

News

Brief

LS polls: Congress names Robert Bruce in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli constituency

Chennai, March 26 (IANS) The Congress on Monday in its sixth list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls named Robert Bruce in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli constituency.

In Tamil Nadu, the party has already announced the candidature of Karti P. Chidambaram (Sivaganga), S. Jothimani (Karur), Sasi-kanth Senthil (Tiruvallur SC), MK Vishnuprasad (Cuddalore), B. Manickam Tagore (Virudhunagar), K. Gopinath (Krishnagiri) and Vijay Vasanth (Kanniyakumari) for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Hanuman Beniwal to be INDIA bloc candidate from Nagaur

Jaipur, March 26 (IANS) Rashtriya Loktantrik Party leader Hanuman Beniwal will be the INDIA bloc candidate from the Nagaur Lok Sabha constituency in Rajasthan.

The Congress had left the seat for Beniwal's RLP.

He will file his nomination on March 27 for the seat, which will go to polls in the first round of Lok Sabha elections on April 19.

Beniwal will face BJP's Jyoti Mirdha again in Nagaur seat. However, in 2019, Mirdha was the Congress candidate, while Beniwal was the NDA candidate. Mirdha was also the Congress candidate in 2014, but Beniwal had contested as an independent then, and CR Chaudhary was the BJP nominee.

MeT Dept predicts wet spell for J&K

Srinagar, March 26 (IANS) A wet spell is likely to occur in Jammu and Kashmir from Wednesday, the Meteorological (MeT) office said on Tuesday.

The MeT office said that beginning March 27 another spell of wet weather will affect the union territory till March 31. "During this period, a generally cloudy sky with light rain in plains and snow in the higher reaches is expected to occur," the statement said. Srinagar had 5.4, Gulmarg 2.8 and Pahalgam 0.7 as the minimum temperature on Tuesday.

Leh town in Ladakh region had minus 2.4, Kargil minus 1.7 and Drass minus 7.9 as the minimum temperature.

Odisha: Man, his son killed in wall collapse

Bhubaneswar, March 26 (IANS) Two members of a family died in Odisha on Monday after a dilapidated wall collapsed and fell on them.

"Samiruddin along with wife Asima Biwi and son Arif were collecting crushed stone chips kept near the brick wall of an old house. Meanwhile, the wall suddenly collapsed on them and they sustained severe injuries." The locals rescued the injured trapped under the debris and rushed them to Balasore District Headquarters Hospital.

6 Chinese nationals killed in suicide attack in Pak.

Islamabad, March 26 (IANS) In a suicide attack, six people, including six-Chinese nationals, were killed after the vehicle in which they were travelling was targeted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Besham city in Shangla district, media reports said.

Police said the attackers crashed their vehicle full of explosives into the car carrying Chinese engineers who were going to Dasu camp in Kohistan from Islamabad, the Geo News reported on Tuesday.

The car's driver, who was a Pakistani national, succumbed to his injuries during treatment in a hospital.

A search operation was launched in the area for the suspects after a heavy contingent of security personnel arrived at the site and cordoned off the area.

China's Gezhouba Group Company is involved in the construction of a major hydroelectric dam in the Dasu area, which has been a target in the past as well.

A bus explosion in 2021 in the region had killed 13 people, including nine Chinese nationals.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari condemned the incident and expressed solidarity with the families of the de-

ceased.

A statement issued by PPP's media cell on X said that Bilawal extended condolences to the Chinese government and called for severe punishment for those involved in the attack.

The safety of Chinese workers has long been an area of concern in Pakistan with a convoy of Chinese engineers attacked in Balochistan province by armed rebels last year.

Dasu is the site of a major hydroelectric dam, under construction by the China Gezhouba Group Company, and the area has been attacked in the past.

-IANS

FM Sitharaman rebuts Congress charges on Atal Pension Yojana

New Delhi, March 26 (IANS) Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in a strong rebuttal to Congress charges on the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) on Tuesday, described it as a scheme based on 'best practice choice architecture' and also underlined the fact that the APY subscribers are getting guaranteed 8 per cent return every year.

Sitharaman's defence of the flagship scheme of the Modi government comes on the back of Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh's claims that it was a 'very poorly-designed scheme' and people were 'coerced and hoodwinked' by the officials to join it.

Breaking down the

best practice choice architecture, the Finance Minister said on X: "The feature was introduced for the best interest of subscribers. Instead of requiring people to decide each year to continue, they have to take a decision to discontinue." Further, refuting the Congress charges on 'poor returns', she said that the minimum return under the APY has been guaranteed by the government at least 8 per cent, regardless of prevailing interest rates and returns.

"This is an attractive guaranteed minimum return. Govt pays a subsidy to PFDA to make up for any shortfall in actual returns. If higher investment returns are received on the contributions of sub-

scribers of APY, the higher pension would be paid to the subscribers: In fact, currently the returns are more than 8 per cent," the Finance Minister pointed out. Taking strong objection to Jairam's 'this is fixed income pension' comment, the Finance Minister accused the senior Congress leader of not even bothering to check the facts on the guaranteed pension scheme. Earlier in the day, Congress communications in-charge stepped up his attack on the Centre and accused it of 'befooling' the public with a 'very poorly designed scheme'. He also claimed that the paper tiger was hoodwinking and coercing people to participate in it.



Haridwar Lok Sabha candidate and former Chief Minister of Uttarakhand Trivendra Singh Rawat worship before filing nomination, in Haridwar on Tuesday. UNI

With 1 MP and 2 MLAs, Congress faces do-or-die battle in Uttar Pradesh

Lucknow, March 26 (IANS) Uttar Pradesh was once considered to be the stronghold of the Congress party as the Amethi and Rae Bareilly constituencies have always sent Gandhi-family scions to the parliament.

However, Congress has been reduced to just one MP in the outgoing Lok Sabha and two MLAs in the 403-member Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly.

In the upcoming Lok Sabha election, the Congress faces a do-or-die battle in Uttar Pradesh as the party is low on confidence, lacks leadership and also faces a dearth of candidates.

The Congress currently has no representation in the legislative council of Uttar Pradesh.

The Congress secured 6.36 per cent of the votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

The biggest setback in these elections was that senior party leader Rahul Gandhi had suffered a defeat in Amethi where union minister Smriti Irani emerged victorious in the last election.

The cadres sunk into the realms of despair and the party's vote share

plummeted to a mere 2.33 per cent in the 2022 UP legislative assembly polls.

Any further decline in the party's performance in the upcoming elections will result in no representation for the Congress from Uttar Pradesh, a state that has sent nine prime ministers to the Lok Sabha.

The Congress faces the challenge of working out political equations and evaluating winnability as it selects its candidates for 17 out of 80 seats it is contesting in alliance with the Samajwadi Party in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

The foremost challenge for the Congress is not only to defend Rae Bareilly but also to increase its tally in Uttar Pradesh.

The party is yet to announce candidates for two key parliamentary (Amethi and Rae Bareilly) constituencies. It is not yet known if a member of the Gandhi family will contest these seats.

Sonia Gandhi was the only Congress candidate who won in Uttar Pradesh in 2019. She got 55.78 per cent votes in Rae Bareilly. Rahul Gandhi with 43.84 per cent votes lost to Smriti Irani in Amethi five

years ago. Irani won with 49.69 per cent votes.

Sonia Gandhi has since taken the Rajya Sabha route to parliament through Rajasthan.

Congress fortunes have been going downhill since 2009 when the party won 21 seats.

It won only two seats in 2014 and one in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Of the 17 seats given to the Congress for the 2024 election, the party had won only six in 2009 - Rae Bareilly, Amethi, Kanpur, Maharajganj, Jhansi and Barabanki.

The Congress, so far, has named candidates for three of the six seats - Alok Mishra in Kanpur, Tanuj Punia in Barabanki and Pradeep Jain Aditya in Jhansi.

Initial reports say that Congress candidates in Saharanpur (Imran Masood) and Amroha (Danish Ali) have taken an early lead and with the caste arithmetic favouring them, they could help the Congress increase its tally.

A former UPCC president, who spoke to IANS on condition of anonymity, said that the problem is that no one in UP is there to guide the candidates or address their problems.



Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami with BJP candidate from Tehri Garhwal constituency Mala Rajya Laxmi Shah at a roadshow organised on the occasion of nomination of Shah for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, in Dehradun on Tuesday. UNI

Woman killed by husband, in-laws in Delhi

New Delhi, March 26 (IANS) A 27-year-old woman died after her throat was allegedly slit by some sharp object allegedly by her husband and in-laws in outer Delhi's Alipur area, an official said on Tuesday. The official said that they have apprehended the accused identified as Manjeet (30), his father Bhim (52), his mother Meena (48), and brother Manish (27). Sharing details, police said that on Monday at 6:50 p.m., information regarding a quarrel between husband and wife was received at Alipur police station following which a police team rushed to the spot. "The woman was rushed to the hospital, where she was declared brought dead," said a senior police official, adding that the body was shifted to the mortuary for autopsy.

Tussle continues in INDIA bloc in Bihar over seat-sharing formula

Patna, March 26 (IANS) The INDIA bloc in Bihar has not been able to resolve its seat-sharing problems delaying the announcement of candidates.

The RJD has announced six candidates so far, and sources have said that it is finalising many more names without consulting others in the bloc.

Sources have also said that the Congress was demanding 10 seats in the state which has led to a disagreement with the RJD. However, Lalu Prasad, on the other hand does not want to repeat his "mistake" of giving 70 seats to the Congress in the 2020 Assembly elec-

tion. The Congress performed miserably and won only 19 seats.

"There is no dispute between the RJD and Congress party, but the latter is demanding more seats in Bihar and not even explaining the details of the candidates. Without discussing the profiles of candidates, how can seat-sharing be possible? RJD national president Lalu Prasad Yadav is in Delhi and negotiation will take place with the top leadership of Congress," said Shivanand Tiwari, the national vice president of RJD.

Sources have said that the Congress is eyeing Kishanganj, Supaul, Kati-

har, Darbhanga, Purnea, Aurangabad, Buxar, Patna Sahib, Begusarai and Sasaram.

The RJD has already announced its candidate, Abhay Kushwaha, from Aurangabad. The party is also likely to give the ticket to Bima Bharti from the Purnea Lok Sabha seat.

Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, the Bahubali leader and four-time MP, has claimed that he will contest Purnea seat at any cost. Pappu Yadav merged his party named Jan Adhikar Party in Congress on March 20 with the aim to contest from Purnea on the ticket of the grand old party. This is an alarm bell for the RJD.

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