

5 DECISION 2019

THE CITY

‘Surrogate ad’: Gambhir gets notice for poll code violation

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

THE DISTRICT Election Officer (DEO) East has issued a showcause notice to BJP’s East Delhi candidate Gautam Gambhir for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct through a “surrogate advertisement” published in an English daily. The notice has also been issued to the Managing Director of Times Internet Ltd, which published the advertisement.

In the notice issued on April 29, DEO East K Mahesh said the Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) of East Delhi noticed the advertisement, which appeared on April 26 in Delhi Times promoting a cricket game app, CricPlay, along with a photo of Gambhir.

The notice said it carries the tagline ‘*Ab mere saath India khelega*’, and announced a daily cash prize for the winner of the game. “This appears to be a surrogate advertisement, which appears to have political overtures in favour of a contesting candidate of a particular political party, which is contrary to the Model Code of Conduct,” the notice said. “Now, therefore, you are directed to submit/produce documents/certification obtained from Media Certification and Monitoring Committee set up by Election Commission of India..., for the aforesaid documents on or before 4 pm of May 2, failing which it shall be presumed you have nothing to state and action in accordance with electoral laws and rules framed thereunder shall be initiated,” it further said.

Responding to the notice, Rajeev Babbar, BJP Delhi election in-charge said, “We have replied to the notice today and stated that the advertisement had not been issued by the office of Gautam Gambhir. We feel that the reply should satisfy the election officer.”

BJP has fielded Gambhir from the East Delhi parliamentary constituency, replacing sitting party MP Maheish Giri. The candidates pitted against him are AAP’s Atishi and Arvinder Singh Lovely of the Congress.

Atishi has already moved court against Gambhir, alleging that he had enrolled twice as a voter in Rajinder Nagar and Karol Bagh in violation of the Representation of the People Act. The Delhi Police Saturday had lodged a complaint against the cricketer-turned-politician for allegedly holding a public meeting in Jangpura without prior permission from authorities.

MEANWHILE

DMRC under EC fire for poll violations

New Delhi: The District Election Officer (DEO) East Tuesday issued a show-cause notice to the managing director of the DMRC for playing a video on its Pink Line showing events related to the Metro’s inauguration featuring “dignitaries from three political parties that are contesting the general elections”. This includes BJP leaders Venkaiah Naidu, Narendra Modi, Manohar Lal Khattar and the late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Congress leader Sheila Dikshit and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Responding to the notice, DMRC in a statement said, “We have received the notice... DMRC is ascertaining the facts regarding the same and accordingly, the notice will be replied to... in the given time.”

AAP didn’t deliver 67 of 70 promises: BJP

New Delhi: BJP MP Vinay Sahasrabudhe Tuesday released a manifesto review of the Aam Aadmi Party, titled ‘A tale of Betrayal’, and accused the party of not fulfilling most of its promises. Citing the report released by the Public Policy Research Centre, he said that AAP, in its 2015 manifesto for the Assembly elections, had made 70 promises but failed to deliver 67 of them.

AFTER AAP COMPLAINT

Voter IDs found dumped, poll officer tells commission postman is to blame

ARANYA SHANKAR
& RITIKA CHOPRA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

THE DELHI Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) has asked the Chief Postmaster General of the Delhi circle to “fix responsibility” for negligence in handling of voter ID cards that were allegedly found dumped in Badarpur.

The state CEO, in his report on the Aam Aadmi Party’s complaint submitted to the Election Commission (EC) on April 15, is learnt to have informed the poll panel that delivery of the voter ID cards was outsourced to a private person against the vacancy of a postman. The person, who allegedly dumped the cards instead of delivering them, has been fired on the orders of the Chief

Postmaster General.

AAP’s South Delhi candidate Raghav Chadha had written to the EC seeking an inquiry into the discovery of roughly 150 voter cards allegedly found dumped in Badarpur.

“The incident highlights a shocking... state of affairs where the best situation one can hope for is that an inquiry will discover that this was a case of officials and employees in the election machinery being slothful and careless,” Chadha had written in his letter.

Chadha had also claimed on Twitter that the voter IDs “belong to those who had applied for enrollment via AAP voter registration camps”.

The Delhi CEO was subsequently asked by the Commission to conduct an inquiry.



Around 150 cards were allegedly found dumped in Badarpur

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Delhi CEO Ranbir Singh said: “We have written to him (Chief Postmaster General) that you should



Congress’s East Delhi candidate Arvinder Singh Lovely during a road show in the constituency, Tuesday. Amit Mehra

‘Left Cong for BJP due to internal fight, will always regret that shift’

SUKRITA BARUAH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

CONGRESS’S EAST Delhi candidate Arvinder Singh Lovely talks to *The Indian Express* about his campaign strategy, the AAP-Congress tie-up saga, and his brief BJP stint.

East Delhi is in the news every day because of sparring between Atishi and Gambhir. Aren’t you being framed as the third candidate?

This is a fight between Twitter-wallahs and a man on the ground. Election is going on and both candidates are busy elsewhere — sometimes with errors in nomination papers, sometimes with election commission norms. She (Atishi) has so much time that she’s conducting a press conference every day. I don’t even have time to eat or talk to anyone. I am among the people, telling them that candidates who don’t come to you even during elections will definitely not come to you afterwards. These people are on a political picnic.

Because of the confusion over an alliance between AAP and Congress, Atishi was declared as a candidate before you were. Do you think you lost valuable campaigning time because of that?

I have been working for and in this area since the age of 15, almost over 30 years. There is not a single street where I don’t know at least a few people personally. I am told she has been at it for six months. Then why is she not on the ground? As far as the alliance is concerned... we waited for them till

NO END TO SPAT BETWEEN GAMBHIR AND ATISHI

New Delhi: BJP’s East Delhi candidate Gautam Gambhir told a news outlet that he does not believe in “dharma and debates”, in response to a call for a debate on development in East Delhi by AAP’s candidate Atishi. In response to this, she tweeted, “Gautam Gambhir ji, if you don’t believe in debates, then why have you entered politics? Delhi government is opening a cricket academy, you can run that. There you will have no need to debate on issues.”

the end. Our cadre were completely against the alliance... Despite that, Rahul Gandhi looked at the national perspective and thought it shouldn’t appear that the Congress considers itself above allying with small parties. We said we would do it in Delhi but their greed didn’t reduce and reached Haryana, Goa and Punjab. It doesn’t work that way.

Gambhir is also portraying himself as a local leader and speaking on local issues.

A couple of days ago, Gambhir went to Trilokpuri, and I also went there the other day. In this heat, he could only be there for half an hour. I did a *padyatra* for six hours. People in Trilokpuri know this is the differ-

ence between someone trying to portray himself as a ground person and someone who is really one.

Do you feel your support base eroded because of your temporary shift to BJP?

I left for a few months and that was because of internal fights and not ideological differences. I will always regret that shift. When I joined back after a few months, I said I was an ideological misfit in BJP. I can’t compromise with my ideology and I’m a generational Congressman. I myself am a member of a minority, there is no place for us in that party. Everybody knows it was a temporary action taken in a situation of anger.

You had left the party because of disagreements with Ajay Maken. What is your equation with him now?

Ajay ji and I are on good terms now. Congress leaders are putting up a united face in Delhi. All group leaders are contesting this time — Maken ji, Sheila ji, JP Agarwal. This is the first time Congress is putting up a united face and we do hope Delhi will see changes.

You’re the only Sikh candidate in the fray in Delhi. Do you feel the community is under-represented in terms of candidates?

Not just Delhi, I’m the only Sikh candidate in the entire country outside Punjab; but I have never done community politics. I have never been known as a Sikh leader. I have an equal following amongst Muslims. I am more Jain than Sikh — in Jain functions, I am the most invited politician.

conduct an inquiry into the matter and fix responsibility, and send a report. I have also directed Mr Satnam Singh (Special CEO) to standardise the procedure and lay down SOPs and also put in place a monitoring mechanism so that such a thing doesn’t happen in the future. I asked him to do this jointly with the Postmaster General, so that both the postal department and our centre work in tandem and it is closely monitored.”

According to Satnam Singh, out of the 147 cards in question, 132 have been distributed to the respective voters and that the CEO’s office is trying to figure out addresses of the remaining 15.

“They have promised that within one week, they will conduct an inquiry and submit the report. However, we haven’t received anything from them yet. But they

have terminated the services of the person who was supposed to distribute these voter I-cards. He was not a government servant or a postman. They had hired a private entity against the vacancy of a postman,” said Singh.

“We also held a meeting with them. One nodal officer each has been assigned in our office as well as theirs. The applicant will be informed of the process through text messages — like when their card has been dispatched and delivered,” he added.

The District Election Officer (South East) Harleen Kaur had in her enquiry found that the negligence was on part of the postman of Badarpur post office, who was given the task of delivering the cards. A complaint in this regard was also lodged with the Delhi Police.

AAP’s New Delhi man says voters angry with Lekhi, Kejriwal work will pay off

SHIVAM PATEL
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

AAP’S NEW Delhi candidate Brijesh Goyal Tuesday claimed voters were angry with incumbent BJP MP Meenakshi Lekhi as she did not address the sealing issue. Goyal was campaigning in Paharganj, where he said the contest for Lok Sabha seats in Delhi was between the BJP and AAP. He said the Congress had lost its base and that a vote for the party will be a wasted vote.

“People are very angry with Lekhi because she has been absent from the constituency for five years... They are voting after considering the work done by Arvind Kejriwal in terms of electricity, water, education and health...”

If elected, Goyal said he would address issues such as sealing, women’s safety, unemployment, parking, and problems with pension of civil servants in his constituency.

He also said that if the state government wishes, it could provide relief to traders from sealing by introducing an ordinance and making amendments to the Delhi Master Plan 2021, which lays down planning guidelines for socio-economic activities in the city. However, in the bylanes of Paharganj’s Mantolla Mohalla and Tel Mandi, where Goyal was campaigning, locals and shop owners aired sanitation and improper sewage system among their concerns.

Amit (30), who owns a general store and a tailoring business in Mantolla, said lowering electricity charges was the only good thing the AAP government has done: “Sanitation and a proper sewage system is a big problem here. Our drains get choked during rain, leading to water logging. Our MLA and the MCD

For Sahib Singh Verma’s son, campaigning runs in the family

ABHINAV RAJPUT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

AHEAD OF BJP West Delhi candidate and incumbent MP Parvesh Sahib Singh’s visit Monday, Deep Enclave in Vikas Nagar was decorated with BJP flags and balloons.

As Singh, son of former CM and Jat leader Sahib Singh Verma, arrived in his Fortuner, the streets were too narrow for his car to pass through. Addressing residents, he said, “*Ye Desh ka chunao hai, humare aapke bachhe sena me bharti hote hain, aur humein aisi sarkar chunni chahiye jisse humari sena surakshit ho.*”

During the rally, he spoke to each worker and garlanded them: “I learnt the initial lessons of campaigning from my father. Workers are the most important people in

NEW DELHI

Incumbent MP: Meenakshi Lekhi

Total voters	16,10,864
Male	8,92,465
Female	7,18,352
Third gender	47

Vote share in 2014 Lok Sabha polls

Party	Candidate	Votes polled
BJP	Meenakshi Lekhi	46.73%
AAP	Ashish Khetan	29.96%
Congress	Ajay Maken	18.50%

Candidates this year

BJP	Meenakshi Lekhi
AAP	Brijesh Goyal
Congress	Ajay Maken

keep blaming each other, nothing gets done.”

Pavan Chhabra (48), who runs a family-owned cloth business, said the area was poorly maintained despite being popular among international tourists. “The government should do something... Paharganj is famous across the world, it should look like a place that’s worthy of it,” he said.

Laxman Singh Bhandari (70), who paints idols and makes artwork in his shop in Tel Mandi, wondered what benefit full statehood will have for financially weaker sections of society: “Our backs were broken after introduction of GST and demonetisation. There is a lot of unemployment in the area and people are not able to sustain themselves.”

My target is to reach the areas of as many workers as possible as it motivates them... It is impossible to reach every citizen in such less time. In such a scenario, at least workers will ensure votes.”

Hitting out at the AAP government, he said: “Many complain of pollution-related diseases, but this government does not allow you to avail the benefits of Ayushman Bharat. But your son will ensure that after forming a government at the Centre, we will also form a government in the state and get your work done.”

Singh is up against Congress’s Purvanchali face Mahabal Mishra and AAP’s Balbir Jakhar in the constituency. On sewage issues raised by people, Singh said: “This is the condition of several unauthorised colonies. They come under the Delhi government, which keeps extending their unauthorised status but never solves problems.”

OUTREACH PROGRAMME

Sanitation workers, expected to encourage voting, say fix pay woes first

SOURAV ROY BARMAN
NEW DELHI, APRIL 30

A POLL official asked them to clap, and they did for a few minutes. He announced from the stage that it was an occasion to celebrate the country’s “biggest festival”, the general elections. After a brief pause, the official asked them to clap again. This time, they were celebrating their “hardwork” that keeps cities clean, the speaker said.

By then, there were a few murmurs. “We fulfill our duties every year, even if we are ill. We go out and vote, but what have we got in return? They can’t even pay us on time,” said Sunita, who belongs to the Valmiki commu-

nity. A resident of Shakarpur, Sunita, a widow with a family of four, was among a few hundred sanitation workers working under the North Delhi Municipal Corporation who were brought together by the North West District election office for a voter awareness campaign.

“I have been working as a *safai karamchari* since 1999. I used to get Rs 2,500 initially and now my salary is Rs 12,000. But we are never paid before the 28th of a month. How do we run our families?” she asked, standing next to her son Rakesh (24).

For district authorities, there are reasons to worry. In the 2014 polls, North West registered the lowest turnout among all seven constituencies. Tapan Jha, nodal officer (SVEEP and media cell) of the constituency, said, ex-



At a voter awareness campaign by the North-West District election office

plaining the need to rope in as many people as possible to spread awareness. “The idea is simple: Each *safai karamchari* covers an area that has at least 100-150 families. We want their involvement in raising awareness about the need to vote. Recently, we roped in ASHA workers as well,” Jha told *The Indian Express*.

While the initiative is noble, sanitation workers like Sunita, who turned up in large numbers at a municipal school in Rohini’s Sector 3, were not impressed. “We were told there will be *jaanch-partial* (discussion) about our work and regularisation of jobs. But officials came and went after giving speeches. We just ended up spending Rs 200 to get here,” Seema, who has been a sanitation worker since 1997, said.

Rakesh explained how the contractual nature of his mother’s job prevents them from taking loans. “We stay in an unauthorised colony, so we can’t even mortgage the house for a loan. These are issues that matter. We will vote in any case,” he said.

Geeta, who came from Nangloi, said her two months’ salary is pending. Surender Kumar (35), a sanitation worker since 1996, said he had come expecting that the meeting will be a step towards resolving their pending issues. “I was told I will be given a hearing about regularisation and payments on time. Someone also told me that our fingerprints will be taken to ensure that our contracts are not ended. The workers’ unions fool us like this all the time,” Kumar, a father of three, said.

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‘If not Modi, they’ll back anyone... there is a BJP base... But not enough to win’

P VAIIDYANATHANIYER

WITH THE Congress having clawed its way to a win in Madhya Pradesh in December 2018, despite the BJP’s 15 years in power, more than just putting up a good performance in the Lok Sabha polls (the BJP had won 27 of 29 in 2014) is at stake for CM Kamal Nath. His son is making his poll debut from his bastion of Chhindwara, while Kamal Nath is himself contesting from an Assembly segment under it. Kamal Nath spoke to *The Indian Express* hours before boarding a flight from Bhopal to receive Congress chief Rahul Gandhi at Khajuraho:

You claim the Congress will triple its overall tally in the Lok Sabha elections. How do you see that happening?
In the 2014 elections, the BJP had polled 31% of the votes. And they say they have a national mandate. Can they get the same 31% again? That’s the first point. The second point is Mr Modi stands totally exposed. All his promises — Rs 15 lakh (in accounts), jobs, *acheche din* — all that (turned out to be) a hoax. And that has a rebound effect. I am touring the state every day for the last one month. I see the sense on the ground, with a 40-year experience in electoral politics, that people are keeping quiet. There is a sense of not disenchantment alone, but anger. No voter wants to be thugged. And they (the BJP) are talking national security, nationalism! Elections have become very localised. Of

course, every Indian is a nationalist... As if the country was unsafe earlier, when Rajiv Gandhi was PM, Manmohan Singh was PM, Indira Gandhi was PM. The most sordid terror attacks have happened under BJP governments. I was in Parliament when the attack (on the House) took place. When Kargil happened, whose government was it? Now, the Pulwama attack... the BJP should be apologetic about it... Instead, they are saying we did this strike. Until now, the country doesn’t know what kind of response it was.

But the Congress seems to be bothered about the PM’s national security narrative.
We must remember that the armed forces were created by Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The Sainik Schools, Military Academy, National Defence Academy... did Mr Modi build them?

Has the fielding of Pragya Singh Thakur by the BJP queered the pitch for the Congress?
She joined the BJP a day before filing nomination. The BJP wants to use her to send a message of division, of Hindutva. These are the cards they have left to play. And these are dangerous cards to play. They don’t care about dividing the country. They divided the RBI, the judiciary, the CBI. So it’s a mindset.

Could Digvijaya Singh, the Congress candidate from Bhopal, have avoided sharing the stage where a book was launched stating that the RSS was



behind the 26/11 Mumbai attack?
I don’t know what he said... What’s the narrative in Bhopal? It’s not development, not progress. They have shifted the narrative to arousing religious sentiments. How many people are going to fall for this?... She (Thakur) doesn’t have anything to say, she just says ‘*Ram ke naam pey vote doh. Hindu ke naam pey vote doh* (Give vote in the name of Ram, Hindu)’.

What, according to you, is the best-case scenario for the Congress in MP?
We should win 22 seats out of 29.
But people seem to be choosing based on two different considerations, for the state, and the Centre?
I don’t see any Modi votes, people voting for Modi as they did in 2014. Eighty per cent

of the people who voted for him are so disenchanted. There is a BJP base vote. If not Modi, they will support anyone from the party. Madhya Pradesh is a hardcore BJP state, L K Advani said it in his book, as the laboratory of Hindutva, of the RSS. There is a BJP base vote, but that is not enough to result in a seat.

Even in the Assembly polls though, the BJP vote share was higher.
But this vote share is total percentage. If you take three seats away, take away (former CM) Shivraj Singh’s seat... Somebody wins by 50,000 seats, if you add it to the total vote share, it gives you a wrong reading.
The Congress is seen as a party of dynasts? Your son Nakul is himself contesting.
The people of Chhindwara, who have voted for me for 40 years, they are the ones who said Nakul must contest. I was not pushing Nakul down their throats. If that was so, people wouldn’t vote (for him). Why should political parties be so concerned about dynasty as the media, because in the end, it is the people who are voting... What about Rajnath Singh, and so many others in the BJP?

About the farm loan waiver, the refrain in Rajgarh seems to be that they haven’t received it, and are not sure if they will.
It has been 180 days since our government came to power. I had 75 days before the model code of conduct kicked in. Roughly, of the 50 lakh farmers for which I started the loan waiver, loans of 21 lakh have been waived... When a farmer sees ‘*Uska ho gaya, mera nahin hua*’ (His has happened, mine hasn’t), I tell them yours too will get done.

SEEN & HEARD PRAGYA SINGH THAKUR VOTING ON MAY 12

On Pragya trail, prayers, temple visits, Pulwama, but all down ultimately to ‘deshdrohi’ Digvijaya

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, SEHORE, APRIL 30

“HOW’S THE *josh*?” calls out a middle-aged man, who identifies himself as Madhugiri ‘Modi’ (the suffix added for the Prime Minister), and as the Karnataka president of the ‘Hindu Samrat Dharmasene’. Seated on a raised platform in the middle of Bhopal’s busy New Market, Madhugiri is waiting for Pragya Singh Thakur to arrive for her last meeting of the day.
“High sir, high sir!” respond friends Sunil Kumar Thakur, Shashikant Sharma and Piyush Tripathi, who have also come from Karnataka to lend support to the BJP candidate from Bhopal.
The quartet then break into slogans, among others, of ‘*Hindu Dharma Ki Jai*’, drawing the attention of bystanders. “We work for Hindutva, not for any party,” insist the four, two of them sporting saffron tees with Pragya Thakur’s face.
Posing for selfies with local Bajrang Dal activists, they, at one point, introduce themselves as part of the NaMo (Narendra Modi) brigade. Madhugiri adds he has nearly 200 police cases against him.
Asked whether they were on leave from work, the four say no. “We are on duty of the nation.” So did they first hear about Pragya Thakur after the Malegaon case? They are a little cagey, before saying, “Anyone who is Hindu has heard about her.”
Around 9 pm, Thakur arrives in an Innova and gets into an e-rickshaw for a round of the market’s narrow lanes. Some respond enthusiastically, others look on impassively. Getting down, she goes into a shop to appeal for votes, and then covers a stretch of 300 metres on foot. While one of the grounds for bail for the Malegaon terror accused was that she was ailing, leaving her in no condition to walk, Thakur doesn’t seem to be in any discomfort.
As the clock ticks towards the Election Commission’s campaigning deadline of 10 pm, Thakur is helped on to the raised platform. Sitting BJP Bhopal MP Alok Sanjar tells the crowd that a vote for Thakur would achieve three victories: “Yours, for choosing nationalism; the BJP candidate’s and Modi’s”



Malegaon blast accused Pragya Singh Thakur campaigning in Bhopal on Saturday. PTI
— a “buy two get one free” scheme.
Thakur begins with a prayer, a ritual at all her rallies. Calling her fight a battle between *dharma* and *adharma*, she says, “It’s an eternal truth that *dharma* always triumphs.” Her Congress rival Digvijaya Singh is an “*amachari*, *papachari*, *bhrashtachari* and *deshdrohi* (uncivil, sinful, corrupt and a traitor)”, she adds.
Accusing him of coining the term “*bhagwa aatankwad* (saffron terror)”, she says Digvijaya prefixes names of terrorists with “ji”.
About herself, the 49-year-old says as a *sanyasi*, she owns and earns nothing. “If we start earning, who will live and die for the nation?” she says, as the crowd claps. Wrapping up her speech by praising schemes of the Modi and previous BJP governments, she heads to the Hanuman temple nearby.
Thakur’s elder sister Upma, who has been by her side lately, grumbles about the long day and asks a BJP leader if it’s necessary to show up at a newly inaugurated campaign office at this hour.
Next morning, by 9, the media is already crowded around a bungalow that has been rented for Thakur, who is from Lahar in

Bhind. But soon word spreads that the candidate is running late. A new door-frame metal detector, additional security and an entry register are new acquisitions to regulate access to Thakur.
The first to emerge is Upma, referred to as ‘*didi*’, who squeezes her way out through the waiting media. It’s another 20 minutes before Thakur emerges, taking just one question.
Her first halt is a Hanuman temple, a different one from the night before. Offering prayers from outside, she asks for a flower from inside the temple. One of the two men who are always with her, helping her climb stairs and raised platforms, rushes in, removing his shoes on the run.
At 11.25 am in Fanda, she addresses a group of less than 20 seated in the car. But the people are overwhelmed. “Our *saansad* (Sanjar) was good. You too will be good,” says a villager. There is a round of selfies with her.
At Sehore, where Thakur holds her first meeting for the day, Sanjar says she was “tortured for nine years” in jail. “I salute the BJP leadership for fielding her. I won by 3.71 lakh votes, make her win by five lakh.” He goes on

to say Thakur speaks like Goddess Saraswati.
Thakur too talks about her jail time, and again slams Digvijaya. Touching briefly on the locals’ concern about shut factories, she blames Digvijaya for their closure.
Leaving in an open vehicle, the 49-year-old next makes a roadside halt at Jamonia Talab, apologising for reaching late. “I have been hearing about her from the day she went to jail,” says Jitendra Tyagi, a villager. As she leaves, the crowd shouts “Modi Modi”.
The temperature is now around 42 degrees, and with the heat keeping crowds small, Thakur touches upon the matter at her meeting in Raipura, underlining her “asceticism”. Hearing her at Mungavali, Thakur’s next stop, a villager named Prakash Sharma says, “*Bachcha bhi khada hoga toh jitega* (Even a child fielding by the BJP from here would win).”
At a 4 pm meeting in Doraha, a preacher known for her provocative speeches at VHP meetings, Sadhvi Saraswati, joins Thakur on the stage. Briefly talking about triple talaq, Thakur says, “No true *Mussalman*, Christian or Hindu will go against one’s country.”
Taking a break for just over 30 minutes, Thakur again hits the road around 5.45 pm, making her way first to Ahmadpur. Kallu Khan, a villager standing in the crowd, is not sure who she is. “Is Shivraj Singh Chouhan not contesting?” he asks. The BJP is said to have offered Chouhan, the former chief minister of the state, who was popular across communities, the Bhopal ticket, but he refused.
Addressing small gatherings in Charnal and Sultanpura over the next 90 minutes, Thakur admits she has come here for the first time. But, she claims, she had gone to school and college, as well as to jail, in Bhopal.
In Padiyala and Bamuliya, she tells people they must have heard of “*bhagwa aatankwad*”. When that doesn’t resonate, she says “*Hindu aatankwad*”. When even this doesn’t work, she resorts to talking about Digvijaya.
It’s just half an hour for the 10 pm deadline now, and the organisers have their eye on the watch. Thakur’s last speech for the day, at Shyampur, is rushed. As the organisers pack up, a bystander quips, “*Ho gaya sabzi bazaar khatma* (The vegetable market has shut)” — likening the commotion to the temporary market in that space during the day.



Rajammal (right), a weaver for over 50 years, is the AITUC vice-president. Amrith Lal

In ADMK stronghold hit by GST, note ban, will ‘silent rage’ overtake caste noise?

Her brother, Palanisami, a realtor, also supports Modi, saying demonetisation was a “cure”, and that when the disease is grave, the medicine will be bitter.
Hosiery is just one part of the Tiruppur story. This town lives in the shadow of Coimbatore, a manufacturing and education hub. The Noyyal, that connects the two cities, is now a stinking reminder of the ecological cost of the industry boom. Farmers in the Noyyal basin fought for their river in the courts and forced the industry to set up STPs.
The Tiruppur constituency stretches from the Noyyal to the Cauvery in the north, and much of it is rural. The Federation of Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists Association has fielded a candidate, L Kathiresan, who taught at NIFT, Tiruppur, before turning an entrepreneur.
The Association has nearly three lakh members. One of its leaders, Nallasamy, says they chose to field a candidate in Tiruppur since it is home to people from all over Tamil Nadu.
Nallasamy isn’t impressed with what Modi and Rahul are offering to farmers. He calls for an Agriculture Commission on the lines of the Pay Commission. Cauvery water, substitution of farm imports by local produce, “inclusion of domestic edible oils in the PDS system”, revival of water sources, are prominent on Nallasamy’s list of demands.
At Bhavani, where the

ACROSS A NATION

LENGTH &
KARGIL KANYAKUMARI

BREADTH
PORBANDAR PASIGHAT

2 LINES, OVER 7000 KM
30 DATELINES, 15 STATES

Bhavani joins the Cauvery, Siddaiyyan, an AITUC leader, has a different set of concerns. He heads a union of weavers who make handloom *durries* (*jamukkalam*s). It’s a 100-year-old industry that has GIS certification and employs nearly 30,000 people. “We were outside the tax net and then 18% GST was imposed. It has since been reduced to 5% but, as a handloom sector, there should be no tax on us,” Siddaiyyan says. GST is only the most recent blow to the industry. The Tamil Nadu government hasn’t revised wages since 1994.

Rajammal, the AITUC vice-president who has been a weaver for over 50 years, warns that the profession may become extinct. It takes two weavers a day-and-a-half to weave a 15-ft-by-8-ft *durrie*. They earn Rs 400 for it.
At Vaniputhur, in the northern edge of the constituency, DMK cadre are confident Subbarayan will win. Lilavati, a DMK leader, however, is concerned the AIADMK will “buy voters”. Pointing at the CPI candidate, she says, “He neither takes money nor gives.”
The AIADMK has won Tiruppur since its inception. In 2014, the AIADMK front (including the AIADMK, DMDK and BJP) had polled over seven lakh votes. In contrast, the DMK and allies Congress and CPI had got just 2.86 lakh votes. In the 2016 state elections, the AIADMK had won all six Assembly segments.
The AIADMK front this time represents a coalition of politically dominant Gounders and Vanniyar castes.
But standing at Gokul Tea Stall in Tiruppur town, outside a new hosiery unit, old mill-hand Kuppusswamy says things are about to change. Taking a puff from his *beedi*, he says, “*Saar!* There is a silent rage all around. It will become a storm.”

THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER JHARKHAND

In Pathalgadi areas, villagers say why vote if seen as anti-national by govt

ABHISHEK ANGAD
KHUNTI, APRIL 30

ONE APRIL MORNING, tribals of the Munda community held an emergency gram sabha meeting at Ghaghra village in Khunti district of Jharkhand. After a few hours, they arrived at a decision: they would boycott the coming election. After all, said one of those who turned up at the meeting, “All these years we have voted and only been exploited in return”.
Ghaghra is one of 100-odd villages in Khunti that were part of the Pathalgadi movement in 2017-18, when stone plaques had come up outside villages, declaring the gram sabha as the only sovereign authority.
Over the next couple of years, following a crackdown and the arrest of top Pathalgadi leaders, the movement has largely petered

out. Yet, the fault lines have persisted. Now, with days left for May 6, when the Khunti Lok Sabha seat votes, the bitterness following the crackdown on the movement has resurfaced.
The BJP has not given a ticket to incumbent MP Kariya Munda and instead fielded Arjun Munda, who has been thrice Jharkhand CM and who will take on mahagathbandhan candidate, Kalicharan Munda of the Congress.
Activist Kalyan Nag, who works for tribal rights in Khunti, says parties must take note of their anger. “We can debate the correctness of the boycott, but if people start rejecting candidates because they think that they will be exploited, it’s not healthy for democracy.”
The rival parties, however, said they were confident people would turn out to vote.
“It is a shame for the government if some people are not voting. We are sure that our candidate will respect them,” said Jharkhand



A stone plaque outside Haradlama village in Khunti. Abhishek Angad

EXPLAINED

Numbers low but anger counts

THE PATHALGADI movement saw widespread protest in Adivasi areas. Although the number of voters is significantly less vis-à-vis the total number of electors in Khunti, the simmering anger over State ‘repression’ is a poll issue

Congress spokesperson Rajesh Thakur.
BJP spokesperson Pradeep Sinha dismissed the boycott call, saying, “People who are boycotting anyway don’t support the BJP, so there is nothing to lose... The BJP’s vote bank in Khunti will not be affected.”
In 2014, the Khunti Lok Sabha constituency, with 11.1 lakh electors, had recorded a turnout of 66.34 per cent.
In 2018, the Pathalgadi movement had taken its first violent turn in Ghaghra village. On June 26 that year, angry over police raids against one of their leaders, Pathalgadi supporters in Ghaghra and neighbouring areas had held a protest. Police had detained a few, following which Pathalgadi supporters abducted three guards and a policeman from the residence of Kariya Munda in Anigara. When talks failed, police had cracked down, resulting in the death of one person.

Following the incident, cases had been registered against several villagers. With its men, including the sarpanch, still in jail, Ghaghra remains wary of the administration and its representatives.
Talking of why they decided to boycott the election, a villager said: “They want to force development on us, but we want to be consulted first. The government says we are *deshdrohis* (anti-nationals), then why should we vote? If we say that the district administration should not enter without our permission, it is because we have been exploited enough.”
Asked of their expectations from the government, the villager, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said, “*Pehle hamare logon ko jail se rihna kare, phir baat kareng*e (First they should get our people out of jail, then we will talk).”

7 DECISION 2019



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra interacts with people in Amethi on Tuesday. *PTI*

Priyanka: Didn't pull out of Varanasi contest

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, APRIL 30

CONGRESS GENERAL secretary in charge of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who was in Amethi Tuesday campaigning for her brother Rahul Gandhi, clarified that she did not pull out of contesting from Varanasi and instead, followed the instruction of the party.

She said that Congress candidates who are waiting for her to campaign in their constituencies would be "disappointed" if she focused only on one constituency. "I didn't pull out. I took the advice of senior leaders and my colleagues in Uttar Pradesh. They firmly felt that I have a responsibility of looking after 41 seats and all the candidates still waiting for me to go to their constituencies. They would be disappointed if I focused only on one place." Priyanka told reporters in Amethi when asked why did she pulled out of contesting from Varanasi.

Whether the decision not to contest from Varanasi sent a wrong signal, she said, "No. I didn't think so. I said from the beginning that I would follow what my party says. My party decided this and I am happy to follow their instructions."

When asked if Rahul was contesting from Wayanad because he was feeling insecure in Amethi, Priyanka said that he just went with the demand of people from the South.

Both Congress, BJP misusing central agencies: Mayawati

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, APRIL 30

ALLEGING THAT the Congress and BJP were misusing central agencies such as CBI, Enforcement Directorate and the Intelligence Bureau, BSP chief Mayawati Tuesday said it was time for those raising the 'Namo Namo' chant to go as those saying 'Jai Bhim' would come to power after the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a rally in Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituency in support of the alliance's nominee CL Verma as well as Lucknow candidate Poonam Sinha, Mayawati said that while B R Ambedkar made legislation for progress, the central and state governments did not implement those laws properly.

She alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was mostly busy doing "chowkidaari" of capitalists and said that his "drama" and "jumblebaazi" (rhetoric) was not going to work any longer.

Poonam Sinha and CL Verma were present on the dais. While Sinha would be contesting against BJP candidate Rajnath Singh and Congress candidate Acharya Pramod Krishnan, Verma is pitted against BJP sitting MP Kaushal Kishore and Congress candidate RK Chaudhary in Mohanlalganj.

Earlier in the day, Mayawati addressed a rally in Dhaurahra Lok Sabha constituency in support of alliance candidate Arshad Siddiqui and Lakhimpur Kheri candidate Poorvi Verma. While Arshad is fighting against BJP's Rekha Verma and Congress party's Jatin Prasad, Poorvi is contesting

SEAT WATCH BARRACKPORE, WEST BENGAL

Decade after TMC wrested CPM bastion, BJP throws challenge by fielding ex-Trinamool MLA

SWEETY KUMARI
KOLKATA, APRIL 30

EVEN AS veteran Trinamool Congress leader and former railway minister Dinesh Trivedi aims for a third term from Barrackpore, the BJP has thrown a challenge by fielding former TMC leader Arjun Singh, a four-time MLA from the area.

Located about 25 km from Kolkata, Barrackpore Lok Sabha constituency is an industrial belt on the eastern bank of the Hooghly. Trivedi, a trained pilot and MBA from the US, first won the seat in 2009, wresting it from the CPM which had won Barrackpore nine times since 1951.

The political equations changed with the TMC's Singh, a trade unionist, joining the BJP in March. A Hindi-speaking local strongman, Singh is the MLA from Bhatpara under Barrackpore Lok Sabha seat, which has a sizeable population of Hindi-speaking settlers from other states.

"Trivedi is a good Parliamentarian, who ended the CPM's hold on Barrackpore. While the TMC remains strong in the area, the BJP

Modi: Party that can't have Oppn leader in LS dreams of having PM

MAULSHREE SETH & SANTOSH SINGH

LUCKNOW, MUZAFFARPUR, APRIL 30

TAKING A dig at the Congress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said a party that does not have adequate numbers to get a Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha is dreaming to see its leader take over as the Prime Minister following the elections.

He maintained that like the 2014 general election, the people are not ready to make any Leader of Opposition this time as well.

"Jo log 50-55 seat lekar ke vipaksh ka neta bananey ki sthiti mein nahi hai woh pradhan mantri banne ke liye darji ke paas kapde sila rahay hai (Those who are not even in the position to become the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha with 50-55 seats are today getting clothes stitched to become the PM)," Modi said at a rally in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh.

The Prime Minister on Tuesday also addressed rallies in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki and in Bihar's Muzaffarpur.

At the UP rallies, Modi asked people to vote for the BJP to get "rashtriya suraksha (national security)". He said, "130 crore Bharat-vaasion ki suraksha ke liye hum kahin par bhi ghus karke maar sakte hain.... Modi sahi kar raha hai? Aap khush hain? (For the security of 130 crore Indians, we can kill by entering anywhere. Is Modi doing the right thing or not? Are you happy or not?)"

He told the gathering in Bahraich to keep in mind that when terror strikes, places of religious belief such as the "Awadh region", comprising the "Ramayan circuit" and "Buddha circuit", become the first targets.

The Prime Minister, who will be in Ayodhya on Wednesday, alleged that the SP, BSP and the Congress cannot fight terrorism.

"Abhi apko mandiron mein, bazaaron mein, railway station par, bus station par bam dhamake ki khabrein nahi sunayi deti. Yeh dhamake bandh huay ki nahi huay? Yeh Modi ke dar ke karan bandh hua hai (Do you hear



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with UP Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma and other BJP leaders at a rally in Barabanki district, on Tuesday. *PTI*

news of blasts at temples, markets, railway or bus stations any longer? Have these bomb blasts stopped or not? They have stopped due to the fear of Modi.)"

Questioning whether the Congress, which has promised to take away special rights of the Army (AFSPA, which empowers the forces in insurgency-hit areas), can even fight terrorism, Modi said, "Yeh wo log hai jo aatank ke gola-barood mein bhi bhagwa dhundne ki koshish karte hain (These are people who look for saffron even in blasts and explosions)."

Without naming the Congress, he alleged that "sleepers cells" of terror outfits grew across the country during "their" regime.

Taking the attack to the SP and BSP, "Can the SP and BSP give you a strong government? Is there any possibility of that?"

In Muzaffarpur, referring to the district's famed litchis and mangoes, Modi said their sweetness may well have left a bitter taste in

the mouth of Opposition leaders.

"The NDA has a clear-cut policy. But do they (Opposition leaders) ever tell you at their rallies what their policies are? Their only interest is in getting more numbers (in Lok Sabha) and engage in corrupt practices," he maintained.

Referring to the extradition of Christian Michel, the alleged middleman in the AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam, Modi said, "Abhi Michel-mama aaye hai, aur bhi chacha, kaka hai wo aayenge (We have extradited only Christian Michel. Many more will be back soon)."

While he did not elaborate on the scam, the Prime Minister said each paisa looted from the poor has to be accounted for.

Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar, Union minister and LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan and Bihar deputy Chief Minister Sushil Modi of the BJP shared the dais with the Prime Minister.

Her Guna candidate joins Cong, Maya says will review support

MILIND GHATAWAI
BHOPAL, APRIL 30

BSP PRESIDENT Mayawati has accused the Congress government in Madhya Pradesh of forcibly winning over the BSP's Guna Lok Sabha candidate and threatened to "reconsider" continuing support to the Kamal Nath government in the state.

BSP candidate Lokendra Singh Rajput on Monday joined the Congress and extended his support to Jyotiraditya Scindia, the Congress candidate for Guna, which goes to the polls in the penultimate phase on May 12. Scindia is also Congress in-charge of western Uttar Pradesh.

Mayawati on Tuesday alleged that the Congress was equally bad when it comes to misuse of official machinery. Without elaborating, she alleged that the Congress intimidated the BSP's Guna candidate to withdraw his candidature. "The BSP will respond by contesting on its symbol and will review its decision to extend support to the Congress government (MP)," she tweeted.

Hours after her tweet, Chief Minister Kamal Nath said the BSP and Congress have a common aim to defeat the BJP. "Our target is one, our ideology is one. There are no differences between us. If there's any misunderstanding we will sit together and resolve it. There is no resentment," he said.

However, Mayawati also accused the Congress of working to defeat the BSP-SP coalition in UP. She claimed the Congress has taken a line that "let the BJP win but the BSP-



Mayawati accused Cong of intimidating Lokendra Singh Rajput to withdraw his candidature

SP coalition should not win". She said it reflects on the Congress's "casteist, narrow and duplicitous character". Only the BSP-SP coalition can defeat the BJP, she said, warning the people against the Congress.

The defection was embarrassing for the BSP supremo as she was set to address a rally in Guna on May 4. Posters about the same had been distributed and the announcement made on social media.

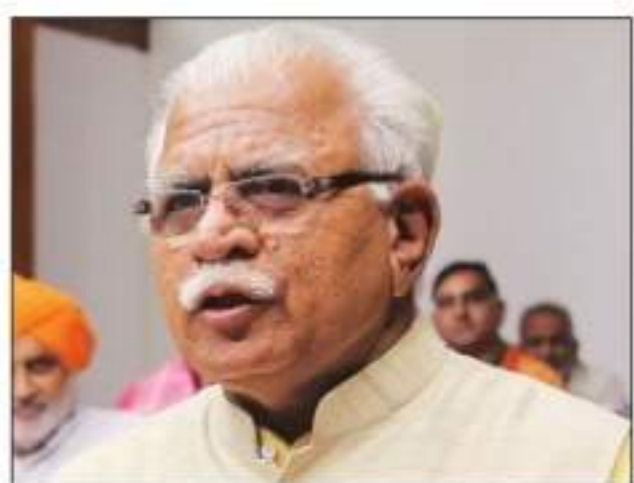
While joining the Congress, Rajput said that he was impressed by Scindia and wanted to work for him. He said the Congress did not target him and he shifted his loyalty of his own volition.

Meanwhile, Scindia's close aide Pankaj Chaturvedi denied the allegation that official machinery had been misused to win over the BSP candidate. He said Rajput was impressed with Scindia and policies of the Congress and decided to make the switch.

The BSP won two seats in the recent Assembly elections. Its MLAs, along with four Independents and one SP legislator, helped the Congress form the government. The Congress got 114 seats while the BJP won 109 seats in the 230-member house.

'Cong, INLD organisation weak; BJP immensely strong even at grassroots'

HARYANA CHIEF Minister **MANOHAR LAL KHATTAR**, who is leading the BJP's campaign across the state, is confident that his party will decimate the Opposition in Haryana, where all 10 seats go to the polls on May 12. Excerpts from an interview conducted with **VARINDER BHATTIA** over the phone:



BJP was not a major player in Haryana until 2014. Can you really expect the same result — 7 out of 10 Lok Sabha seats this time?

In 2014, the people were fed up of the Congress's corruption and misgovernance and the BJP had pledged to uproot such a government. Amid a strong Narendra Modi wave across the country, the BJP gave two seats to ally HJC (Haryana Janhit Congress) in Haryana. Out of eight seats the BJP contested, we won seven. This is a fit example that the BJP is on top of people's mind in the Lok Sabha polls.

This time, the BJP on its own will win all 10 seats in Haryana. Besides being in power, the BJP is in a strong position in all districts of the state. While traditional political parties such as the Congress and the INLD have failed in their organisational structures, the BJP has become immensely strong down to the grassroots level.

During your tenure, there were three major law and order problems, which the administration was unable to control — Rampal's arrest, the Jat agitation, and the Dera Sacha Sauda chief's arrest. Will this not work against the BJP in 2019?

Giving preference to the safety of the people, the BJP government implemented the court's directions, arrested Rampal and produced him in court. Similarly, it was the government's responsibility to implement the court's directions and produce Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim in court with minimum possible damage.

As far as the Jat agitation is concerned, it was the result of the mindset of certain people with vested political interests. For the first time in Haryana, a government, accepting the demands of a particular community, completed all procedural formalities in a constructive manner and assured to take up the matter with the Centre. Yet, there was violence. At that time too, the government's priority was to re-

Unlike your predecessors, you are a relatively low-key CM and do not advertise yourself.

For any Chief Minister, the first priority is (taking care of) people's interests. Whatever the previous chief ministers of Haryana did to project themselves as "No. 1", I never had any such personal intention. In the past, chief ministers indulged in number-games, they would make announcements, and then get busy in their publicity. But we do not believe in such traditions. The BJP (government) made proposals and extended the benefits to the people.

After that, when beneficiaries publicise our work among the people, there is no requirement for us to publicise anything further. Rather than promoting myself, more important (aspect) for me is to ensure doing work...

Apart from the Modi factor, what else is the BJP's plus-point in Haryana?

Each Haryanvi is happy that Haryana retained its No. 1 position due to the schemes initiated by the Narendra Modi government. There have been schemes such as direct benefit transfer, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Ujjawala yojana, PMKVY (Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana for skill development), etc, as well as digitisation of government's functioning has enhanced administrative efficiency in the state.

Transparency in government jobs, unemployment allowance to the youth, online transfer policy, transparency in change of land-use policies, single-window system, etc are schemes important for us. The people ensured the BJP's victory in successive elections as a result of all these policies.



Mamata Banerjee at a rally in Howrah on Tuesday. *Express*

TMC moves EC on 'horse trading' by PM, Mamata says cancel his candidature

ABANTIKA GHOSH & SANTANU CHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, KOLKATA, APRIL 30

A DAY after Prime Minister Narendra Modi claimed at a rally in West Bengal's Serampore that about 40 Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLAs are in touch with him, and would switch sides once the BJP wins the Lok Sabha elections, Chief Minister and TMC chief Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday demanded cancellation of Modi's candidature for "shamelessly indulging in horse-trading" during elections.

This comes on a day the TMC filed a complaint with the Election Commission of India in New Delhi, stating that the tone of Modi's speech is "very likely to create an indication of impending horse-trading related to election".

Addressing a rally at Bhadreswar, in West Bengal's Hooghly district, Banerjee called Modi's remarks "unconstitutional". "Yesterday... he said about 40 MLAs (from TMC) are in touch with him. He is a shameless Prime Minister. A Prime Minister is indulging in horse-trading. His party is not like our party. His party is full of thieves and functions only on money (power). Our party functions on the sacrifices of our party workers," she said.

Stating that she has "no worries", she said, "If one party worker leaves, I will create 1 lakh more workers. For this reason (Modi's speech), his candidature must be cancelled."

Banerjee accused Modi of violating the Constitution by making "unconstitutional statements" while holding a constitutional position, and asserted: "He has no right to remain the Prime Minister."

In its complaint letter to the EC, signed by TMC's Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien, the party said: "We are shocked and surprised to hear the utterances of Sri Narendra Modi... saying in an election campaign meeting that 40 AITC MLAs are in touch with him and will cross over to BJP.... This is very unbecoming of the Prime Minister. He is trying to influence voters to vote for BJP, creating a mala fide impression in their minds that many MLAs of AITC are in touch with him and will cross over to his party, which will have a bearing on the fate of the present government in West Bengal."

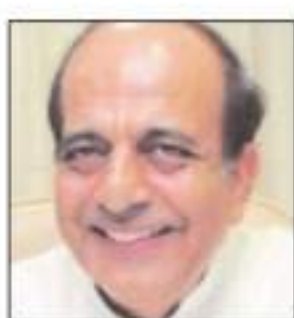
"We lodge a strong protest against this mischievous campaign of Sri Modi."

It says: "Moreover, this tone of speech is very likely to create an indication of impending horse-trading related to election. We demand that the Election Commission of India take cognizance of this unfounded, inappropriate and illegal campaign and utterances of Mr Narendra Modi and take strong action against him as per rules."

While the TMC maintains that the party is intact, and that Modi's assertion about 40 MLAs as a "fiction", the fact that it has accused the Prime Minister of "impending horse trading" shows that the ruling party in West Bengal, which has lost several leaders to the saffron fold, is not willing to take any chances.

After the party's erstwhile number 2, Mukul Roy, joined the BJP, the TMC lost MPs Soumitra Khan and Anupam Hazra to the BJP. This was followed by MLA Arjun Singh, and Bharati Ghosh, the former IPS officer once known to have been close to Banerjee.

All these leaders, barring Roy, are now contesting the elections on BJP tickets.



Dinesh Trivedi, Arjun Singh



has gained strength. The fight will be interesting," said Mintu Biswas, a local voter.

Trivedi claimed that Singh's defection would not have any impact on his poll prospects. "Considering Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and the work done, there is no fight. People are happy. I have done my work very sincerely. People have confidence in Banerjee. People don't want mafia here. Singh is a fish in a pond that he poisoned, now the pond is being purified," he said.

Singh had been at loggerheads with Trivedi, and had told the TMC chief that re-nominating Trivedi from Barrackpore would

affect the party in the election. But Banerjee gave the ticket to Trivedi.

After Arjun joined the BJP, several TMC party offices were repainted and made BJP offices, indicating the BJP's focus in the area even as it seeks to make inroads into West Bengal.

On Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed a rally in Bhatpara, and blamed the TMC for the closure of jute industries. "First the Left Front and now Did's atrocities have put the locks on jute factories of the area. Hooliganism in trade unions and syndicates have forced the jute industries to close down," he said.

"People in my area are pro-BJP."

They have seen me working throughout the year, unlike TMC leaders who are seen only during poll season... This isn't the panchayat election, people will vote for BJP in the Lok Sabha election," said Singh. "I have always been there for Barrackpore's residents, and they treat me as a son of the soil."

As for the campaign plank, the TMC has been focusing on development during its tenure, while the BJP is trying to woo Hindi voters.

More than half the voters in Barrackpore

VOTING ON MAY 6

