

8 DECISION 2019



ASSETS WATCH
AJAY SINGH DHARMENDRA DEOL, 59
 BJP CANDIDATE FROM GURDASPUR
₹ 87.19 crore
TOTAL ASSETS*
₹ 66.19 crore
IMMOVABLE
₹ 21 crore
MOVEABLE
₹ 26 lakh
CASH; WIFE: RS 16 LAKEH
INCOME (2017-18)
₹ 63.82 lakh SELF | **₹ 2.90 lakh WIFE**
INCOME (2016-17)
₹ 96.29 lakh SELF | **₹ 26,370 WIFE**
CRIMINAL CASES: N.A. (*INCLUDING OF WIFE, CHILD)

THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER PUNJAB
Amid calls for NOTA, parties hold separate meetings in SC areas

RAAKHI JAGGA
 LUDHIANA, APRIL 28

RAJA AMRINDER Singh Warring, the Congress candidate pitted against the Akali Dal's Harsimrat Badal from Bathinda, started his campaign by spending a night at a Dalit household in Badal village. Ever since his candidature was announced on April 20, Warring makes it a point to have his dinner at the house of a Dalit family in his constituency. Once considered a no-go zone by upper-caste Jat Sikhs, the Dalit *vehra* (zones) in villages in the state are witnessing a run of VIP visits in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. Sunday morning, Akali Dal patriarch Parkash Singh Badal had his morning tea at the Dalit *vehra* of Gaggar village in Lambi. In the neighbouring Lok Sabha seat of Sangrur, Congress candidate Kewal Dhillon has been making it a point to visit Dalit areas, instead of inviting them to a common rally as used to be the norm. As per the 2011 Census, at 31.9% in Punjab, Scheduled Castes and Tribes make up the largest share of the population in the country — the national average is 25.2%. While of Punjab's 13 constituencies, four are reserved — Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Faridkot and Fatehgarh Sahib — Dalit bodies are now demanding that Ferozepur too be made a reserved seat. Harjinder Singh Jakhu, general secretary of the Akali Dal Punjab's SC wing, said SC/ST votes "can make or break a government". He added that the Dalits were ready to dump the Congress. "After Independence, they voted for the party for decades together. What did the Congress get them? It could not reduce poverty or work for their welfare."

EXPLAINED
Dalits as deciders

COMPRISING 31.9% of population, mostly based in villages, the Dalits are being courted this time by special visits. With AAP disintegrating, each party is hoping to attract the Dalits who had voted for it in 2014.

'I, AJAY SINGH 'SUNNY' DEOL, HEREBY DECLARE...'
 Sunny Deol, the BJP's Gurdaspur candidate, at a rally before filing his nomination on Monday. *Rana Simranjit Singh*

In land of Lals, CM Khattar, BJP hope to ride Modi appeal to breast the tape

COOMI KAPOOR & VARINDER BHATIA
 ROHTAK, BHIWANI, HISAR, APRIL 29



At a BJP rally in Rohtak. PM Modi is yet to campaign in Haryana. *Manoj Dhaka*

THREE MAJOR factors dominate Haryana's poll scene. One, the number of third- and fourth-generation members of prominent political dynasties in the fray, scions of the great Lals of Haryana — Bansil Lal, Devi Lal, and Bhajan Lal, as well as the relatively recent dynasty, the Hoodas. Two, a certain silent polarisation that is visible — all other communities versus the Jats, the dominant, doughty peasantry of the state. This is a phenomenon which seems to have got accentuated following the violent Jat agitation for reservation three years ago. Ironically, while elsewhere in the country the term 'gath-bandhan' symbolises a combination of forces against the BJP, in Haryana, it is the other way round. But perhaps the third, and the most important factor of this election, is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, though he has not even visited the state so far.

HARYANA LOK SABHA, 2014
10 SEATS

BJP	7 seats, 34.84% vote share
Congress	1 seat, 22.99%
Indian National Lok Dal	2, 24.43%

Birendra Singh aspired to be CM. But Modi's surprise choice was Khattar, a political novice, backroom organiser and earlier, a full-time RSS pracharak. Khattar's advantage was that in his younger days he once shared a house with Modi and worked under him as general secretary in charge of Haryana. The fact that Khattar was a Punjabi refugee and not a Jat may have figured in the BJP's political calculations. Haryana has been largely ruled by Jat CMs. The last time this trend was broken was nearly three decades ago when Bhajan Lal, a Bishnoi, consolidated the non-Jat votes in a Jat-dominated state.

As *The Indian Express* travels along dusty roads lined by harvested wheat fields, kiosks and small towns from Rohtak, past Bhiwani to Hisar and onwards to Sirsa and Kurukshetra, when randomly asked as to which candidate is ahead in the constituency, the answer usually is Narendra Modi. Many still do not know the name of the BJP candidates in the region. Others grumble that BJP incumbents did little in the last five years.

In a state where rough talk and blunt banter is the norm, Khattar has been the butt of several personal jokes and earned nicknames such as *khattara* (jalopy). He is accused of not having a grip over the administration. His detractors complain that the 64-year-old is not just ineffective but is uninspiring and invisible. Khattar, however, told *The Indian Express*: "Other CMs may have projected themselves as number one, but I have no such personal ambition. I would like my work to speak for itself."

VOTING ON MAY 12

In Bhiwani market, Ram Lal, a cane juice seller, says BJP candidate Dharambir Singh would not get 20,000 votes on his own steam and recounts a popular tale in these parts of how he once got up at a public gathering and declared that he was not "layak (worthy)" of the post. Bansil Lal's grand daughter Shruti Chaudhary, his predecessor as MP, was far more active, Lal says. "But we are voting for Modi, not Dharambir," he points out. Shyam Juneja, a shopkeeper, is not a fan of the BJP's CM, Manohar Lal Khattar, whose administration, he says, came to a standstill during the Jat agitation. "This time Modi," he

says emphatically. Then comes the rider, "Vidhan Sabha mein Khattar ko nipertenge (We will deal with Khattar in the Assembly polls)." A group of men smoking hookah in Milakpur village in Hisar say their entire village of Sainis and Yadavs will vote for Modi. Most are unsure of the BJP candidate's name but one recalls that he is Chaudhary Birendra Singh's *chora* (son). "Some of us from here are military people and Modi will keep this nation strong," explains Mohan Yadav.

In Sirsa, Bhagat Singh, a Jat, says, "We need Modi for another five years to put the system in place." His companions nod in agreement. Congress president Rahul Gandhi, says a school teacher, doesn't inspire confidence: "He couldn't even install his own man in Karnataka as chief minister." Shyam Sunder, a retired Air Force personnel who now sells text books, says amending the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, as the Congress promised in its manifesto, would be "dangerous". Given this sentiment, the chances of a repeat performance of 2014, give or take a seat or two depending on local factors, seems

likely. In 2014, the BJP won seven out of 10 seats. The BJP's performance came as a political shock since until then, it was never a major player in the state whose politics was dominated by the Congress and anti-Congress forces represented by the INLD. The BJP was a force only in a few urban pockets and tagged on to INLD's Om Prakash Chautala's coat-tails as a junior partner until 2004, when the BJP under L K Advani broke ranks. Prior to 2014, the BJP had never won more than nine seats in the 90-member Assembly. But six months after its impressive showing in the parliamentary polls, the BJP won 47 seats out of 90 in the Haryana Assembly. That too, without projecting any leader. Several BJP veterans and some impressive new entrants such as Chaudhary

the mal-governance, divisiveness, destruction of economy and brutalisation of institutions over the past five years. My campaign will be based on these issues and the commitments that we have made in our manifesto, the NAYAY scheme for the poor, the other issues of the marginalised and impoverished. That is going to be the basic thrust of our campaign.

VOTING ON MAY 19

Both the Congress and Akali Dal launched schemes for Dalits while in power. With 75.7% of the SC population in villages, the focus of these schemes is rural, said Jakhu. In 2014, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had got a chunk of this vote bank, with Punjab the only state from where the party MPs won. Its state president and winning MP Bhagwant Mann (now standing from Sangrur) had held

a 'Bijli Aandolan', under which he visited Dalit families entitled to 200 units free power per month who had got hefty power bills. In the 2017 Vidhan Sabha elections, AAP president Arvind Kejriwal had announced that if the party won, the deputy CM would be a Dalit — a first for Punjab. Harpal Singh Cheema, leader of the Opposition in the Vidhan Sabha and the AAP MLA from Sangrur's Dirba constituency, is the Dalit face of AAP in Punjab. While emphasising that Dalits need "due importance", Cheema regretted that parties believed more in sops than trying to bring change through education and better health facilities.

Among those vying for the Dalit vote is the BSP, which got around 1.9% of the total votes in the state. It is contesting from three seats, Anandpur Sahib, Jalandhar and Hoshiarpur. Randhir Singh Vehniwal, BSP in-charge of Punjab and Chandigarh Affairs, said this election is about "guiding" the Dalits to vote to "save the Constitution". About the Congress "initiatives", Punjab party chief Sunil Jakhar said, "The Congress is a secular party and we don't do separate meetings for Dalits. Rather we meet all of them together in a village." Lately though, Dalit associations have been urging people to use NOTA to show their unhappiness with all parties — a call that has picked up strength after the denial of a ticket to sitting BJP MP and party Dalit face Vijay Sampla. Gurmukh Singh, general secretary of the Zamin Prapati Sangrath Committee, an organisation that works for the rights of Dalits, said NOTA is to ensure parties don't "use" Dalits. "We are not even given due representation."

NEXT
#66 Why villages in Jharkhand want a poll boycott



At a BSP rally in Faridkot. The party got 1.9% votes in the state in 2014. *Gurmeet Singh*

SEAT WATCH LADAKH

One more religious schism as largest seat heads to polls

BASHAARAT MASOOD
 SRINAGAR, APRIL 29

WHEN LADAKH parliamentary seat goes to polls on May 6, it would not be just a close quadrangular contest between rival political parties but also a contest between two districts — the largely Muslim Kargil and the predominantly Buddhist Leh, with approximately the same number of voters in each. What may also prove crucial is the religious schism within Kargil itself.

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

BJP's Thupstan Chhewang	26.35% votes
Ghulam Raza (Ind)	26.32%
Syed Kazim (Ind)	23.92%

Spread over 1.73 lakh sq km, with 1.71 lakh voters, Ladakh is the country's largest parliamentary seat by size as well as the third smallest in terms of voters. In the reckoning for the seat are the Congress's Rigzin Saplbar, a three-time former chief executive councillor (CEC) of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Leh; the BJP's Tsering Namgyal, the current CEC of the LAHDC (Leh); NC and PDP's joint candidate, journalist-turned-politician Sajjad Hussain; and senior Congress rebel leader Asgar Karbalai. Hussain and Karbalai are contesting as Independents. While both BJP and Congress candidates

are Buddhists from Leh, Hussain and Karbalai are Muslims from Kargil. A traditional stronghold of the Congress, the BJP won Ladakh for the first time in 2014, by a mere 36 votes against an Independent candidate. In the municipal polls held in October last year, the Congress won all 13 councillor seats from Leh. Traditionally while the voters of Leh district and the Buddhist voters of Kargil stand behind the candidates from Leh, the Muslims of the district support the candidate from Kargil. Within Kargil too, a divide is developing. Kargil houses two religious schools, both Shia — the Islamia School and Imam Khomeini Trust. The Islamia School is backing Hussain while the Khomeini Trust is backing Karbalai, seen by many as a Congress proxy.

VOTING ON MAY 6

'Had leadership been upset, why field me?'

KANCHAN VASDEV

FORMER UNION minister and Congress national spokesperson Manish Tewari is believed to have got the Anandpur Sahib ticket from the party due to the backing of Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, despite Rahul Gandhi reportedly refusing to clear his name in two meetings. Tewari, who was an MP from 2009 to 2014 from Ludhiana, is up against the 'outsider' tag, plus being a Hindu in the Sikh constituency of Anandpur Sahib.

Punjab Congress president Sunil Kumar Jakhar was said to be unhappy about the ticket to you... Many say you settled for the seat after being refused Ludhiana and Chandigarh.

The entire Congress is together. Leaders, activists who I have worked with over the past 35 years, in the NSUI, Congress... all are united. We are fighting to win... The love and affection I have got are unprecedented... I do not want to go into unnecessary speculation or unnecessary diatribe. I think the battle we are fighting is far, far more important than these trivialities. This is a battle for the soul of India. This is a fight for who are going to form the next national government. This is not an election to form the government in Punjab, or a zila parishad or block samiti... It is a referendum on the five years of the Modi government. It is a litmus test of

Who do you see as your Opposition?
 The Akalis carry the baggage of the bad deeds of the Bargari episode (the desecration of the Sikh holy book and subsequent police firings at Behbal Kalan and Kotkapura), and the efforts that have been made to subvert the investigation. The AAP has imploded completely. The Congress is united. If you look at the battlefield from the perch of the Congress, you do not see one army against you, you see four-five different vigilante groups.
What about the fact that a Hindu has never won from Anandpur Sahib?
 (Showing a picture on his drawing room wall) That is the first cabinet of Pepsu (the Patiala and East Punjab States Union, comprising eight princely states, which existed between 1948 and 1956). My maternal grandfather, Sardar Tirath Singh Guram, is in the picture, with Giani Zail Singh and Maharaja Yadavindra Singh (the last Maharaja of Patiala). My grandfather was deputy chief minister of Pepsu. Number two, my father, who sacrificed his life for the unity and integrity of Punjab, taught us that the essence of Punjab

THE EXPRESS
INTERVIEW
 WITH **MANISH TEWARI**
 CONG CANDIDATE, ANANDPUR SAHIB

is Punjabi and Punjabiat (Tewari's father V N Tiwari, a professor at Panjab University and an author, had been killed at the height of the Sikh militancy in Punjab in 1984). So, it is criminal to divide Punjab into Hindus and Sikhs. Those people who are trying to pedal this line are going down a very dangerous trail. And what the terrorists could not do from 1980 to 1995, these people are doing. Plus, I am a half Sikh, my mother was a Jat Sikh.

Rahul Gandhi was also said to be opposed to your nomination, as you were seen to have deserted Ludhiana in the last elections (he had refused to contest, citing health grounds). If the Congress leadership had been upset with me, they would not have given me a ticket. I did not fight 2014 as I had health issues. I completed my term from 2009-2014. Check out if any MP has done in the last 70 years what I did in those five years... For the past five years, I have fought every day for the party. I have been the most visible face in the media space. We will serve Anandpur Sahib with the same diligence, conviction and commitment as we served Ludhiana.

Do you see any Modi effect in Punjab? There is no Modi wave anywhere. In Phase 1, 91 seats went to polls. The BJP has done very badly in these 91 seats. They won't get even 10.

9 DECISION 2019



THE TURNOUT



Shiv Sena chief Uddhav Thackeray, wife Rashmi and son Aaditya with BJP candidate for Mumbai North Central seat Poonam Mahajan at a polling booth in Mumbai on Monday. Pradip Das

9 STATES 71 SEATS

State (seats in phase-4)	Poll %
Maharashtra (17/48)	55.8%
Rajasthan (13/25)	68.2%
Uttar Pradesh (13/80)	58.4%
West Bengal (8/42)	76.6%
Madhya Pradesh (6/29)	66.9%
Odisha* (6/21)	64%
Bihar (5/40)	59%
Jharkhand (3/14)	64.1%
Jammu & Kashmir** (1/6)	10.3%

(All figures till 8 pm, as per EC website)
*Assembly elections also held for 41 seats
**Second phase of polls in Anantnag constituency (divided in three phases)

PHASE-V VOTE ON MAY 6

7 STATES 51 SEATS

BALLOTIN

Poll ink removed easily: Congress

New Delhi: Congress leader Sanjay Jha tweeted on Monday that the indelible ink, applied on the index finger of voters just before casting of vote, can be easily removed. Jha tweeted a picture of his index finger claiming that he had managed to remove the indelible ink stain with a nail paint remover. Reacting to Jha's claim, EC said it has sought a report from Maharashtra CEO. **ENS**

Cong worker killed on way home

Bhubaneswar: A Congress worker was stabbed to death while returning from a polling booth, while three polling personnel were suspended for violation of norms in the final phase of polling in Odisha Monday. An estimated 64 per cent turnout was recorded in Odisha, where state polls were held alongside the general election. **PTI**

Largely peaceful, voting over for 71 more seats

Bengal: 76% polling, some violence

SANTANU CHOWDHURY & SWEETY KUMARI
KOLKATA, BIRBHUM, APRIL 29

AMID SOME incidents of violence and reports of EVM glitches in some areas, 76.66 per cent polling was recorded in eight constituencies of West Bengal on Monday.

The constituencies that went to the polls are Birbhumi, Bolpur, Asansol, Burdwan East, Burdwan-Durgapur, Baharampur, Krishnanagar and Ranaghat.

In Asansol, sitting MP and BJP candidate Babul Supriyo said his car was vandalised by TMC workers, while the TMC accused BJP workers of having shattered the windowpanes themselves to incite violence.

ADG (Law and Order) Siddhinath Gupta said six FIRs were lodged, including one against BJP's Supriyo for allegedly entering polling booths with armed security guards and intimidating CRPF personnel. "Another FIR was lodged after his car was attacked," Gupta said.

The state's chief electoral officer, Ariz Aftab, told the media: "Barring some isolated incidents of violence, polling was peaceful. There were two incidents of firing today in Birbhumi: at Parui and Dubrajpur. Both took place following altercations between voters and central forces. Another incidence was reported from Hanksalia in Ranaghat, where two persons received minor injuries." Aftab said the person responsible for the incident has been arrested, and two presiding officers removed in Birbhumi. "Approximately 580 companies of CRPF will be deployed in the fifth phase (on May 6)," he added.

BJP candidates Kalyan Choubey (Krishnanagar) and Dudh Kumar Mondal (Birbhumi) have been issued showcause notices for allegedly using cellphones inside polling booths.

The EC received 630 complaints, of which it said 602 were resolved.

Alleging malpractice, the BJP demanded repolling at all booths in Birbhumi, and at some in Asansol and Ranaghat. "Babul Supriyo's car



Union Minister Babul Supriyo's car vandalised in Asansol on Monday. Partha Paul

was attacked. At several places, our polling agents were not allowed to enter the booths," state BJP vice-president Joy Prakash Majumdar said. "At many places, people were not allowed to vote. We have brought these issues to the EC's notice and demanded repolling."

Supriyo said, "I had received reports that our agents were being driven out of booths. When I visited the booths to reinstate them, TMC workers tried to prevent me — they vandalised my car." Local TMC leaders alleged that Supriyo was bringing goons to the booths to influence voting.

In Dubrajpur, central armed police forces (CAPF) personnel reportedly fired in the air to control a mob that allegedly clashed with them when they were barred from entering the booths with mobile phones. TMC spokesperson Derek O'Brien has lodged a complaint with EC on this.

ADG Gupta said, "About 145 preventive arrests were made; six bombs were recovered. FIRs have been lodged in CAPF firing incidents as well."

At 67%, Rajasthan records highest turnout for 13 seats

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, APRIL 29

RAJASTHAN ON Monday recorded its best-ever turnout in Lok Sabha elections with a tentative voting percentage of 67.7 for the 13 seats that went to polls.

The remaining 12 seats will go to polls on May 6 in the fifth phase of the election.

According to Rajasthan Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Anand Kumar, the state's previous best turnout was recorded in 2014. That year, the 13 seats that went to polls on Monday recorded 64.27 per cent voting, while the overall voting percentage was 63.11 per cent.

Barmer, where Congress candidate and son of former BJP leader Jaswant Singh Manvendra Singh is locked in a tough fight with BJP's Kailash Chaudhary, witnessed the highest

polling percentage at 73.14 per cent. The state recorded a turnout of 72.56 per cent in 2014.

CEO Kumar said that barring minor incidents, polling was "totally peaceful". In Jalore, some miscreants threw stones at the car of Congress candidate Ratan Dewasi and ballot units were allegedly damaged in Barmer and Ajmer. "We are satisfied with the voting and want to thank the people of Rajasthan for recording the highest turnout despite scorching heat," Kumar said.

Director General, Law and Order, M.L. Lather said that polling was conducted peacefully and "no untoward incident" took place.

As many as 28,402 ballot units, 28,412 control unit and 22,882 Voter Verified Paper Audit Trial (VVPAT) machines were employed for voting in the 13 seats. Among these, 49 ballot units, 49 control units and 305 VVPAT machines had to be changed.

Up late 'due to late bed tea', TMC's Sen says no idea of violence

Kolkata:

When TMC's Asansol candidate, actor-turned politician Moon Sen, was asked about alleged vandalism on Babul Supriyo's car, she said she had no knowledge of the clashes. "They provided me my bed tea very late, so I woke up quite late. What can I say? I really don't know," Sen told a news channel.

She declined to comment when asked about Supriyo's allegations. "I don't want to hear his name; bas (that's it)," she said. **ENS**



UP: 58.4% polling, SP alleges delay, EVM snags in Kannauj

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, APRIL 29

THE 13 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh that went to polls in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections on Monday recorded a turnout of 58.4 per cent.

Several complaints of faulty EVMs and VVPATs and intimidation of voters were received, mainly in Kannauj. Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) L Venkateshwarlu said all the complaints had been addressed.

Samajwadi Party MP Dimple Yadav is seeking her third term from Kannauj and is contesting against BJP candidate Subrat Pathak.

Speaking to reporters, the CEO said reports were received that due to improper handling of situation at some booths in Shahjahanpur by officials concerned, voting was delayed. While there would be an inquiry, re-polling would take place at booths where polling was delayed by more than two hours, he added.

Earlier, Samajwadi Party lodged a complaint with the CEO, alleging incidents of faulty EVMs and delay in polling in Kannauj. It was also alleged that a police officer was intimidating the voters. "It is said that on directions of senior police officers, policemen appear to be active in favour of the ruling party instead of doing their duty of ensuring fair elections," the complaint said.



At a polling booth in Quimoh in Kulgam on Monday. Shuaib Masoodi

SECOND-PHASE POLLING FOR ANANTNAG SEAT

Big security posse, few voters: at 10.3%, Kulgam fares worse than Anantnag district

ADIL AKHZER
KULGAM, APRIL 29

AT JABLIPORA village, in J&K's Kulgam district, which is part of the Anantnag Lok Sabha constituency, CRPF personnel guarding polling stations in the local government school had locked the main gate from inside after some local residents threw stones. In the afternoon, opening the gate somewhat reluctantly, a paramilitary trooper said that "only reporters", and not voters, were coming there.

By 2.45 pm, an hour before the scheduled close of polling, only five out of 3,251 votes had been cast at the school's three polling stations.

Overall, as Kulgam district voted in the second-phase polling in Anantnag on Monday, the turnout was 10.32 per cent (including migrant votes), according to J&K Election Commission.

Anantnag seat, with 16 Assembly segments, is voting in three phases. On April 23, when Anantnag district voted, the turnout was less than 14 per cent. Pulwama and Shopian districts in the constituency go to the polls on the final day — on May 6.

"One voter came around 8 am. Since then, no one has come," said an election official, appearing terrified, at 36A Jablipora polling station. That early-morning vote was the only one cast, out of 1,022 registered voters, at the station by day-end. Jablipora comes under Homshalibugh Assembly segment, which recorded 1.14-per cent polling.

In Kulgam town, the roads lay deserted — a large number of paramilitary personnel and hardly any voter seen.

At 1 pm, inside the cooperative society building in Kulgam town, 94 votes were polled out of 3,427 at four polling stations. "We were expecting a better turnout. There seems to be

a total boycott," said a polling agent outside booth number 48A in Kulgam. Out of 719 voters, 19 people had voted at this booth when reports last came in.

Kulgam district comprises the Assembly segments of Devsar, Kulgam, Noorabad and Homshalibugh.

The turnout was comparatively better in Devsar and Noorabad. At noon, 465 out of 1,943 votes had been cast at the two polling stations in Bonigam higher secondary school in Devsar. "The candidate for whom I voted has promised to bring development to our area," Mohammed Yusuf, 53, said.

By the end of the day, Devsar's turnout was 16.84 per cent, and Noorabad saw the highest polling — at 20.58 per cent.

Incidents of stone-throwing were reported from several places in the district, and Health Department officials said at least 11 people suffered injuries.

EC likely to announce repoll at 131 booths in West Tripura seat

RITIKA CHOPRA & ESHA ROY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 29

THE ELECTION Commission (EC), in all likelihood, will announce a repoll in nearly 130 polling booths of West Tripura seat — the highest for any Lok Sabha constituency in the ongoing elections.

Retired IAS officer and former Deputy Election Commissioner Vinod Zutshi, who was appointed Special Observer for Tripura on April 22, is learnt to have recommended repoll in the 131 booths, in his report to EC recently, on the ground that the "poll process was vitiated".

Repoll will be announced once "availability of adequate security forces" on "suitable dates" is worked out by the Commission, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

West Tripura voted in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections — April 11. The seat has 1,679 polling booths. EC's probe found the voting process to be vitiated in roughly 8 per cent of total booths.

Zutshi was appointed special observer to the state after both Opposition parties in Tripura — Congress and CPM — alleged "mass rigging" in the first phase. The CPM had demanded repoll in 464 booths in the constituency, which they later revised to 846 booths.

The Commission, subsequently, deferred polling for East Tripura seat from April 18 to April 23. Zutshi was tasked with overseeing voting in East Tripura and submit a report on complaints of alleged rigging, which he did recently. "Our initial estimation was 464 booths. Then we received more reports of booths being rigged or captured. On April 27, we demanded the countermanding of Tripura West

EXPLAINED

'Rigging' first confirmed in DM's report

REPORTS OF rigging were first confirmed in the report submitted by West Tripura District Magistrate Sandeep Mahatma, who detailed violations across seven Assembly segments, ranging from "intimidating" voters to cast votes in favour of a particular candidate to polling agents casting votes of voters "multiple times". The Assembly segments named in his report were Mohanpur, Kamalsagar, Charilam (ST), Dhanpur, Kakraaban-Shalgara, Rajnagar (SC) and Belonia.

election," said a CPM leader, adding that they made the fresh demand for election after they ascertained that "50 per cent voters were unable to vote on April 11". On Monday, Congress leaders Randeep Surjewala, Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Jairam Ramesh met CEC Sunil Arora and Election Commissioners Ashok Lavasa and Sushil Chandra to demand countermanding of West Tripura poll.

'Destruction of social fabric and alienation of STs big problems'

JHARKHAND CONGRESS president **DR AJAY KUMAR** speaks to **ABHISHEK ANGAD** on the party's poll prospects in the state and the key issues this election season

How many seats do you think the UPA will win in Jharkhand?

Based on surveys and feedback, I think the UPA will be able to win 9-11 seats (out of 14 seats in the state). We have an edge in Rajmahal, Dumka, Giridih, Lohardaga, Godda, Singhbhum, Khunti and Chatra. We need to be a little careful in Ranchi. In Hazaribagh and Dhanbad, we will give a good fight with our new candidates.

Will the performance of the BJP-led state government be a determining factor in the polls?

Absolutely. Schools are closing down, ration cards are being cancelled and there is joblessness. There is distress in rural areas. The destruction of the social fabric and alienation of Scheduled Tribes are big problems. People are going to vote keeping these issues in mind. Every section has been hit....

But people are saying 'Modiji ko jitana hai (We have to ensure Modi's victory)'.

The media is reaching out to people who are sitting in roadside shops or dhabas. Go to the rural areas and ask labourers....

What is your stand on the 2017-18 Patthalgadi movement that took place in the villages of Jharkhand?

The Patthalgadi movement was a reaction to atrocities. The state government reacted by booking villagers on charges of anti-national activities. An expression of distrust is what Patthalgadi people were concerned with and we respect that. There was a total disillusion-



ment with the state apparatus and we must look at the villagers as victims of oppression....

You recently said the Mahagathbandhan in Jharkhand will ensure minimum splitting of votes. But in seats like Chatra, there is a candidate from both the Congress and the RJD, which has disagreed with the seat-sharing. In Godda, there has been anguish over candidate selection, with a former MP alleging that you misled the Congress's central leadership. How will you stop splitting of votes?

In Chatra, we are going to win and there are a lot of complexities due to which the RJD is also contesting. But we are very clear that the split won't be significant... In Godda, there is no splitting, just anguish. The Jharkhand Vikas Morcha (Prajanantrik) is a partner and when we sat for negotiations, they wanted two seats — Kodarma and Godda. Former Godda MP Furkan Ansari may accuse me of anything... but there has to be logic. Also,

we don't give tickets on the basis of religion. Not having (JVM(P) president) Babulalji (Marandi) as our alliance partner would cost our vote share dearly. Let us be honest: in every election, the JVM(P) gets 60,000-70,000 votes, which is a winning margin.

The Aadhaar-based biometric authentication is mandatory for buying ration from the Jharkhand public distribution system and receiving pension among other things. This has led to exclusion of many. There have been reports of starvation and death because people could not get ration.

If our government comes to power, we will abolish the Aadhaar-based biometric authentication system. Let us imagine: out of 100, 10 people who are from the lower middle class and should not have got rice under Antodaya scheme got it... But Food Corporation of India loses million tonnes of foodgrain due to lack of storage facilities. That is okay, but people eating rice is not okay?...BJP has a sick mentality. They always blame the poor.

Recently, a mob killed a tribal Christian man in Gumla on the suspicion that he slaughtered a cow. The state Congress unit did not condemn it. Has it become a new normal among politicians to not condemn such violent acts?

No, I don't think we should ever accept it. Cow slaughter is wrong in places where it is banned. If you kill a cow, it is a crime. But if you kill a man suspected of killing a cow, it is a bigger crime. The government must take action.



WITH **DR AJAY KUMAR**
JHARKHAND CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Bogus voting at Kasaragod booth on April 23, says Kerala CEO

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
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BOGUS VOTING took place at a polling booth in Kasaragod Lok Sabha constituency when Kerala voted on April 23, Kerala Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Teeka Ram Meena said on Monday.

Meena told reporters that police cases have been recommended against three individuals — Sumaiyya KP, Saleena NP and Padmini — for voting twice in booth number 19 in Pilathara. While Sumaiyya is a former panchayat member, Saleena is a serving member of the local body. The CEO has also recommended that Saleena step down from her position and face a preliminary inquiry.

Cases against the trio would be filed under Sections 171(C), 171(D) and 171(F) of the IPC for exercising undue influence during elections and impersonation. Meena told reporters. He also sought reports from the Kasaragod district collector on allegations of bogus voting there. He said the district collector must also conduct an inquiry against polling officials present in the booth at the time.

The Congress had complained of bogus voting in favour of the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) at several booths across Kannur and Kasaragod constituencies in north Kerala. The party released web-cam footage of persons suspected to be engaged in bogus voting.

The CPM dismissed the charges, saying that the accused were actually casting 'open votes' — whereby a person is permitted to cast votes on behalf of another person who may be physically incapable of voting.