



THE TURNOUT



Infosys co-founder Narayana Murthy and his wife Sudha after casting votes, in Bengaluru on Thursday. PTI

11 STATES 95 SEATS

State (seats in Phase-2)	Poll %
Tamil Nadu* (38)	70.9%
Karnataka (14/28)	67.6%
Maharashtra (10/48)	63%
Uttar Pradesh (8/80)	62.3%
Bihar (5/40)	62.5%
Odisha** (5/21)	64%
West Bengal (3/42)	76%
Chhattisgarh (3/11)	71%
Jammu & Kashmir (2/6)	42.4%
Assam (5/14)	73.3%
Manipur (1/2)	80.5%
Puducherry (1)	82.1%

*Polling was also held for bypolls to 18 Assembly segments in the state
**Polling was also held for 35 Assembly seats in Odisha, where the state polls are being held alongside the general election

POLL WATCH



MKM chief Kamal Haasan with daughter Shruti in Chennai. PTI

TAMIL NADU

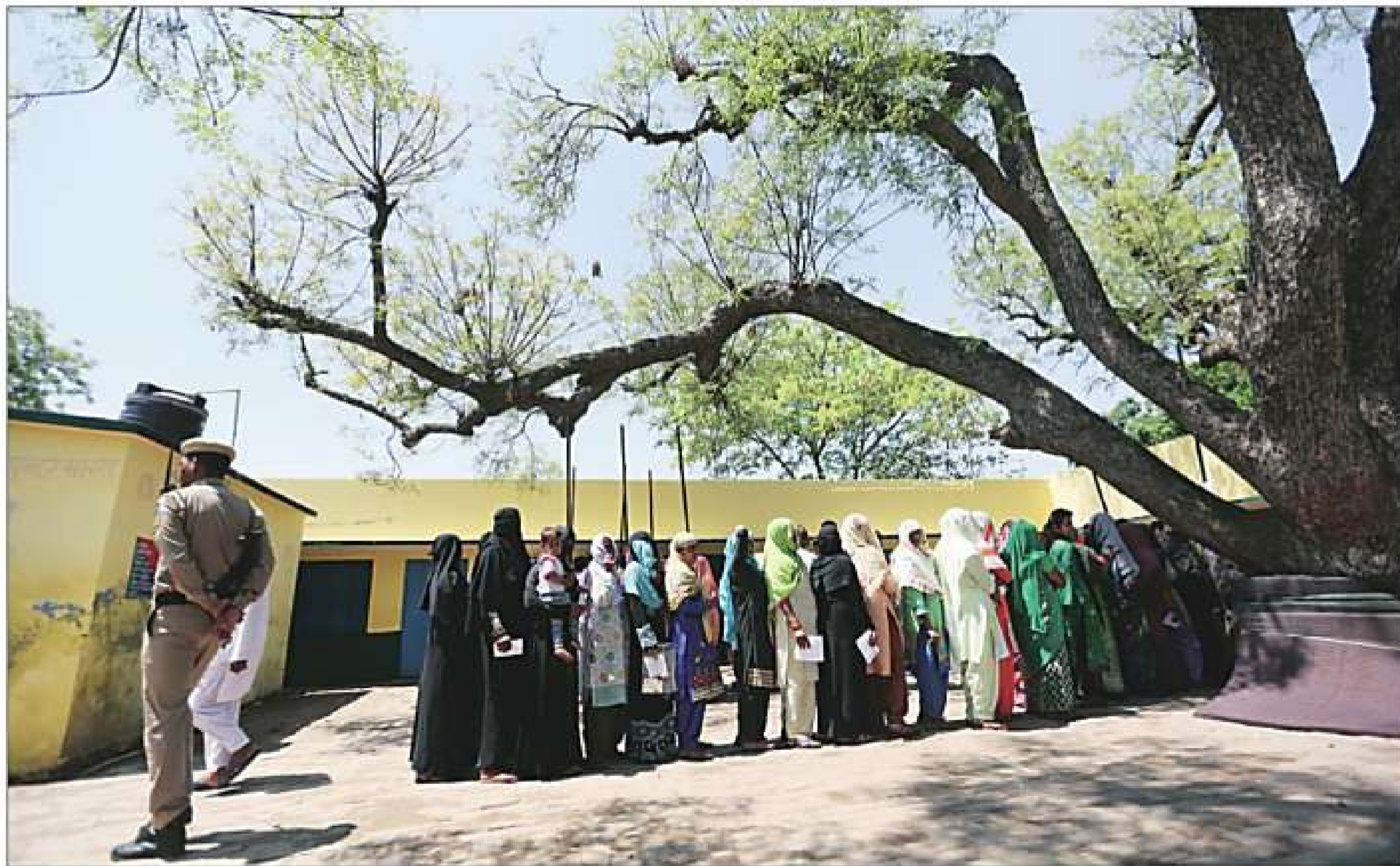
Largely peaceful polling was reported across Tamil Nadu and Puducherry in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections on Thursday. Thousands were seen trying to travel across cities to cast their votes. A rough estimate from a senior state transport official said that more than 1 lakh people travelled from Chennai to various towns and villages in central, southern and western Tamil Nadu to exercise their franchise. Interestingly, 18 Assembly seats that saw by-polls had a higher polling percentage, 71.62%, than the 38 Lok Sabha seats that registered 70.9% voter turnout in 2014 Lok Sabha polls was 73.67%, while in Assembly polls it was 74.26%.

MANIPUR

Voting was stopped at two polling stations after EVMs were damaged in violence which broke out over alleged proxy voting and dispute among polling agents in Imphal East district. "To disperse the mob, which was getting violent, CRPF personnel had to open blank fire. The poll process was stopped immediately," CEO Manipur PK Singh said. An FIR was lodged. Singh added that EVM machines of a polling station under Keirao Assembly constituency were damaged by polling agents and voting was stopped. ENS

PHASE-III VOTE ON APRIL 23

15 STATES 116 SEATS



Voters at a polling booth in Nayabans village of Bulandshahr district on Thursday. Gajendra Yadav

In Bulandshahr on voting day: As old wounds remain, new hopes float

SOMYA LAKHANI
BULANDSHAHR, APRIL 18

THE NIGHT before Bulandshahr went to polls, Habibur Rehman (60) and his family of eight drove from Ghaziabad's Dasna to Nayabas village — 30 km from Bulandshahr — and unlocked the house they had fled from four months ago when violence broke out over cow carcasses found in a field. The family is here for a day — to vote.

"We are here just to cast our vote, we now live in Dasna. In December, when the cow carcasses were found in a field in our village and SHO Subodh Kumar Singh was killed, there was widespread fear. Here we have our own house, but in Dasna we live on rent," said Rehman, who queued up early on Thursday to vote.

Likewise, carpenter Jabbar Ali (59), his wife and their four children reached Nayabas from Ghaziabad's Masuri at 8 am on Thursday, four months after fleeing home. "We vote for *aman-chain* (peace and harmony)," he said.

On December 3, Singh, who was the SHO of Siyana police station, died at the hands of a mob angry over alleged cow slaughter. At Nayabas — home of the main accused, Bajrang Dal district convener Yogesh Raj —

conversations on polling day revolved around the "haadsa" (tragedy), inside living rooms, outside a *parchun ki dukaan* (general store), and atop bullock carts.

In Bulandshahr, the Lok Sabha candidates are current BJP MP Bhola Singh for the BJP, Yogesh Verma for the Mahagathbandhan, and Banshi Lal Pahadia for the Congress.

At Chingravathi, next to the police chowki that was set on fire by the mob on December 3, villagers stressed on "forgetting the past and focusing on the future". The primary school across the chowki was turned into a polling booth, guarded by more than eight armed police officers. While college student Jaideep Kumar (19), a first-time voter, focused on "vishva sammaan" (global honour) and Sushila Devi (38) hoped for "more progress" in her village, at Chingravathi it was about "toilet, LPG and electricity".

"For 37 years, I would go to the farmland to relieve myself, but since a toilet was built inside our house under a government scheme, life has changed. The village needs more such miracles," Sushila Devi said. Dayawati (55) spoke about a gas stove and LPG cylinder replacing the *chulha* at home. "We have toilets and LPG, now we need jobs for our sons," she said.

At the booth showed up Brajesh Batti (45), wife of labourer Ramesh Jogi (50), who is one

of the accused in the killing of the SHO. "I didn't want to vote, no party has stood by us, but then someone said that if I do vote, my husband will be released from the jail," she said.

Farmer Satpal Singh (85), retired Air Force man Yogender Singh (66) and sugar mill worker Vipin Kumar (25) cited "vikas" (development), "military strength" and "pushing out invaders" as their expectations. Simultaneously, a small rebellion brewed among a group of veiled women "against the men at home who dictate votes".

At Nayabas village, conversations around December 3 were set aside as 18-year-old Hemant Kumar, a first-time voter, reached the polling booth with his great-grandmother Sukhdai Devi, who said she was 102 years old. "I want employment and surgical strike on enemy nations from the next government," said Kumar, as Devi nodded in agreement.

Safuddin (38) stood in a crisp kurta, with a polling agent pass clipped on it. On December 5, the cloth merchant was arrested by police on charges of cow slaughter, but given a clean chit after two weeks. "It was a tough time but I got a clean chit. Moving on, I hope people vote for an honest government that works to maintain the sanctity of the judiciary, the CBL... one that gives out figures we can trust," he said.

BJP candidate enters poll booth, EC issues notice

SOMYA LAKHANI
BULANDSHAHR, APRIL 18

THE UTTAR Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer has issued a showcause notice to BJP's Bulandshahr candidate Bhola Singh after two videos, circulated on Thursday morning, showed him entering a polling booth to seek blessings of voters.

In one video, a CRPF personnel is seen trying to stop Singh from entering the booth and is handed over the BJP candidate's phone with Bulandshahr District Magistrate (DM) Anuj Kumar Jha on the line. In another video, Singh is seen inside a polling booth in a stole with the party symbol on it, seeking the "aashirwaad" of voters.



Bhola Singh at the booth

UP CEO L Venkateshwarlu told *The Indian Express* that "Singh has been issued a showcause for the above reasons". "We have issued a notice to him and have asked the DM to submit a report. Once we get the report, we will forward it to the Election Commission Office in Delhi," he said at a press conference in Lucknow.

The CRPF personnel who attempted to stop Singh from entering the polling booth at JP Janta Inter College told *The Indian Express*. "This happened at 8 am and I told Singh that I can't let him enter as per instructions given to us during training, but he insisted and made me talk to the DM."

The District Magistrate said, "A candidate is allowed to enter the polling booth but since there was a violation, we issued a notice to him and restricted his movement across polling booths till 4 pm. I will soon submit a report on the matter to the UP CEO."

Singh, who is also the Bulandshahr sitting MP, is contesting the Lok Sabha elections against Mahagathbandhan candidate Yogesh Verma, and Congress's Banshi Lal Pahadia. Singh did not comment on the matter despite repeated attempts by *The Indian Express*.

WEST BENGAL

Stray incidents of violence, oppn parties complain to EC

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
& SWEETY KUMARI
DARJEELING, KOLKATA, APRIL 18

RAIGANJ, JALPAIGURI and Darjeeling Lok Sabha seats recorded turnouts of 73.31 per cent, 82.76 per cent and 72.14 per cent, respectively, in the second phase of polling on Thursday — an average of 76.07 per cent.

Sporadic incidents of violence, including assault on journalists, damage to vehicles and use of crude bombs, were reported.

Since the morning, there were reports of EVM malfunction at various places that delayed the polling. Congress candidate from Raiganj, Deepa Dasmunshi, and TMC candidate, Kanhaiya Lal Agarwal, had to wait due to the EVM snag, sources said.

"Voting was largely peaceful, but for a few stray incidents. Total poll percentage recorded till 5pm was 76.07 per cent," said Chief Electoral Officer Aariz Aftab.

Special Police Observer Vivek Dube said, "People could vote with the help of security forces... More or less voting was peaceful. Small incidents will always occur but overall it was peaceful."

According to ADG, Law and Order, Siddhi Nath Gupta, eight FIRs were lodged on Thursday and 33 people arrested. "Three people were arrested in specific cases while 30 were held as preventive measure," said Gupta.

At Kataphulbari polling booth in Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency, a journalist and camerapersons of a news channel were beaten up by miscreants. BJP workers have alleged that the booth was "captured" by TMC men. "We have received a complaint against unknown people. We are probing," said ADG, Law and Order.

At booth number 180 at Chopra in Darjeeling constituency, residents of Middapara and Dighi Colony blocked NH-31, alleging that they were not allowed to vote. A huge police contingent arrived and resorted to lathicharge to lift the blockade. Miscreants attacked the police with bricks and crude bombs. Police responded with tear gas shells and fired three rounds in the air to disperse the mob.

When CPM candidate and sitting MP in Raiganj Md Salim visited the booth in Patigara High School in Islampur, miscreants damaged his car and beat up his supporters.

"State police were mute spectators and central forces were absent. TMC is rigging the polls. My car was vandalised and our supporters beaten up," said Salim.

The Congress, the CPM and the BJP have lodged complaints with the EC.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

Turnout in Srinagar dips, Udhampur clocks 70% polling

BASHAARAT MASOOD,
NAVEEDIQBAL & ARUN SHARMA
BUDGAM, SRINAGAR, GANDERBAL, JAMMU,
APRIL 18

AFTER A moderate turnout in north Kashmir's Baramulla last week, the turnout in Srinagar parliamentary seat dived on Thursday. The voting percentage was 14.8, up from 7.14 in the 2017 bypolls but much lower than the 26 per cent recorded in 2014 Lok Sabha elections.

Polling was conducted amid unprecedented security. Barring some incidents in Budgam district, the polls were peaceful.

The Srinagar constituency, which comprises Srinagar, Budgam and Ganderbal districts, is witnessing a contest between NC stalwart Farooq Abdullah and two political greenhorns, PDP's Aga Mohsin and Peoples Conference's Irfan Ansari, both Shia leaders.

The surprising factor was the twin districts of Budgam and Ganderbal, which have traditionally witnessed higher turnout.

Budgam itself was a story of contrasts. While voters turned up in large numbers in several parts of the district, it was near-total boycott in other parts. The district polled 21.6 per cent votes as against 39 per cent in 2014.

At nearby Nasrullahpora, hundreds of policemen, paramilitary personnel and soldiers stood guard but voters stayed away from polling stations.

Memories of 2017 bypolls were palpable in the district, and villages that had seen violence mostly refrained from voting. Villages like Beerwah, Chewdora and Rathuna witnessed stone-throwing.

Ganderbal district — comprising the Assembly segments of Kangan and Ganderbal — also saw a sharp decline in turnout. It was 17.5 per cent, down by 28 per cent from 2014.

Jammu's Udhampur constituency recorded a turnout of 70 per cent, even as Wednesday's rain disrupted vehicular traffic along the Jammu-Srinagar national highway and nearly 2,000 people from hilly areas of Reasi district failed to reach polling stations for lack of public transport. The polling was slow in the morning and picked up later.

SEEN & HEARD MAFUJA KHATUN

BJP's Muslim pick gears up to take on Pranab son, outsider tag

ABANTIKA GHOSH
JANGIPUR (WEST BENGAL), APRIL 18

AN "OUTSIDER" who faces a heavyweight opponent, the BJP's Jangipur candidate Mafuja Khatun is not daunted by the odds against her.

Much of Mafuja's long political career has been spent in South Dinajpur district as a CPM leader. She joined the BJP in 2017 and is one of the two Muslim candidates the party has fielded in West Bengal this time — the other is former TMC minister Humayun Kabir who is now with the BJP.

Armed with a rustic sense of humour and a confidence that comes with an experience of over 25 years in politics, Mafuja had her supporters in splits when she responded to the "outsider" tag on the day she filed nomination papers. "I was born in Gangarampur, I am fighting from Jangipur. The 'pur' is the same in both, just replace the Gangaram with a Jangi," she says.

Mafuja, who has been an MLA twice, says she has no qualms about seeking Muslim votes on behalf of the BJP. "When I was with the CPM, I had an impression that the BJP is anti-minority. Ever since I joined the BJP in 2017, I have not faced any discrimination. I have attended so many meetings, but never ever have I heard anything anti-Muslim."

She is up against sitting Congress MP and former President Pranab Mukherjee's son Abhijit Mukherjee, Khalilur Rahman of the TMC and Zulfikar Ali of the Left Front.

"About 50 per cent of my voters are beedi workers, yet the PF office was shifted from here. Go and see Raghunathganj Municipal Hospital. It is a place where people fall ill, don't get cured. There has been no development. The MP sought votes in his father's name and he is from a privileged background. If he wanted, what could he not have done? But he chose to do nothing. I know I will win and change everything here," she tells *The Indian Express* at the



Mafuja on the campaign trail

Miyapur BJP office. Known to be a good speaker, Mafuja knows looks mean a lot in politics. That is why, as she sits relaxed with her long hair open, she will not allow herself to be photographed. "Head

covered, always," she smiles.

In the 'beedi' villages such as Jagtai, Mafujadi is well-known. "We saw Pranab babu once and his son once," says Namita Singha. Namita has four daughters and the family earns Rs 156 for every 1,000 beedis they roll.

Ask residents of Jagtai and the surrounding villages about demonetisation and the chorus is "We have no money so we did not suffer. Only the rich did."

Some like Sanjib Roy say beedi factory owners have ordered them to vote for the TMC. "But my party is BJP," he adds.

There is overwhelming support for the NRC and memories of a scuttled panchayat election. "I had filed nomination but was forced to withdraw after Trinamool goons came to my house with pistols," says Sudip Singha. Influx from Bangladesh is a problem and that is why NRC is a must, he says.

About 68 per cent of Jangipur's 16 lakh voters are Muslims. That is why West Bengal Chief

Minister Mamata Banerjee's repeated claims that the RSS is helping Congress candidates in Jangipur (Abhijit Mukherjee) and Baharampur (Adhir Chowdhury) has caused some discomfort in the BJP camp.

Mafuja says, "I have replied to her in my speeches and said it is an utter lie. But the question is whether she is doing this to get Muslims to vote for her or to get Hindus to vote for Abhijit."

That lingering doubt is something many BJP workers voice off the record. The large number of Muslim voters means that it is easy for the votes to get split between three Muslim candidates and if that happens, a consolidation of Hindu voters in Mukherjee's favour will ensure his victory.

District BJP chief Sujit Das is from an RSS background. He describes himself as the "principal general of Mafujadi". "Mamata's barbs that the RSS is helping Congress has only enthused us more to ensure Mafujadi's victory," he says.