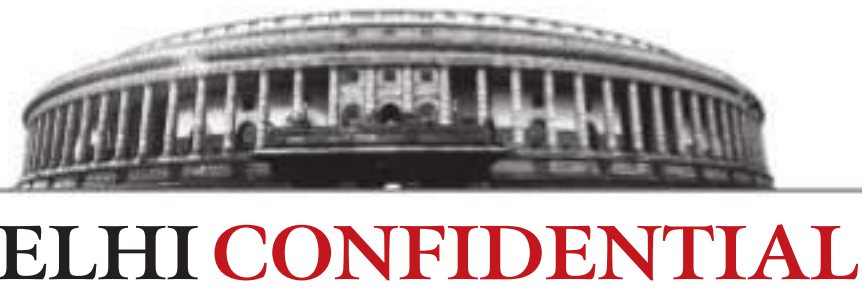


# 8 GOVT & POLITICS



## NOTES ON SONG

THE STATUS of the BJP's publicity song in West Bengal — *Ei Trinamool aar na* (Trinamool no more) — is a hot button issue in Asansol, where the singer, Babul Supriyo, is the sitting MP and the candidate again. The song, which the TMC maintains has been banned, keeps playing in Supriyo's road shows — the defence being that the ban is on its video, not the audio. There have been a few skirmishes over this, but Supriyo is in no mood to back down.

## IN SOLIDARITY

AS THE motive behind the terrorist attack in Sri Lanka is being said to be a retaliation to the Christchurch attack, New Zealand High Commissioner Joanna Kempfers on Wednesday displayed her solidarity by wearing a Sri Lankan handloom saree. "Every waking moment and even my dreams have been filled with Sri Lanka this week," she tweeted, as she decided to wear her heart on her sleeve.

## 110% NO PRESS MEET

THE BJP'S media department had a tough time on Wednesday after a rumour spread that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would address a press conference in Varanasi on April 26, the day the PM files his nomination for the Lok Sabha polls. The news spread like wildfire with an ostensible press release, claiming to be issued by BJP's Varanasi unit, started circulating on social media with Modi's programmes for nomination filing the same day. According to the schedule in the "press note", after filing his papers at 11.30, there was to be a press conference at 12.30 at Taj Ganges hotel in Varanasi. With news channels showing it as breaking news, BJP leaders started getting calls. "The news is 110 per cent fake," said one party spokesperson. While some party leaders blamed the local unit for issuing "misleading press notes", some others alleged it was a "fake press release" and "mischief" by the Congress.

# Kerala sees highest polling since 1989, Wayanad records 80%



SHAJU PHILIP  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,  
APRIL 24

WITH A three-cornered contest in Kerala this time, featuring Congress president Rahul Gandhi and both the Congress and BJP taking on the CPI(M)-led state government on the Sabarimala issue, seen as having led to the highest voter turnout in Lok Sabha elections in 30 years, leaders from all three fronts have their fingers crossed, even as each claimed to be the beneficiary of the record voting.

All 20 seats in the southern coastal state went to the polls on Tuesday, recording 77.68 per cent polling — up from 74.02 per cent in 2014, and 73.37 per cent in 2009.

In 1999, the state saw 70 per cent polling, while it was 79 per cent in 1989.

This year, eight constituencies have registered more than 80 per cent polling, and only six recorded polling below 75 per cent. While four seats saw less than 70 per cent voting in 2014, all 20 went past that mark this time.



Women wait in queue to cast their votes at a polling station in Kozhikode on Tuesday. PTI

Wayanad, where Rahul Gandhi is in the fray, has recorded 80.31 per cent voting — up from 73.29 per cent in 2014 — while Pathanamthitta, where the issue of the Pinarayi Vijayan government allowing entry of women of all ages to Sabarimala, following the Supreme Court's ruling, is expected to have played a key role, registered 74.19 per cent polling, against 66.02 per cent in 2014.

Congress Working Committee member and former Kerala chief minister AK Antony said that the voters were visibly

determined this time.

"In the Sabarimala issue, sentiments of even the Christian community were against the Chief Minister, who had shown undue enthusiasm in the temple issue (allowing entry of young women). Besides, the BJP government (at the Centre) has created a sense of unease among people in Kerala, who believe that anarchy will rule if the BJP returns to power."

BJP state president P S Sreedharan Pillai said the NDA has great expectations in the poll outcome.

# Mamata sends me kurtas, sweets, Modi tells Akshay

Bengali culture to welcome guests with sweets, gifts, but will not give 'them' votes, TMC chief says in apparent retort

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

AT A time the BJP is engaged in a bitter electoral fight with the ruling party in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that the TMC chief, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, sends him kurtas and sweets on more than one occasion each year.

"People will be surprised to know this — (and) it may even damage me in the elections — Mamata-didi sends me gifts. She selects at least one or two kurtas herself and sends them to me. She still sends me one or two kurtas every year," Modi told actor Akshay Kumar in an interaction broadcast on Wednesday.

Modi also said Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sends him new kinds of sweets occasionally. "Once Mamata-didi found out, she too started sending me sweets...once or twice a year," he said.

Addressing two rallies in West Bengal hours after the interview was telecast, Modi unleashed a scathing attack on Banerjee, calling her "sticker didi", for ostensibly putting up state government stickers welfare schemes of the Central government.

Apparently replying to Modi's remarks on gifts he gets from her, Banerjee said at a rally in Srerampore, Hooghly district, without naming the Prime Minister: "It is Bengal's culture to welcome guests with sweets and tea. We also greet them on special occasions. This is our tradition. We welcome guests with sweets and gifts, but they (BJP)



A video grab of the interaction between actor Akshay Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

will not get votes."

At another rally in Krishnanagar, she said, "We speak gently, have sweetness and we feel for others when we say something... We love and respect each other... The people of Bengal believe in peaceful coexistence — that's our culture."

Reacting to the interview, Congress communication department head Randeep Surjewala said, "Akshay Kumar is a great actor. An unsuccessful politician who has decimated India's economy...made life hell for India's farmers and the poor (is) now trying to become a better actor... It seems a failed politician who is about to be rejected on May 23 is looking for an alternative employment avenue in Bollywood."

In his conversation with Akshay, Modi said many leaders from other political parties are his "good friends". He recalled one such instance, when, as the Gujarat chief minister, he had gone to Parliament: "(Congress leader) Ghulam Nabi Azad and I

were engaged in a friendly chat. When we came out, the media started asking us how come we spoke so much and shared tea. They wondered how an RSS person like me is friends with Azad."

Mentioning that Azad gave a "good response", he said, "He told them, 'You may not know how strong a bond we politicians share — we are like a family.'"

Asked about retirement plans, Modi said extending his sleeping time would be one agenda. He said a lot of people around him have started worrying about his lack of sleep. "Even President Obama has asked me 'Why do you do it, Narendra Modi-jiji?' We (Obama and I) are good friends...He told me, 'you are a workaholic'. Whenever he saw me, he asked whether I had extended the time of sleep."

But, Modi said, his "body cycle" has become such that and he is instantly alert the moment he opens his eyes. "I open my eyes, and the next moment my feet are on the ground," he said.

"We hope the BJP will get the largest mandate in this election. (We) expect to win a couple of seats in Kerala," he said.

Asked about his opinion on the high turnout, a seemingly irritated Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan told the media "*maari nilkku angottu* (keep away)" and walked ahead.

Heavy polling was reported in areas dominated by minority communities. A sizable chunk of young voters below the age of 20 in Kerala — who will cast their votes for the first time — also belongs to the Muslim community. It is not clear, however, which of the two front among the CPI(M)-led LDF and Congress-led UDF benefited from this, or whether first-time voters in the state go for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal.

With the Sabarimala issue seen as having played a major factor in these elections, particularly in the constituencies in southern Kerala, the swing of hardline Hindu voters, aggrieved over the LDF's stand on the temple issue, will also be decisive. Both the Congress and the BJP expect that the ire of voters on Sabarimala issue will come to their kitty.

But in case this category of votes gets divided between the two parties, the CPI(M)-led LDF could be an unexpected beneficiary.

## After Modi taunt, Naveen claims BJD win in Odisha, invites him to swearing-in

SAMPAD PATNAIK  
BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 24

A DAY after Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that the BJD would lose in Odisha, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said his party has achieved a majority, and invited the PM to the oath-taking ceremony of the new government.

Odisha has so far voted for 15 Lok Sabha and 105 Assembly seats in three phases. Odisha will vote for six Lok Sabha and the remaining 42 Assembly seats on April 29.

BJD leaders have expressed confidence that their party has reached the majority mark of 74 out of 147 Assembly seats, and predict Naveen Patnaik will be CM for the fifth time.

"After the third phase of polling, Odiya people have blessed BJD in getting a majority. With humility, I invite Modi ji to attend the BJD government's oath taking ceremony," Patnaik said in a rally at Basta Assembly constituency.

A BJD MP said, "BJP has done media management in Odisha, without actually building a cadre... They had some momentum a month or two ago, but their poor candidate selection, especially for the Assembly, will cost them dearly in the elections."

On Wednesday, Modi, while addressing a rally in Kendrapara, had repeatedly stressed that the BJP is winning Odisha. He had said, "Naveen babu aap jaa rahe ho, aapka jana tay hai (Naveen babu you are going, it is decided)."

# Will throw you out if you disrespect A-G, SC judge tells lawyer who claims plot against CJ

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

WEDNESDAY'S HEARING in Supreme Court on claims by a lawyer that there was a plot to frame Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi on sexual harassment charges had some tense moments when the bench warned that the court will not hesitate to throw him out if he disrespects Attorney General K K Venugopal, and the counsel responded that he would walk out on his own.

"If you don't (respect the A-G), not even an iota of doubt, we will throw you out immediately. He is the senior-most member of the Bar," Justice RF Nariman told advocate Utsav Bains, who was summoned to provide material evidence in support of his claims.

Bains replied: "I respect the A-G. I was only responding to personal attacks. Since Justice Nariman has decided to throw me out, I will walk out myself. I am deeply hurt."

Justice Nariman later added: "He (A-G Venugopal) is the greatest gentleman in this court. We all learn from him."

It was left to Justice Arun Mishra to cool tempers as he advised Bains to be patient and explained that Justice Nariman had only meant that he should throw out his anger.

The exchange occurred after Justice Mishra told Venugopal that the court would like to hear him on Bains claiming privilege over some of his communications. "What we want to know is in case of such a conspiracy, can there be privilege," Justice Mishra asked.

Venugopal replied, "I really don't understand that a person says there is a conspiracy but only produces half the evidence."

As Bains countered this and said the A-G was making it personal, Justice Mishra intervened and told the lawyer, "You must respect him. You know, even I have learned from him."

Bains said he respects the



Utsav Bains

A-G but the latter had resorted to "personal attacks" ever since the hearing began. He was referring to proceedings earlier in the day after he submitted what he claimed was "material evidence" to support his claims in a sealed cover to the bench.

Venugopal then pointed to certain inconsistencies in what Bains had stated in a Facebook post and what he was saying now.

Apparently upset, Bains said he was "disappointed the way the Bar is divided" on the issue, and that he was not taking the risk of appearing in the matter for himself, but for the entire judiciary. "Ridiculous... I feel disgusted," he remarked, inviting protests from Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who said, "He is a senior. You can't use such words for him."

As the court was about to break for lunch, Mehta said Bains should apologise to Venugopal, who laughed it off and said, "No, no. He is a young man."

At this, Justice Mishra said, "I apologise on his behalf." The post-lunch session saw an intervention by advocate Indira Jaising, who tried to refer to the probe by the apex court's in-house panel. But the court told her that it is only dealing with allegations in Bains's affidavit, and is in no way concerned with the inquiry.

Jaising also said Bains should give a declaration that he is not connected to anyone involved in the controversy.

Bains replied that there were some rumours going on about him and agreed to give a declaration as sought by Jaising.

# Court to hear cheating case against SC ex-staffer on May 23

PRITAM PAL SINGH &  
ANAND MOHAN J  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 24

A DELHI court on Wednesday summoned a man who has accused a former Supreme Court employee of cheating him of Rs 50,000 on the pretext of getting him a job.

On May 23, the court will hear the police's plea to cancel her bail in the cheating and criminal intimidation case.

The former apex court employee has accused Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi of sexual harassment.

On Wednesday, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) Manish Khurana sought Jhajjar resident Naveen Kumar's presence after Delhi Police's Crime Branch sought cancellation of bail granted to the woman on March 12. According to the police, Kumar has claimed that he was threatened by the accused and her husband.

As per law, an investigating agency moving any application, or seeking court order against any of the parties involved, has to inform both the complainant and the accused.

Appearing for the accused, advocate VK Ohri told the court that while they have received police's application, the complainant has not been served a notice.

The court noted that the police moved an application for cancellation of her bail on the basis of Kumar's statement to DCP, Crime Branch. "The complainant was ordered to be summoned. However, he was not served (notice). In the interest of justice, let him be served (a) notice to appear in court." CMM Khurana said and fixed the matter for further hearing on May 23.

During the hearing, Ohri also pleaded with the court to direct the police to release the cell-phone and the CPU of her computer that the police have seized.

Opposing this, Investigating Officer Mukesh contended the seized articles need to be examined for investigation.

The judge noted, "The articles are required for investigation, so they can't be ordered to be released at this stage. Hence the application moved on behalf of accused... is dismissed."

At this, Ohri sought liberty to withdraw the application and file it afresh at an appropriate stage. The court replied the application "stands dismissed as withdrawn".

An FIR for the alleged offences of cheating, criminal intimidation and criminal conspiracy was lodged against the woman on March 3, on the basis of a complaint by Kumar at Tilak Marg Police Station in Central Delhi.

The accused was arrested on March 10, and sent to judicial custody by a city court. She was granted bail on March 12.

After Delhi Police's Crime Branch took over the probe on March 14, the complainant addressed an application to the DCP, alleging that the accused, along with her associates, had threatened him.

The woman, who in a sworn affidavit has alleged that the CJ had allegedly sexually harassed her on two occasions, and that subsequently she and her family were allegedly victimised, has claimed that the case of cheating against her is "false and frivolous".

# Himachal BJP chief: Will chop off hand of those who raise finger at BJP leaders

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
SHIMLA, APRIL 24

HIMACHAL PRADESH BJP chief Satpal Singh Satti, who was temporarily barred from campaigning by the Election Commission last week, courted fresh controversy on Wednesday, stating he would chop off the hand of anyone who raises a finger at BJP leaders.

In a veiled attack on Congress chief Rahul Gandhi at a rally in Mandi, Satti said, "Wo chowkidar ko is desh ka beimaan bolte hain... Jo hamare baap ko chor bolega usko bhi ham log waese hi bolenge... Saamne neta log baithe hain, agar koi unki oar ungli uthaega, ham log uski baajoo kaat karke uske haath mein pakda denge (They call the watchman of the country a thief. Whoever calls our father a thief will hear equally derogatory replies... BJP leaders are sitting here, if anyone raises a finger at them, we will chop off their hands)."

Satti also spoke against senior Congress leader and former PM Manmohan Singh, calling him a "sher (lion)", and referring to former UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi as "Maa (Goddess)".

He said Singh could not do much because "jis samay sher ke upar maa baithi hoti hai toh sher

kuch nahi kar sakta (when the Goddess is riding the lion, the lion cannot do anything)".

The Congress has said it will complain about Satti's remarks to the EC.

"His language and statements against Congress are unacceptable. He should be barred from campaigning in the entire remaining campaigning season," Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee president Kuldeep Singh Rathore said.

Later, Satti told *The Indian Express* that he did not remember having made any comment about chopping hands. On being asked whether he would apologise for the comments, he said, "We'll see later."

Last week, the EC had taken action against Satti for his derogatory remarks against Rahul on April 13.

On April 14, at an election rally at Bhanjal in Una district, Satti made an objectional statement about Gandhi, for which the District Election Officer issued him with a warning on Monday.

## SEAT WATCH MAYURBHANJ

# Small demands, big question: Odisha's tribal belt looks for answers

ALAKA SAHANI  
MAYURBHANJ, APRIL 24

AT KANTHIKANA, a tribal village on the fringes of Simlipal forest in Odisha, ask any woman who she would vote for and she would reply, "Tell us who do you want us to vote for and we will."

About 5 km away, at Kumdabadi village, Dhananjay Dehuri, who claims to be 100 years old, too declines to spell out his choice, if any. His neighbour, octogenarian Jagabandu Dohari echoes the same.

The villagers of Kumdabadi belong to Khadia tribe and collect wood, fruits, berries, herbs, honey and other items from the nearby forest to sell in the local

market. More than a decade ago, they were rehabilitated by the government in this village. However, Kanthikana, home to Santhal and Ho families, is an old tribal village of Mayurbhanj. Both these villages are in Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha constituency that goes to polls on April 29.

The BJD has fielded Debasis Marandi, a doctor-turned-politician and the BJP's candidate is Bishweshwar Tudu. Shibu Soren's daughter Anjani Soren, contesting on a Jharkhand Mukti Morcha ticket, is another prominent candidate.

While posters put up across the village point to the electoral battle, the villagers are not sure about the polling date or their



In the last general elections in Kanthikana, women voters outnumbered men. Alaka Sahani

polling booths. "We don't have any information yet. Maybe like the previous time, it will take place at the school in Ektaali vil-

lage," says Jeema Honnaga of Kanthikana.

Women voters outnumbered men in this constituency

during the last general elections.

At Kanthikana, several women sit huddled inside a community hall at the heart of the village.

Almost all of them want better connectivity and road to the nearby town, Jashipur. Sukhmati Tudu says, "We want a weekly *haat* (market) closer to our village. Now, we have to walk a couple of kilometres to get a shared auto ride to take us to Jashipur." The second significant demand is to have one more tubewell in the village. The village of nearly 80 families is currently dependent on one tubewell.

Since the season of plucking mahul flowers has just got over,

most villagers are still drying it and selling it to local traders.

Soon they would get busy with paddy cultivation, their main source of livelihood.

"We want high-yielding rice seeds. We also want power weeder and tiller," says Nitima Honnaga.

"We have nothing against anyone. We will vote for the one who will solve our problems," she adds.

However, Ginga Marandi, 72, has made her decision. "I will vote for Naveen Babu," she says. When asked about her reasons, she says, "He gave us blankets and umbrella. He has also increased old-age pension to Rs 500."

VOTING ON  
APRIL 29