-owned Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN) on November 25, 2014 in the presence of the then Prime Minister Sushil Koirala and visiting Indian Prime Minister Modi. This is the second blast within a month in Indian properties in Nepal. On April 17, a pressure cooker bomb went off near the Indian Embassy field office in Biratnagar damaging the walls of the premises.

Nepal is currently facing shortage of power and the production of hydropower from the project will mainly serve its domestic demands. The project is expected to bring in USD 1.5 billion foreign direct investment into Nepal and create jobs for thousands of people. (PTI)

AT A GLANCE

Militant attack

SRINAGAR, APRIL 29/-/Militants targeted an Army patrol in south Kashmir's Shopian district today, a police official said. No casualties were reported. A patrol party of Army's 34 Rashtriya Rifles was fired upon by militants in Malikgund area, he said. The official said the Army personnel retaliated, forcing the militants to flee from the spot. A search operation is underway, he said. (PTI)

Foreign donations

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29/-/As many as 3,292 NGOs and institutes, including some top academic centres like JNU, IGNOU, IIT Delhi and Madras, besides the Infosys Foundation in Bangalore have not disclosed their annual foreign donations and expenditure for the last fiscal or previous years, the Home Ministry has said. The ministry told the NGOs and institutes in a notice that after scrutiny of records for 2011-12 to 2016-17, it has been observed that the mandatory annual returns/accounts for some of the financial years in the said period have not been found uploaded on the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act portal despite several opportunities were given to them to do so. (PTI)

Lanka's new Cabinet

COLOMBO, APRIL 29/-/The new Cabinet of Sri Lanka's unity government will be sworn in on Tuesday. President Maithripala Sirisena announced today, weeks after he had suspended Parliament in the backdrop of the ongoing political turmoil in the country. The unity government of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) was thrown into a crisis after former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's new party pulled off a stunning victory in February's local elections seen as a referendum on the ruling alliance. Early this month, Sirisena was forced to face a vote of no confidence in Parliament moved by the Joint Opposition which has the backing of Rajapaksa. Wickremesinghe won the vote convincingly even after some of the unity government's Sirisena loyalists voted for his ouster among them were six ministers of the Cabinet. (PTI)

There's deadly silence about state sponsored terrorism: Hansal Mehta

MUMBAI, APRIL 29/-/Hansal Mehta's 'Omerta' tracks the story of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and the director says through this film he wants to provoke a thought among people about state sponsored terrorism. Sheikh, a British terrorist of Pakistani descent, was involved in the 9/11 terror attacks and killing of American journalist Daniel Pearl. He is currently in prison in Pakistan serving the life sentence. "There are some standard emotions that a film leaves you with like happiness, sadness, this

(film) would leave you angry. We live in a world where a villain like this exists and yet we are silent about it," Mehta told PTI. "There is a deadly silence about the truth surrounding state sponsored terrorism. It exists yet we do not talk about it. Governments don't talk about it because the business of war keeps the government solvent," he says. The film features Mehta's frequent collaborator Rajkumar Rao playing the part of the terrorist, but before he came on board, there were

a few actors who were approached for the role. "That is much before I met Rajkumar. With 'Omerta' I was not able to find the perfect actor initially for the film. I even pitched the story of 'Omerta' to other producers of 'Shahid' but they wanted to make 'Shahid' first as it seemed more manageable. I think everything happens



Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). When the director first went to the examining

committee seeking an 'A' certificate, the board ordered several cuts which Mehta felt were "unjustified" and he approached the revising committee, hoping they would understand the context of the film. "The examining committee had asked for cuts which were completely unjustified. I had gone for the screening asking A certificate. I requested them give us an A certificate. I was surprised why the cuts. I had to take the film to revising committee that's why the delay in release date. The two cuts ordered

by the revising committee were - a sequence where Omar is urinating during the national anthem and the other was sexual in nature, Mehta says. "It is an offensive scene and it is suppose to make you angry. There is one scene where he is having a violent sex before he carries out an operation," he adds. The director believes every film faces some difficulties but the challenge that "Omerta" posed was how to make a film on an antagonist, without glorifying anything. The film is set to release on May 4. (PTI)