

7 DECISION 2019



THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER NDA IN BIHAR

The one note in JD(U) campaign this election: Nitish playing second fiddle

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA/GAYA/PURNIA, APRIL 25

IN ALMOST all the rallies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bihar, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's speeches follow a fixed pattern — he lavishes praise on the PM for "giving" schemes worth about Rs 50,000 crore to the state, and talks about Modi's "strong leadership". He then goes on to talk about the development his government has brought, how he has "electrified all Bihar villages", leaving "no need for the lantern (also the RJD's poll symbol)". Modi returns the favour by praising Nitish, and pitching development and national security.

The message from the dais is obvious: the NDA campaign in Bihar this time is about Modi, with the Bihar CM a second fiddle.

This is a stark change from the 2009 election, which the JD(U) had also fought in alliance with the BJP. At the time, Nitish had led the NDA's charge in Bihar, shared the dais just once with NDA PM contender L K Advani, and, seeking the secular space and a Central profile himself, made a public display of aversion towards then Gujarat CM Narendra Modi.

The JD(U) had contested 25 seats at the time and won 20, while the BJP had won 12. Altogether, the NDA had won 32 seats.

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since — starting with the fact that in 2014, after the NDA split, the JD(U), fighting alone, had won only two of 40 seats. In 2015 Assembly polls, the JD(U), fighting as a gathbandhan with the Congress and RJD, had finished behind Lalu Prasad's party. Two years later, Nitish had made a humble return to the NDA to form a government in the state after ditching the RJD.

This new political equation is now evident across Bihar — both on the stage, and off it.

Nitish has shared platform with PM Modi all five times so far. When he is without the star presence, the JD(U) chief's over 50 public meetings have generated hardly a buzz.



PM Modi and Bihar CM Nitish Kumar at a rally in Darbhanga, Thursday. PTI

At Belaganj, Gaya, before the first phase of polls on April 11, barely 200 people waited to hear Nitish at a rally with LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan. The numbers swelled to about 3,000 after he landed — far from a respectable number for a sitting CM. "Yeh election Nitishji ka thode hi hai. Yeh Modiji ka hai. Nitishji to bas side character hain (This is not a Nitish Kumar election; it is Modi's. Nitish is just a supporting character)," said Munna Kumar, a Belaganj resident.

The subtext in even the JD(U) chief's talk about his government's development efforts is Central schemes such as Ujjawala and Ayushman Bharat. And the voters are not impressed. "He has been around for over 13 years. Let us talk beyond infrastructure and electricity now," said Shanker Singh at the CM's public meeting in Purnia on April 11.

The JD(U) has been making much of the fact that it ensured that it was allocated the same number of seats as the BJP in Bihar — 17 each — underlining its status as an "equal partner". The remaining seats are being fought by the LJP.

Sources in the JD(U), however, admit the fear is the BJP winning more seats than the JD(U). While the JD(U)'s list does not have many well-known faces, the BJP has fielded Union ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad, R K Singh, Ram Kripal Yadav, Ashwini Kumar Choubey and Giriraj Singh.

While the JD(U) hopes that its combined social base with the BJP would be enough this time, what this election would also test is the JD(U)'s ability to transfer votes to the BJP. The signals so far have not been good — from either the 2018 Araria Lok Sabha seat bypoll (the RJD defeated BJP) or the Jehanabad Assembly seat in the bypoll same year (the RJD defeated the JD-U).

In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, it was Nitish's social engineering experiment that earned his party rich dividends. He had carved out a constituency among the Scheduled Castes, called Mahadalits, wooed EBCs, and created a caste-neutral constituency of women with 50 per cent reservation at the panchayat level. That social engineering faces a litmus test due

EXPLAINED E. Reversal of fortunes

JD(U) might be contesting same number of seats as BJP but Bihar CM Nitish Kumar does not look like an equal partner in terms of campaigning. JD(U)'s sense of discomfort also comes from fear of winning less seats than BJP in polls, leaving it with even less bargaining power going ahead.



Raj Thackeray at a rally in Bhandup, Mumbai, Wednesday. Ganesh Shirsalkar

When Raj Thackeray does 'fact checking'... and BJP seeks his 'truth'

MOHAMED THAYER & SAGAR RAJPUT
MUMBAI, APRIL 25

WHILE HIS party is not contesting the Lok Sabha elections, it's hard to tell from the number of rallies Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray has been holding. Or the tool the leader known for his oratory is now deploying — videos and "fact checks" to "expose PM Narendra Modi's claims".

That his followers are charmed is evident from the past two rallies held in Mumbai, where they turned up wearing black T-shirts with his new trademark call before putting on any such video — "Ae lav re toh video (hey play the video)!!!"

Thackeray usually follows this up by instructing the crowd, "Neet bagha (watch properly)". The projector then goes on to show anything from a video of Modi's changing stance on NCP chief Sharad Pawar to him saying purportedly a businessman is more courageous than a soldier.

Apart from the T-shirts, memes have gone viral now with a scared-looking Modi shown asking, "Lavla ka re video (Have they played the video)?"

"Normally so much is said that people tend to forget what was promised in the past. Hence we are going back to things Modi had said, the false claims made, and expose this using irrefutable proof-like videos or news articles... Presenting facts in audio-visual format has a stronger impact," said MNS leader Sandeep Deshpande.

The BJP has questioned Thackeray's motive, saying he seems to be trying to benefit the Congress-NCP alliance. They have demanded that the expense of these rallies be added to the accounts of Congress-NCP candidates.

The MNS chief claims he is only rallying his numbers for the Assembly polls later this year.

At the Gudi Padwa rally at Shivaji Park in Mumbai on April 6, the MNS played a video of Modi telling people to dedicate their votes to the soldiers who carried out the Balakot airstrikes. Thackeray then asked: "Do you know what he actually feels about them? Aata bagha (Here see)." In the footage that Thackeray played next, Modi says at an event, in February 2014, that a "vyaapari (businessman)" has the ability to be more courageous than a soldier. Addressing the Confederation of All India Traders' Association in Delhi,

"I have been following Raj Thackeray since the day he formed his party in 2006. If he says we should vote for the NCP-Congress, I will vote for them. I believe what he says as he gives the exact picture of what is happening..."

However, as a senior citizen at the Bhandup rally pointed out, Thackeray might himself fail a test based purely on things said in the past. "He has left his followers confused. In 2014, he asked them to vote for Modi, today he is against Modi."

Meanwhile, the MNS is convinced that given the growing crowds at Thackeray's rallies — 10 so far — the BJP is rattled. The Congress believes the same. Said party spokesperson Sachin Sawant, "The MNS is acting as a catalyst helping us spread the truth."

One of CPI's 2 nominees in state, Pansare's kin claims resistance to Hindutva

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS

SON-IN-LAW of slain rationalist leader Govind Pansare, Bansi Satpute, 58, is one of the two CPI candidates contesting from Maharashtra. Member of the national council of the All India Kisan Sabha, Satpute claims tacit understanding between the Congress-NCP and the BJP-Shiv Sena in Shirdi, which votes on April 29.

What issues are you are focusing on?

For years, we have worked on farmers' issues, rights of Adivasi women... We also want to take forward Comrade Govind Pansare's views against casteism and communalism. The BJP is trying to mislead the people in the name of development.

How are your chances against your opponents?

This is Govind Pansare's *jan-mabhooni*. People know of his work. Not only do we want to revive the Communist movement, we also want to keep his memory alive. The CPI is the oldest Communist party in the country. There is anger against the Shiv Sena and the other candidates. There is also resistance to the RSS's and the BJP's Hindutva plank. The trend is against the establishment. We are optimistic.



WITH BANSI SATPUTE
CPI CANDIDATE FOR THE SHIRDI LOK SABHA SEAT

Why did the CPI not ally with the Congress-NCP in Shirdi?

The Ahmednagar-Shirdi region is dominated by sugar cooperatives. There is a tacit understanding between the Congress-NCP and BJP-Shiv Sena here. Ahmednagar has been electing BJP candidates and Shirdi has seen Shiv Sena leaders. During the 2014 general elections, the Shiv Sena's Sadashiv Lokhande won, but in the Assembly polls Congress MLAs (were elected) in Shirdi, Sangamner and Shirampur Assembly segments, which fall under the same Shirdi constituency. Local leaders have their milk and sugar factories and need an MP who does not interfere in their work. In the last five years, despite a Shiv Sena MP here, they have not won any gram panchayat elections.

How will you tackle the water crisis, unemployment?

Water sources have dried up. Farmers are selling their cattle, farm produce has been damaged and there has been a spike in farmer suicides. Regional, district-level meetings need to be held to work out a solution for the crisis. A relief fund of Rs 1 lakh crore should be set up to help farmers during natural calamities. We are also proposing a Bhagat Singh National Employment Guarantee Act, to provide unemployment allowance to the youth.

SEAT WATCH ASANSOL; JODHPUR VOTING ON APRIL 29

'CPM sheltered goons. Didi has made goondas leaders'

ABANTIKA GHOSH
ASANSOL, APRIL 25

BOTH HAVE Bollywood links, both trumped career politicians in their debut polls, both are seeking re-election and both are outsiders. The parallels between Moonmoon Sen, actor, and Babul Supriyo, singer, battling it out in the Asansol constituency, however, end there.

Despite having sensationally defeated nine-time Left MP Basudeb Acharya in Bankura in 2014, Sen was, rather mysteriously, shunted out to Asansol. The quintessential star and hardly a political animal, Sen has created quite a flutter, not all flattering, by her appeal to vote for her for the sake of her mother, Bengali cinema heartthrob Suchitra Sen.

Supriyo, a Union minister, on the other hand, is a far cry from the star who had serenaded Asansol in 2014 with the song *Kaho na pyar hai*. He is making sharp political points at his rallies and training his guns on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Sen's campaign is being overseen by state minister Arup Biswas. Supriyo is largely his own general.

But, essentially, Supriyo's contest is with the Trinamool organisation spearheaded by Biswas and hamstrung by factional fights, particularly between Moloy Ghatak, an MLA from Asansol Uttar, and Jitender Tiwary, the Pandabeswar MLA. In fact, conspiracy theorists say Sen was fielded partly to tie over the feud that had cost the party dearly in 2014 when trade union leader Dola Sen's (now a Rajya Sabha MP) defeat was widely attributed to sabotage by Ghatak, who wanted a ticket.

"This is Didi's tested formula, of fielding film stars in seats with factions. In Jadavpur



BJP Asansol sitting MP Babul Supriyo campaigns in Pandabeswar. Abantika Ghosh

there is a fight between Kaiser Ahmed and Arabul Islam, so actor Mimi Chakraborty was fielded," says a party insider.

Biswas brushes aside criticism about Sen being an outsider. "Babul's permanent address is in Delhi. She (Sen) will win by 1-1.5 lakh votes," he told *The Indian Express*.

However, a 2014-like situation may still emerge as there is widespread perception that Tiwary may still damage the party's prospects.

Sen's candidature has not gone down well with some Trinamool voters too. "The BJP has fielded a better candidate. I did vote for the party in 2014 too... This time I would not have voted for them but one does have to look at the candidate," says a trader.

There is fair amount of support for Left candidate Gourango Chatterjee too, after alleged

Trinamool goons landed him in hospital.

The seat's 20 per cent Muslim voters though will stand steadfast with Mamata, with the CM charged by the other side of blatant appeasement to woo them over.

Babul, who claims in his speeches that the Trinamool government "takes *hafta* even from *fuchka* sellers", is reaping the benefits of all this. "Modi is not a politician, he is a social worker. It is not a question of one election, this is about the country. Have you seen the situation in West Bengal, the *goondaraj*?" asks a hotel owner in Asansol, originally from Punjab.

The Hindu polarisation in these parts, with a substantial non-Bengali voter base, doesn't hurt. In Pandabeswar last week, as Supriyo's carcade drove by, mothers urged babies to greet the guests with "Jai Shri Ram".

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
BJP's Babul Supriyo	37.1%
TMC	30.9%
CPI(M)	22.6%

2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
CPI(M)'s Bansagopal Chowdhury	48.69%
TMC	40.53%
BJP	5.56%

Campaigning in the remote hamlet of Jenua, dominated by Muslims, Supriyo insists that he has "never played the communal card".

He also claims the NDA government's push for a Uniform Civil Code had earned it even Muslim support. "As it is, we are a patriarchal society. On top of that, a man is allowed to divorce over SMS or WhatsApp... Abolishing this makes society more progressive," he said, blaming the Trinamool government for communal politics instead. "Nearly 25,000 Durga Puja clubs received Rs 10,000 each. Who gave her (Banerjee) permission to use public money for Durga Puja? She is buying votes."

Supriyo reiterated the BJP charge that the Trinamool is trying to retain hold over Bengal with violence. "This is a rogue government run by a cruel CM. There is a Trinamool reign of terror, that is why the yearning for Central forces."

The violence is different from the CPM's time, he added. "The CPM sheltered goons. Didi has asked *goondas* to become leaders."

On his rival Moonmoon Sen, Supriyo said, "It is deplorable... She is asking for votes in the name of her mother's *atma* (soul). What about the living *atmas*?"

Against Gehlot son, BJP star sees 'Kaliyug Mahabharata'

DEEP MUKHERJEE
JAIPUR, APRIL 25

UNION MINISTER of State for Agriculture and Farmer Welfare and sitting BJP MP from Jodhpur Gajendra Singh Shekhawat never forgets to point out in his campaign speeches that the ongoing Lok Sabha election is the 'Kaliyug's Mahabharata'.

"Much like the Mahabharata, the two sides are standing against each other here as well. One is that of the Pandavas, who stand with the blessings of Lord Krishna and walk the road of truth. The second side is that of Dhritarashtra, blinded with *putramoha* (love for son) and walking on the path of *adharma*," says Shekhawat, while addressing a rally at Jodhpur's ward number 58.

The battle for the Jodhpur parliamentary seat is a high stake one. Shekhawat, a Rajput, who is often regarded as the future of the BJP in Rajasthan, faces Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's son and Congress candidate Vaibhav Gehlot, a Mali, an OBC community.

The Jodhpur constituency, which has nearly 5 lakh OBC and 2.5 lakh Rajput voters among others, has eight Assembly segments.

While the Congress is relying on its victory in six of the eight seats in the constituency in the December 2018 polls, the BJP is hoping



MoS Shekhawat considered BJP's tallest leader in state after Rajee. Express

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
BJP's G S Shekhawat	66.15%
Cong	28.14%
BSP	1.25%

2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
Cong's Chandresh Kumari	53.06%
BJP	38.63%
BSP	3.42%

that PM Narendra Modi's name and Shekhawat's popularity will help it sail through.

Jodhpur is known to be a bastion of Ashok Gehlot, the current and three-time CM of Rajasthan. He had been elected to Parliament for five terms from the seat between 1980 and 1998.

"I am thankful that the party selected me as the candidate from Jodhpur. The high command took this decision as I had the blessings of all Congress workers, senior leaders and the youth. I pledge to be your voice at Jaipur and Delhi," Vaibhav says at a rally in Shergarh.

He then points out the work done by the Congress government in the state during its first three months in office. He speaks of the farm loan waiver, increase in pension and other welfare schemes while adding that the Central government under PM Modi had failed to deliver on its promises.

Although Ashok Gehlot held the Jodhpur Lok Sabha seat for most of the 1980s and 90s, ever since he became the CM of Rajasthan for the first time in 1998, the Congress has managed to win it only once, in 2009. The BJP won the seat in 1999, 2004 and 2014. In the last general elections, Shekhawat wrested the seat from the Congress, defeating then incumbent MP Chandresh Kumari by a margin of more than four lakh votes.

Since then, his stature in the party has only

grown, with the defining moment coming in 2018 when he was considered for the post of the state unit president by the BJP's central leadership after the party lost two parliamentary seats and one Assembly to the Congress in bypolls held in 2018.

At this juncture, a loss against Vaibhav will be a setback for Shekhawat as after the Vasundhara Raje government's defeat in the Assembly polls, he has been playing a crucial role in matters related to the party's state unit.

As for the Congress, sources say that the party is banking on CM Gehlot's charisma and appeal among the people of Jodhpur.

"People support Ashokji due to his down-to-earth demeanour and his ability to connect with them on a personal level. His son Vaibhav will definitely benefit from this," says Sayed Ansari, district Congress president of Jodhpur.

In his rallies, Vaibhav is already raising issues such as why Jodhpur wasn't selected a smart city in spite of the fact that it is the second largest city in Rajasthan and has a BJP MP for the last five years. He further points out that the state and the Centre both had BJP governments.

According to a BJP leader, the saffron party is focusing on two issues in its campaign in Jodhpur — that PM Modi needs to be re-elected in the interest of the country and how CM Gehlot's top priority is the interest of his son.

8 DECISION 2019



BALLOTIN

PM defends national security pitch: Poor worst hit by terror

Targets SP, BSP, Cong: They don't care about country, only care about vote bank

SANTOSH SINGH & MAULSHREE SETH
PATNA, LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Thursday said he is talking about national security in the campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha election because it is directly related to the poor. "Funds used for the purchase of guns could have been used for the welfare of the poor," said the Prime Minister, targeting the Opposition parties who have accused him of raising the national security issue while ignoring bread and butter issues.

The Prime Minister was speaking at a rally in Darbhanga, where he shared the dais with Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and LJP president Ram Vilas Paswan. The BJP has fielded Gopalji Thakur from Darbhanga against the RJD's Abdul Bari Siddiqui.

The Prime Minister also said that the BJP-led government had focused on electrification in the last five years and it would use the coming five years for development of water resources.

"Some people have a problem with Bharat Mata ki Jay and Vande Mataram. Should they not lose their security deposit? ...wo kehete hai Modi aataankwad ki baat kyon karta hai, ye to mudda hi nahi hai. Aap mujhe bataiye rashtraraksha aur aataankwad ye mudda hai ki nahi hai? (They ask why Modi is talking about terrorism. You tell me it is an issue or not)," said the Prime Minister.

Referring to the recent terror attack in Sri Lanka, he said, "Factories of terror are operating in our neighbourhood...It is the poor in my country who have been worst hit by terror." The Prime Minister added that money



PM Narendra Modi in Banda. PTI

being spent on purchasing bombs, shells and guns could have been used for "building schools and hospitals for the poor".

The Prime Minister said politicians did not require so much security 40 years ago and that security forces were now deployed to check railway compartments, at airports, temples, mosques and gurdwaras. "The sons of the poor in the defence forces do not sleep well now (because of security threats) and if an incident takes place, they might lose their jobs," he said.

"This is the reason we need to end terrorism for the welfare of the poor," said the Prime Minister. Modi also referred to the "Darbhanga terror module" and said, "But aapka chowkidar chokanna hai (Your watchman is alert)".

Modi also addressed a rally at Banda in Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. In an apparent response to BSP chief

Mayawati drawing a comparison between SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav and Narendra Modi and referring to Mulayam as a "real" backward leader, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "SP-BSP people are busy distributing certificates of my caste and the Congress is busy abusing the whole backward community by using Modi's name."

Referring to freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, Rajguru, Chandra Shekhar Azad, Rani Lakshmbai and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, he said, "Ek bhi maha purush apni jaati se nah jana jaata hai." (No great personality is known by his or her caste)."

Targeting the Opposition for alleging EVM discrepancies, Prime Minister said, "300 seaton pe vote parne ke baad jo khbarein aa rahi hain, kuch logon ke chehre latak gaye hain...Ab inhone phir se EVM karaag cherdia hai (Due to reports coming in after polling on 300 seats, some people are demotivated. They have again raised a hue-and-cry over EVMs)."

The Prime Minister reiterated in Banda that in his second term, he is going to work for water supply in a "mission mode".

He assured the people in the Bundelkhand region, which faces a scarcity of water, to open a Jal Shakti ministry at the central level.

He alleged that the SP-BSP and the Congress are afraid to even say "terrorism" because they are afraid of losing their vote bank. "Inko desh ki chinta nahi, apne vote bank ki chinta hai (They do not care about the country, they care only about their vote bank)."

At the end, the Prime Minister told the crowd, "Modi dal ke liye nahi, Modi desh ke liye paida hua hai. (Modi was not born for the party, he was born for the country)."

Asked PM Modi for farm loan waiver, he didn't utter a word: Rahul

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
JAIPUR, APRIL 25

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed that he had confronted Prime Minister Narendra Modi and urged him to waive off farmers' loans, but the Prime Minister remained silent and didn't answer.

Addressing a public meeting in Rajasthan's Jalore district, Rahul said, "Main le gaya, do crore form main le gaya. Maine unse kaha, Narendra Modi ji ek kaam kijiye, aapne inka teen lakh crore rupya maaf kiya hai, pandra logon ka, choro ka, maine saamne bola unko...Pooch lena... Ab aap ek kaam kijiye mai nahi janta aapne inka kyu kiya magar aap Hindustan ka kisaan ka karza bhi maaf kar dijiye (I went with 2 crore forms. I told him Narendra Modi ji, you have waived off Rs 3 lakh crore of 15 thieves, I told him to his face...I don't know why you did this but now waive off the loans of farmers as well)."

The Congress leader said the Prime Minister didn't "utter a word".

"Narendra Modi ji ka jawab sunoge? Maine unse kaha Narendra Modi ji kisaan ka karza maaf karo, Narendra Modi ji ka jawab suniye. Ek shabd nahi nikla muh se. Ek shabd nahi nikla, chup bilkul. Chowkidar bilkul chup (Do you want to listen to Narendra Modi ji's reply? I told him, Narendra Modi ji waive off farmers' loans...He did not utter a word. Chowkidar was totally silent)," Rahul said.

The Congress president also raised the Rafale issue, saying that the Prime Minister didn't answer the four questions he asked in Lok Sabha.

"Narendra Modi ji gave his speech for one-and-a-half hours. At times, he abused Congress and named everyone, Rajiv Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, he took everyone's names but didn't answer those four



Congress chief Rahul Gandhi in Kota. PTI

questions," he said.

Later, speaking at another public meeting in Ajmer, Rahul said that after the elections, 5 lakh families will receive Rs 72,000 annually under the Nyunatam Aay Yojana (INAY) scheme — the Congress's minimum income guarantee scheme — in their bank accounts.

He also criticised demonetisation and GST, saying that small businessmen and the poor of the country suffered massively due to these. He added that if the Congress comes to power, a separate farmer budget will be introduced and no farmer will have to go to jail for non-payment of debts.

Later speaking at Kota, Rahul said, "Rafale hawai jahaz kharidne mein tees hazar crore rupye chori karke unhone Anil Ambani ji ke jeb me dale hai (After stealing Rs 30,000 crore while purchasing the Rafale aircraft, he [Modi] put it in Anil Ambani's pocket)."

He also said that he wants that the Kota airport be expanded as the city has become a hub of education.



Shivraj helicopter denied permission to land in Chhindwara

Bhopal: BJP vice-president Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Thursday alleged that the collector of Chhindwara, the home district of MP Chief Minister Kamal Nath, denied permission to land to a helicopter in which he was travelling. Chouhan, a former CM, visited the Election Commission's office here and submitted a complaint, demanding that the collector be transferred.

"I have to reach Umreth around 5.30 pm but the collector said the chopper would not be allowed to land after 5 pm. If Kamal Nath would not allow me to land here, I will travel by car," Chouhan said.

Later, at a rally at Umreth, Chouhan said, "We had heard that in Bengal, (chief minister) Mamata Banerjee did not allow a helicopter to land, now comes Kamal Nath...listen you stooge collector, our days will come soon, what will happen to you then?"

Collector Shrinivas Sharma told the media that as per the rules, helicopters are allowed to land only between 10 am to 5 pm. The Congress has accused him of threatening the collector. PTI



TMC fields Madan Mitra in Bhatpara Assembly bypoll

Kolkata: The TMC has named former West Bengal transport minister Madan Mitra, an accused in the Saradha chit fund scam, as its candidate for the by-election to Bhatpara Assembly seat.

While addressing a rally at Suri in Birbhum district, TMC chief Mamata Banerjee said, "For the Assembly by-polls, Madan Mitra will contest from Bhatpara, Amal Kiskoo from Habibpur and Abdul Karim Chaudhury from Islampur."

The party is yet to announce candidates for the two remaining Assembly constituencies where by-polls will be held on May 19.

The CBI arrested Mitra in December 2014 for alleged involvement in Saradha chit fund scam. He was granted bail in September 2016. ENS

Dimple touches Maya's feet, she seeks votes for 'bahu'



(From left) SP president Akhilesh Yadav, BSP supremo Mayawati, Kannauj MP Dimple Yadav and RLD chief Ajit Singh at Kannauj on Thursday. Express

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, APRIL 25

THE BONHOMIE between the SP and BSP was on display at a joint rally of the SP-BSP-RDL alliance in Kannauj on Thursday when SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife and party candidate Dimple Yadav touched BSP chief Mayawati's feet on stage.

Calling Dimple her "family's bahu", Mayawati asked the people of Kannauj to ensure victory for her by a huge margin. RLD chief Ajit Singh, BSP national general secretary Satish Chandra Mishra and Mayawati's nephew Akash Yadav were among those on the stage.

Speaking at the rally, Dimple said, "The step Mayawati has taken by forming the alliance is praiseworthy. During the press conference in January, Akhilesh ji had said that 'from today, Mayawati ji's respect is my respect and her disrespect is my disrespect'. I would like to congratulate Akhileshji for giving Mayawati ji the respect she deserves from the beginning... I have been very impressed by Mayawati ji's life which has



A bull entered the venue, causing panic. One person was injured trying to chase it away. Akhilesh later tweeted on this. PTI

been full of struggle."

Before the event began, a bull entered the rally ground where the leaders' helicopters were to land. A youth was reportedly injured when he tried to chase the bull away from the venue. Akhilesh later tweeted a picture of the youth trying to stop the bull and wrote, "We built an expressway in 21 months, but people have been troubled by 5 crore stray

cattle in the past 2 years. If the government can't stop bulls from entering political events, then you can understand the plight of the poor farmers."

Slamming the Prime Minister and the BJP, Akhilesh asked the people if they want a "pracharmantri" or pradhanmantri".

Slamming the Congress, Mayawati said that during their rule, backward classes and Dalits were never given due reservation. "When they come asking for votes, you should ask them why they did not give reservation to the marginalised," the BSP chief said.

Alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not even fulfilled one-fourth of the promises his party made before the 2014 polls, she said, "Just like the Congress, due to the BJP's communal, casteist mindset, development hasn't reached Adivasis, Dalits, backward classes, Muslims and other religious minorities. These people have still not been given jobs that they should have got under reservation."

"Every other day, there are terror attacks in the country and several soldiers have been martyred under the BJP rule. The sad part is that these people are using this in some way or the other for political gains," she said.

'This is an election between hope and opportunism'

Union Minister and BJP candidate from Patna Sahib **RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD** speaks to **SHREYASI JHA** on his upcoming contest with two-term BJP MP Shatrughan Sinha, who is the Congress candidate this time. Excerpts:

What made you decide to contest Lok Sabha polls?

I have been the spokesperson and chief spokesperson for the party. I have been in-charge of eight states on behalf of the party, from Tamil Nadu to Rajasthan to Chhattisgarh to Uttarakhand to West Bengal to Uttar Pradesh... This time, I decided that I should contest... My journey started as a booth-level agent after I passed matriculation, then ABVP, then JP Movement and then in Bihar and then at the national level.

What are the main issues in Patna Sahib on which you are contesting the elections?

One is national security. People of Patna Sahib are keen to make Narendra Modi the Prime Minister once again. This has been a traditional BJP seat. That's why out of six assembly segments, the BJP holds five.

Shatrughan Sinha was winning because of the BJP or because of his name and work?

I have decided never to take his name. And I will not take his name. But obviously, (he was winning) because of the BJP's name.

How are you seeking votes from the people, especially when the incumbent MP was from the BJP?

I am going into the positive narrative of India. Resurgent India, safe India, secure India. As an IT minister, the digital revolution which I have brought...I have brought metro train to Patna as a Union Cabinet Minister,



Smart City to Patna...TCS is going to start its operations in Patna very soon. I have expanded the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) in Patna.

Despite the fact that Lalu Prasad is not participating in the elections, the RJD is hopeful of outperforming the BJP in Bihar. How do you see this challenge?

No one can stop them from day-dreaming. But, this is an election between hope and opportunism...And as I said, they have no leader. In our party, there is neeti, neta and neeyat. And on their side, there is no neeti, no neta and no neeyat except for Modi hatua.

BJP has promised special status to Bihar, will you fulfill it if you win?

We have already given that. A sum of Rs 55,000 crore has been invested only on roads, then Railways, then power, the IT sector...STPI centres have come up in Darbhanga

and Bhagalpur. There has been expansion in AIIMS and modernisation in Patna Medical College and Hospital. All these things are being done. Therefore, one has done politics and one has actually contributed.

Should Pragma Thakur have got a ticket when she is accused in a terror case. Won't this affect the BJP's prospects?

Wasn't Rajiv Gandhi an accused in a case? Isn't Sonia Gandhi an accused and out on bail?...she (Pragma) was victimised. Persons like Digvijaya Singh, P Chidambaram and others are talking of Hindu terror, saffron terror; a liberal, inclusive Hindu philosophy with the doctrine of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam was linked with terror. She was also tortured. Today, she is on bail and contesting like others are. Then why double standards? Let the people decide. It will not affect people's votes.

Ram temple is another major issue and you are Ram Lalla's lawyer. Do you think mediation can resolve the dispute?

Ram Mandir is not an election issue, it is a national issue of faith. We expect the Supreme Court to expedite the hearing. I should not comment on the mediation process.

Is the 'Chowkidar chor hai' slogan tarnishing the PM's image?

It is not. The integrity of the Prime Minister is impeccable. The Congress consciously delayed the Rafale deal because no commission was paid. This is a completely motivated campaign.

FULL INTERVIEW ON www.indianexpress.com

'I paid the price of sticking to truth and principles'

TWO-TERM Patna Sahib MP **SHATRUGHAN SINHA**, who joined the Congress after the BJP fielded Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad from the seat, speaks to **SHREYASI JHA** about the reasons for his move and his prospects for this election. Excerpts:

What forced you to go against the BJP?

Unfortunately, it was the other way round. I paid the so-called price of being close to Advaniji and the group and sticking to the truth and principles, which of course did not suit them. Later, the BJP, we all found, has turned democracy into dictatorship. There are so many examples. Supreme Court judges coming out, the way they are playing with the Constitution or the way Parliament proceedings took place, we saw democracy at its weakest. I was vocal from the beginning because I believe the party is bigger than the individual and the nation is bigger than the party. So whatever I said was in national interest. I have always been with the truth and of course they won't like it. They did every possible thing to make me fall in line, created so many obstacles like pulling out all facilities, from security cover to excluding me from parliamentary committees.

At the same time, as I was the seniormost MP, decent orator, crowd-puller and popular among the leadership, local Bihar leadership started having problems with me... As health and shipping minister, I had brought about several changes... Many from the state and some in the Centre started lobbying against me. I was also forced to leave the party. I suddenly saw in the news that they announced Ravi Shankar Prasad as candidate from Patna Sahib. Then I thought, wo afsana jise anjaam tak laana na ho mumkin, use ek khoobsurat mod dekar chhodna achha (the story that cannot reach a conclusion should be left at a beautiful turn).

Several opposition leaders, including



Mamata Banerjee, Akhilesh Yadav and Lalu ji, who is a family friend, requested me to join them. But I joined the Congress for two reasons. One, Rahul Gandhi, the face of tomorrow, within a year of taking over as president won three major states. He proved who the real Pappu is and who feku is. Second, the Congress is the real and grand old party that contributed immensely to independence and nation-building. I am still affectionate to many BJP leaders and will always be. I am against their policies and dual characters.

You have been a long-time BJP man and slammed Congress throughout this period. How do you justify it now?

I never criticised the Congress... I never talk against any individual or party... You won't find a single statement against Sonia Gandhi, Mayawati, Mamata or Akhilesh because I raise my voice against policies...

Have you taken the Congress route to keep yourself in power?

If a cat is caged, it makes efforts to be free. When you have selfless goals and dreams in your eyes, you need a path. If that path is denied, you will not sit idle... Whatever way you may take, you must reach your destination which is the development of the country.

Your wife is SP candidate from Lucknow against Rajnath Singh with no Congress candidate being fielded, is it part of your deal with the Congress?

Not at all. Mayawati ji and Akhileshji wanted me to contest from Lucknow. I told them I will not change my location... Then they insisted that I bring my wife, who has been instrumental in my political life...

Is the incumbency factor against you, with BJP fielding a known face (Prasad)?

The kind of respect I receive here from all sections of people, I feel connected to them. It could be a factor which could hurt public sentiments if I am not here. People here have known me, worked with me, majority of them believe this constituency got name and fame due to Bibari Babu... I fought for the city and brought development.

Who do you think is anti-national?

No one. All of us are citizens of this country. Be it the soldier guarding our boundaries or youths serving the country in some other way. The term has been coined and propagated by the propaganda machinery. There is neither Hindu terrorism, nor Muslim terrorism. Terrorism is terrorism with no caste and colour.

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