

# 6 DECISION 2019



## THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER TRS PLANS FOR NATIONAL PITCH

# Assembly win a draw, KCR throws open gates, has leaders flocking

SREENIVAS JANYALA  
HYDERABAD, MARCH 17

TELANGANA RASHTRA SAMITHI (TRS) working president K T Rama Rao calls it their "16 *Geluddam*, Delhi *Saddidam* (Win 16 and Win Delhi)" Project.

In other words, as TRS chief K C Chandrasekhar Rao aims for a national profile post the coming general elections, the party is banking on winning all 16 of the state's 17 Lok Sabha constituencies it is contesting. The 17th, Hyderabad, has gone to TRS ally AIMIM, and Asaduddin Owaisi is expected to win again from there.



K C Chandrasekhar Rao

Towards that end, the TRS is approaching the elections district-wise, seeking to consolidate where the Opposition won just one or two Assembly segments in 2014. It has made strides by wooing winning candidates of the other parties, with its landslide win in the December Assembly elections only making the party even more attractive.

In the 31 districts of Telangana in the 2014 polls (increased to 33 after the elections), the TRS had won all the Assembly seats falling in 18 districts. In seven districts, the TRS had won all but one seat. That means the TRS needs to cover ground essentially in eight districts or four-five Lok Sabha seats.

The elections had been held in a joint Andhra Pradesh then. Seat-wise, the tally stood at 11 of the 17 seats that now fall in Telangana for the TRS, two for the Congress, and one each for the YSR Congress Party, BJP, TDP and AIMIM.

Recently, the TRS successfully wooed one Congress, one TDP and one Independent MLA in Khammam district. The Khammam Lok Sabha seat was won by the YSRCP in 2014 while the TRS had won the neighbouring Mahabubabad, parts of which are under Khammam and Mahabubabad districts. Congress MLA Rega Kantha Rao from Pinapaka in the adjoining Bhadradi Kothagudem district has also joined the TRS, strengthening the party in the area.

In the December 2018 Assembly elections, the TRS had won both the Assembly seats in Mahabubabad district while it had won only one seat in Khammam district; the Congress had won two, TDP 1 and Independent 1. TDP candidate Sandra Veera Venkataiah and Independent L Ramulu have already joined the TRS and the entry of Congress MLA from Yellandu, which falls in the Mahabubabad Lok Sabha seat, not only increases the chances of retaining the Mahabubabad Lok Sabha seat but also bolsters the TRS chances of wresting the Khammam seat from the YSRCP.

Yellandu MLA Banoth Haripriya was the fourth Congress MLA to join the TRS recently. The TRS is also said to be wooing Congress MLA from Chevella Sabitha Indra Reddy, and her son Kartik Reddy, a popular Youth Congress leader. In 2014, the TRS's K Visweshwara Reddy had won from Chevella but resigned last November and joined the Congress. Of the seven Assembly segments under the Chevella Lok Sabha

TELANGANA  
17 seats  
Votes on April 11

2014 LOK SABHA POLLS	
TRS	11 seats
Congress	2 seats
YSRCP, BJP, TDP, MIM	1 each

Vote share of undivided Andhra, so not applicable for Telangana

## FACE-OFF

At a shop in Lalbaug, Mumbai. As campaigning picks up, shops are stocking up on election material. Prashant Nadkar

### SEAT WATCH PANCHMAHALS

# As Cong gains ground, Godhra says not 2002, on its mind are jobs

ASHWARYA MOHANTY  
GODHRA, MARCH 17

BOTH THE Hindu and Muslim localities of Signal Falia, near the Godhra railway station, from where most of the accused in the Sabarmati train burning case of 2002 were picked up, say they want the same thing from this election: a candidate who will deliver on promises. Neither is sure that will happen.

In his late 50s, Hanifbhai, a driver by profession, who is afraid to share his last name, says, "We are common, poor people. We need a basic job which will help us earn a square meal and raise our family. It has been seven days since my truck is parked here... After the GST, a lot of inter-state transactions have stopped... I will vote for sure, but I don't know for which party. I will see the candidate. Everybody rises to power, but nobody works."

Over at the Hindu neighbourhood, Jyotika Rana (52), who runs a small soda shop in the Lalbaug bus station area, however, is not sure if she will vote. "What is the point? Everybody comes, makes tall promises, then forgets."

Godhra falls under the Panchmahals Lok Sabha seat, which has around 1.94 lakh minority voters, around 12 per cent of the total. In Godhra Assembly constituency itself, one-third of the voters are Muslims.

Immediately after the 2002 riots, Godhra had elected a BJP candidate, Hareshkumar Bhatt. But the Congress had wrested the seat five years later, and continued to win it till 2017, when a leader who had left the party to join the BJP scraped through.

The Lok Sabha seat, on the other hand, called Godhra earlier, has stayed with the BJP since the riots. The party won it in 2004, 2009 and 2014. Its sitting MP from the seat, Prabhatsinh Chauhan, however, has lately turned a rebel.

The Congress also smells a chance as in the 2017 Assembly polls, of the seven seats under the Panchmahals constituency, the Congress and BJP had won three each, while the remaining seat had gone to an Independent.

At the municipality level too, politics has been churning. In 2002, Independent Mohammad Husain Kalota had headed the



Signal Falia, near the Godhra railway station, from where most of the Sabarmati train burning accused were picked up. Bhupendra Rana

Godhra body. He was arrested as a prime accused in the Sabarmati burning, along with three other Muslim councillors. Kalota died last year, spending a good part of his later years in prison before he was acquitted.

In the 44-member civic body now, there are 18 councillors of the BJP, 25 Independents and one Congress member. Twenty of the Independents and the lone Congress member are Muslim. However, the BJP holds the presidency, having secured the support of seven Independent councillors. This had sparked off protests from the Muslim community, which saw a lost chance of holding the post after 16 years.

This feeling of exclusion is hard to miss in Signal Falia, where more than a decade after the Sabarmati incident and the riots that followed, Muslims are open to talking, but do so mostly without giving their last names, like Hanifbhai.

Stopping his vehicle to listen to a conversation at a tea stall, a contractual labourer who refuses to give his name altogether says, "I want my daughter and son to study well and give them all I want. For that we need jobs and proper jobs. We don't indulge much in these political discussions, but if someone comes

and asks, I will tell them we want jobs so that we can lead our lives peacefully."

About the present MP, he adds, "I do not have any complaints, but I don't know for whom I will vote."

Abdul Gaffar, 83, a staunch Congress supporter, says the party doesn't have to even come seeking votes here. "The minority community is like a fixed deposit for the Congress. We will unhesitatingly vote for the Congress."

But Yakub Sujela, 66, says it's time the community got out of this mindset. "A lot of us are BJP supporters too. At the end of the day, it is work that speaks. The current MP has helped ensure more trains stop at Godhra, while the only underground bridge close to the railway station has been rebuilt." Sujela used to work as a loco pilot with the Railways.

In other areas of the Panchmahals seat too, many people vouch for the Modi government. Nimrat Varia of Chilala village in Vejalpur says, "The BJP will come to power and win from Panchmahals. No other party stands a chance."

Narwar Solanki from Desara village in Kalol asserts, "Under the present government our village got houses under the Awas Yojna, toilets, RCC roads. Why wouldn't we vote for them again?"

But the Congress, boosted by its performance in the 2017 Assembly elections, insists it has a fighting chance. "In 2014, the BJP had won the seat by more than one lakh votes, but the difference of votes in the seven Vidhan Sabha constituencies combined had dropped to almost 50 per cent in 2017. We are trying to capitalise on the anti-incumbency against the sitting MP," says the AICC secretary-in-charge for Central Gujarat, Biswaranjan Mohanty.

The Congress's seat-sharing deal with the NCP is likely to decide who fights against the BJP here. Now in the NCP, veteran Shankersinh Vaghela, who has represented Panchmahals earlier, recently announced it was one of the seats he could contest from.

The sitting MLA from Godhra, CK Raulji, is also considered close to Vaghela. Having won from here on a Congress ticket in 2007 and 2012, he had switched to the BJP ahead of the August 2017 Rajya Sabha elections and won from Godhra in 2017 by just 258 votes.

Rupesh Panchal, who owns a *paan* stall, contends that Vaghela has a good chance of winning from Panchmahals. "The public needs a new face now."

As for change of agenda on the ground, so far, to the misery of both Jyotika and Hanifbhai, there have been few signs of that. On February 12, attending a party meeting 10 km from Godhra station, BJP president Amit Shah called for making the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The town also took note of a Mumbai-based filmmaker setting a train coach on fire on March 3, 80 km from Godhra, as part of shooting for a film on PM Modi, that would feature the burning of the Sabarmati Express.

Says Jyotika, "The riots are used as a tool to radicalise people and garner votes. There was no aftermath in Godhra after the train was burnt, but we have become infamous because politicians have used Godhra. Everybody has moved on and so should they. We have genuine issues, like roads, infrastructure, lack of a surgeon at the civil hospital here, jobs."

As for justice, who has time for that, says Hanifbhai. "My 16-year-old son and three brothers were picked up in the *dabba kaand* (Sabarmati train burning). They were innocent... but I don't have the money, power or will anymore (to fight)." All four remain in jail.

## PARTY KARYAKARTA HENARANI SINGH, 47, BJD

# 'Women dedicated... With quota, we'll have Ram Rajya'

SAMPAD PATNAIK  
JAGATSINGHPUR, MARCH 17

"RAM RAJYA will begin in Odisha," says Henarani Singh, a BJD worker in Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district. "I have first hand seen the outcome of electing a woman politician. With seven women MPs, the BJD's focus on women's empowerment and dedicated leadership will get a major boost from 2019."

Henarani is talking about Odisha Chief Minister and BJD supreme Naveen Patnaik's promise to allocate a third of the tickets for the state's 21 Lok Sabha seats to women. Currently the BJD has three women MPs — Sakuntala Laguri (Keonjhar), Pratyusha Rajeshwari Singh (Kandhamal) and Rita Tarai (Jajpur).

Henarani, 47, is the BJD secretary of Tarapur gram panchayat, around 70 km from Bhubaneswar. She grudgingly admits that the three MPs have neither been given any important role in the party nor brought any significant changes in their constituencies.

"Yes, I know," she replies testily as her younger brother Nirranjan points out that "(Narendra) Modi has women ministers

handling defence and external affairs, while 20 years of Naveen rule have not seen a top woman minister".

Nirranjan goes on, "After Pulwama, people in Odisha may vote for the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls even while they support Naveen in the Assembly." Henarani tells him to "keep quiet". "It is my interview."

Retaking control of the conversation, Henarani gives the example of a woman BJD leader. "Our local MLA, Dr Rajashree Mallick (Tirtol seat), is an inspiration. When she broke her legs, she used to still attend meetings to monitor how schemes were being run... Women make more dedicated politicians."

Henarani adds that she herself supervises the running of around 60-80 women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in Raghunathpur block. She also "advises" local SHGs on procurement of loans and timely repayment.

"I am a very busy person," she says, adding that with elections round the corner, she also mobilises local women to attend BJD rallies. "I do not mobilise men", Henarani confesses. "There are male BJD workers (for that). Also, Odisha is still patriarchal." Giving her own example, Henarani says,



Henarani with brother Nirranjan

"When I got married around 30 years ago, women had no say in Odisha. My husband, who had then just started an acting and music career in local theatre productions, used to earn almost nothing, but he was the authority in our house... The BJD's pro-women schemes, like Mission Shakti and MAMATA, gave me an excuse to step out. I convinced my husband that I would only avail government benefits."

The Mission Shakti scheme has been supporting around six lakh SHGs in the state. MAMATA is the state's conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women.

"I began participating in a local SHG. Today, I lead so many of them that you can ask directions to my house as far as 5 km away. Because of the BJD, I am known and respected today," Henarani says, throwing a triumphant look at Nirranjan, who watches her with amusement.

Henarani says that the BJD government's decision to reserve 50 per cent seats for women in panchayati raj institutions also went a long way towards getting women respect from families. "Now our husbands know we are worth more than cooks and cleaners."

However, she herself is not keen for a ticket now, she says, preferring to wait till son Biswanjan, 21, and Gayatri, 29, get jobs and marry. "As a party worker, I am still master of my own time. Once you get elected, voters become masters," she says.

As Henarani is talking, someone comes to deliver a gas cylinder, and she pauses the conversation to guide him to the kitchen in her three-room house. Henarani alleges local women have to pay Rs 600 bribe to local officials to avail benefits of Ujjwala, a Central scheme. "The BJP is a cheater party. They promised one thing and delivered another... If I have to pay a bribe to get a subsidy, then how do I gain?"

Her thoughts turn to Congress president Rahul Gandhi's recent Odisha rally, where he promised free education for girls, monetary assistance during marriage, higher pension for widows and a financial corporation to assist women entrepreneurs.

"Rahul gave a decent proposal," Henarani assesses. "We women also know that unlike the BJP, the Congress kept its promise on farm loan waivers in three states (Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan)."

### MPs WHO MOVED PRIVATE MEMBER BILLS

TOP 10 (2014)

Nishikant Dubey - Godda, Jharkhand, (BJP)	48
Kirit Premjibhai Solanki - Ahmedabad West, Gujarat, (BJP)	37
Gopal Chinayya Shetty - Mumbai-North, Maharashtra, (BJP)	32
Om Prakash Yadav - Siwan, Bihar, (BJP)	28
Pushpendra Singh Chandel - Hamirpur, UP, (BJP)	26
Udit Raj - North West Delhi, Delhi, (BJP)	25
Rajesh Shankarrao Satav - Hingoli, Maharashtra, (Congress)	23
Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank - Haridwar, Uttarakhand, (BJP)	23
Rajesh Ranjan @ Pappu Yadav - Madhepura, Bihar, (RJD)	22
Supriya Sule - Baramati, Maharashtra, (NCP)	22

Source: PRS

NEXT  
#37 Nana Patole, the 'giant challenger'

EXPLAINED