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7 Days That Could Decide The Next 5 Years

18 assembly bypolls hold key to power in TN



RARING TO GO: Students at a National Voters Day function in Bengaluru recently

100% VVPAT Deployment, Trail Matching In 1 Booth Per Segment

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New Delhi: The Election Commission on Sunday announced seven-phase polls to the Lok Sabha and four state assemblies, to be held from April 11 to May 19.

Assemblies polls will be held in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, which will complete six months of dissolution of the assembly in May, was left out.

Chief election commissioner Sunil Arora attributed the delayed assembly poll in J&K to the security situation in the state in view of which the J&K government and home ministry had expressed their inability to hold simultaneous polls.

TOI was the first to report on February 15 that Lok Sabha and assembly polls in J&K may be decoupled.

As per the schedule announced by Arora, who was flanked by election commis-

sioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra at Sunday's press conference, polling will be spread across seven phases on April 11, 18, 23, 29, May 6, 12 and 19. While 22 states and Union Territories will vote in a single phase, Karnataka, Manipur, Rajasthan and Tripura will have two-phase polls.

Assam and Chhattisgarh will poll in three phases; Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha in four phases; J&K in five phases and UP, Bihar and West Bengal in all seven phases.

The model code of conduct kicked in with declaration of polls. General election 2019 will have 100% deployment of VVPATs. It will continue with the practice of matching EVM count with paper trail in one polling station each in every assembly segment, though the CEC did not rule out raising the tally if the Indian Statistical Institute, which is looking into the possibility, recommends the same ahead of counting day.

As many as 89.88 crore electors, including 1.59 crore new voters aged 18-19 years, are registered to vote though this number is likely to go up since additions to the electoral rolls

can be made till the last day of filing of nomination, even though only applications. In addition, nearly 16.62 lakh have enrolled as service voters.

In the 2014 polls, 81.45 crore voters were enrolled. As per EC sources, there will be 10,35,932 polling stations spread over 4.36 lakh locations across the country this time.

The poll announcement has set in motion a highly-anticipated contest which is shaping up to be a 'Modi versus Rest' showdown. The recent Pulwama attack and IAF air strikes on a Jaish camp in Pakistan have added a new dimension to the polls as the military action is seen to boost the Modi government's credentials, though the challenge for BJP is to sustain the high till voting day and factor in possible escalation.

Declaration of polls is expected to spur the opposition to look for alliances to take on Modi and BJP. The key alliances in UP and Karnataka are a major challenge for BJP as are strong regional leaders like Mamata Banerjee, Naveen Patnaik, K Chandrasekhar Rao, Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav. A key determinant will also be 'BJP versus Congress' battles in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Congress scored victories in some of these states recently and it remains to be seen if a national election fought on 'for-or-against-Modi' lines will allow BJP to regain the advantage.

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Chennai: While the campaign in Tamil Nadu will be on for all 39 Lok Sabha constituencies, the focus of party leaders could be skewed towards 15 Lok Sabha seats which include the 18 assembly bypolls where by-elections will be held simultaneously.

The ruling AIADMK government's survival depends on what happens in these 18 assembly seats. By the same token, this is the Opposition DMK's chance to unseat it.

Three Lok Sabha seats — Vellore, Dharmapuri and Theni — are likely to receive the maximum attention as each has two assembly segments going to the polls.

"We have to ensure our government completes its five-year term and hence there is no doubt the focus will be more on constituencies where assembly bypolls

will also be held. With the DMK too looking at grabbing power, we cannot take things lightly," an AIADMK leader, who was part of the seat-sharing committee for the Lok Sabha polls, said.

While it is a 234-member House, including the Speaker, in Tamil Nadu, the official strength is now down to 213, with 21 assembly seats lying vacant. After bypolls in 18 assembly seats (court cases have delayed elections in the other three constituencies), the strength of the house would go up to 231 after the results are announced on May 23.

To remain in power, AIADMK would need the support of 116 members. While the DMK-Congress alliance has 97 members, T T Dhinakaran is an Independent member.

As on date, the AIADMK's official strength is 114, besides speaker P Dhanapal.



POLL-READY: Cutouts of PM Narendra Modi, late AIADMK leader J Jayalalitha and other leaders during a rally in Chennai recently

However, this includes three Independent MLAs who won on the AIADMK symbol, and three AIADMK MLAs who are backing Dhinakaran. That brings down the effective strength of the AIADMK to 108 in the house.

AIADMK has to win a minimum of eight assembly bypoll seats to stay in power:

On the other hand, even if DMK wins all the 18 seats, its effective strength, along with its allies, can touch only 115. That may not be enough, on paper, to grab power in the state, but would render the government very shaky. "The campaign could be on two fronts for the ruling party, with the Lok Sabha

candidates of the AIADMK-led alliance projecting PM Narendra Modi to seek votes. For the assembly bypoll candidates, the focus will be state-centric," said another senior AIADMK leader.

The AIADMK could also rue bypolls not being held in Thiruparankundram and Ottapidaram. "While Thiruparankundram is considered strong for AIADMK, the very purpose of bringing K Krishnasamy's Puthiya Thamilzhagam (PT) into the alliance is lost with Ottapidaram too not having bypolls," said a political observer.

DMK, which grabbed V Senthil Balaji from AMMK to field him for the Aravakurichi bypoll, too must be ruing the delay. However, the DMK could still utilise his resources by naming him for Karur Lok Sabha seat, for which too he has submitted his application.

Vijayakant finally takes ADMK's offer of 4 seats

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Chennai: Hours after EC announced the election schedule, AIADMK on Sunday signed a poll agreement with DMK chief Vijayakant, allocating four Lok Sabha seats to his party. The end seemed almost inevitable after DMK shut its doors on the actor despite last ditch efforts to sew up an alliance.

DMK has extended full support to AIADMK in the 18 by-elections to assembly seats. Tamil Nadu CM Edappadi K Palaniswami and his deputy O Panneerselvam and Vijayakant signed the deal in the presence of DMK leaders Premalatha Vijayakant and L K Sudheesh. "We will arrive at a consensus on the parliamentary constituencies after consultation with allies. It will be done before the filing of nominations," Panneerselvam said, terming the coming together of both parties a whole-hearted alliance.

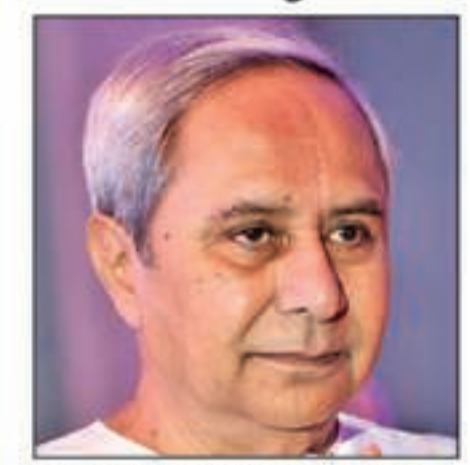
In a first, BJD to keep 33% of seats for women

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Bhubaneswar: Odisha chief minister and BJD president Naveen Patnaik put his promise of giving greater representation to women in electoral politics into practice on Sunday, announcing hours before the Election Commission declared the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections schedules that his party will reserve 33% of its LS poll tickets for women.

This is the first time any political party in the country has done so, the move is likely to further endear him and his party to women voters. Naveen's announcement means BJD will field at least seven women candidates from the 21 parliamentary seats on offer in Odisha.

"Odisha will send 33% women to Parliament in the coming election," Naveen told a huge congregation of women self-help groups (SHGs) at Kendrapada, 80 km from Bhubaneswar. Women voters are con-



Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik

steps of his father, former Odisha CM Biju Patnaik, who had announced 33% reservation for women in panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) and government jobs in the early 1990s.

"If India is to lead the world, if India is to be an advanced nation like America and China, women's empowerment is the only answer," Naveen said.

The BJD president was instrumental in the Odisha assembly passing an unanimous resolution on ensuring 33% reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies. Naveen had himself approached other leaders and had written to PM Narendra Modi seeking his intervention on clearing the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament.

The announcement, however, met with derision. "Why did Naveen announce the decision to field 33% women candidates in the LS polls and not for the assembly election?" BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra asked.

Cong fights for survival in NE, once its bastion

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Guwahati: Congress finds itself friendless in the north-east ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, with its fight turning into a test of survival and not one for victory in the region. Congress has eight MPs in the outgoing Lok Sabha. And while BJP speaks of expansion, Congress has to plan for survival.

Until five years ago, the region was a Congress stronghold. The historic association of each state's formation with subsequent Congress governments at the Centre had lent it a political capital its regional units could bank on. It had few regional alliances, but never needed too many either. When it did rely on coalition politics, the arrangements were never too stable but did not come in the way of Congress retaining its bastions.

But the 2014 Lok Sabha election changed all that. Since then, Congress has been ceding ground to BJP and its allies — first, Assam, followed by Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and, finally, Mizoram. In Tripura, it went from being the primary opposition party to not winning a single seat in the assembly election last year. Its fate in Nagaland was similar.

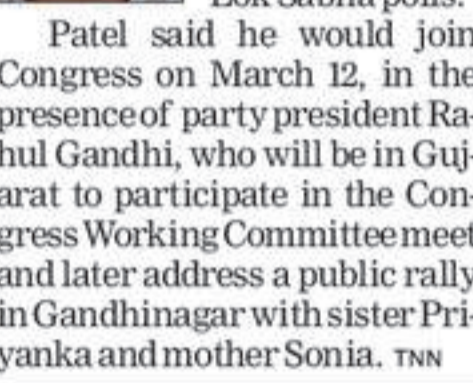
As a result, Congress barely has much footprint left in the region. So what is it counting on for a comeback? "Over the past five years, the NDA government has made a mess of everything handed to it by the UPA government. Just imagine the situation in the north-east had the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill been passed. BJP wants to create a situation in the north-east similar to the one they have created in Jammu & Kashmir." North-east Congress Coordination Committee chairperson and former Meghalaya chief minister Mukul Sangma told TOI.

If Congress were to gain an advantage over BJP because of the resentment over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, it would have to move fast to turn it into a political gain. And that would need support from allies. "Congress may not have friends in its fight against BJP at the moment, but friends can always be made after polls," Sangma said.

Hardik to join Cong on Mar 12

Ahmedabad: Hardik Patel, who launched a stir against the ruling BJP in Gujarat demand-

ing quota for Patidars in 2015, declared on Sunday that he would join the Congress ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Patel said he would join Congress on March 12, in the presence of party president Rahul Gandhi, who will be in Gujarat to participate in the Congress Working Committee meet and later address a public rally in Gandhinagar with sister Priyanka and mother Sonia. TN



Hardik Patel

In last-minute rush, Yogi gives 75 netas MoS status

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Lucknow: Delaying the take-off of his chopper in an hour, UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath, who was to attend a function at Rahmankhera on the outskirts of the state capital, hurriedly signed files to appoint and elevate 75 BJP leaders to the status of minister of state on Sunday afternoon, just before Election Commission's model code of conduct came into force.

The leaders were appointed as chairpersons and vice-chairpersons in various corporations. The list is dominated by leaders from eastern UP, with 35 of them from Gorakhpur, Yogi's home district. Earlier, the CM announced a series of hikes in salaries and emoluments, including Rs 1,500 for cooks

Computer Baba to head MP trust

Self-styled godman Namdev Das Tyagi aka Computer Baba has been appointed as the chairman of 'Ma Narmada, Ma Kshipra and Ma Mandakini River Trust' by the Madhya Pradesh government. "The government has appointed Computer Baba, a resident of Gomat Giri Ashram, Indore, as chairman of the 'Ma Narmada, Ma Kshipra and Ma Mandakini Nadi Nyas (River Trust)' till further orders. The appointment will be effective with immediate effect," read an order issued by the spiritual department of the Congress-led Kamal Nath government on Saturday.

Rajendra Sharma/TNN

in schools run under mid-day meal programme and hike in honorarium for Mansarovar pilgrims. The CM unveiled projects of over Rs 75,000 crore in the last three days while taking a whirlwind tour of UP.

Also, the Gau Sewa Ayog was made functional on Sunday with the appointment of a new chairman. For a year, the commission had been lying defunct. By spending over Rs 3,000 crore for Kumbh, Yogi attempted to showcase good governance and promised to fetch Rs 4.28 lakh crore investment through MoUs.

Confident of his performance, the CM has been boasting about sending 75 MPs to Lok Sabha, two more than last elections, including Amethi and Azamgarh. There were muted voices for a change in leadership in UP but these talks were shelved till the outcome of poll results in May.

Mukul outreach sparks Bengal ripples

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Kolkata: Senior BJP leader Mukul Roy's alleged outreach to Bidhannagar mayor Sabayashi Dutta, former state Congress president Adhir Chowdhury and Baisakh Banerjee, a close confidante of former mayor Sovan Chatterjee, evoked sharp reactions on Sunday both within and outside BJP.

While Trinamool Congress hit back at Roy for deliberately creating an "air of suspicion" over attempt to bond with Dutta over luchi-aloo dom, a sarcastic Adhir hit back against the "baseless whisper campaign" and Roy's own party



HEAD HUNTER?

on Sunday morning. MP Do-la Sen went to Dutta's home early this morning. Urban development minister Firhad Hakim presided over the councillors' meeting later. Sources said CM Mamata Banerjee also spoke to Dutta before he left for the meeting.

Dutta clarified to reporters that Roy had called him. "He wanted to come over to meet me and my wife Indrani. At home he asked my wife to prepare luchi-aloo dom and we watched the India-Australia third ODI," said Dutta. He said they did not discuss politics. "I know him for a long time and could not say no to him when he wanted to meet my

family. It was out of a good gesture," he insisted. But Hakim said, "Our relatives and friends are within the party. India and Pakistan's army cannot just meet as goodwill gesture. That would break morale of the armed forces," Hakim said.

Roy, however, kept the speculation alive. He claimed he had a word with Dutta. "I have spoken to him already. There is enough time before the polls," he said. Adhir reacted strongly to suggestions that he met Roy in New Delhi. He claimed that these speculations are being raised by the Trinamool leaders to malign his image.

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NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE DRM (S&T) NWR, Ajmer on behalf of The President of India invites E-Tender for the following work up to 15.00 Hrs. on the mentioned date.

उत्तराखण्ड पावर कॉर्पोरेशन लि (उत्तराखण्ड सरकार का उपक्रम) विद्युत वितरण मण्डल, सुभाषनगर, हल्द्वानी (नेनीताल) क्र.सं. 1. ई निविदा संख्या ई0डी0सी0ई-निविदा. 29/2018-19.

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