



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra campaigning in Pratapgarh, Thursday. PTI

Congress hopes brightest in last two UP phases

BHUPENDRA PANDEY
LUCKNOW, MAY 9

AS ALL parties vie for Uttar Pradesh, the Congress's hopes rest on the last two phases of voting in the state, with 27 seats on the line.

The constituencies are spread over eastern UP, the region from which general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is making her electoral debut as in-charge. Of all the constituencies in the state, where the party has been in terminal decline, it has the best chance here. While 26 of these 27 seats had been won by the BJP in 2014 (barring Azamgarh), the Congress had won six of them in 2009.

This is also the reason the Congress has wielded its trump card of Priyanka in this area, to shore up its chances.

There are several reasons why the Congress prospects are brighter in these 27 seats, including anger over several BJP candidates and caste equations here which are different from other regions of the state. West UP has Dalits, mostly Jatavs, while Jats, Gurjars, Muslims form a big number. Central UP has OBCs, including Lodhis, Kurmis, Baghels (in east UP they are Thakurs) who vote for the BJP traditionally. In the eastern part, Brahmins, who used to be Congress supporters, make up good numbers, apart from several OBC sub-castes known to back different parties.

All this has put the Congress in the fight in at least seven-eight seats.

While 14 of the seats vote on May 12, the remaining on May 19. Of the 14 voting in the sixth phase, the Congress had won Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Shravasthi and Domariyaganj in 2009. It had won Maharajganj and Kushinagar among the remaining 13 constituencies, where elections will be held in the last phase.

With 21 seats in UP in 2009, the Congress had a vote share of 18.3%. This had dropped to two seats and 7.5% vote share in 2014.

Kushinagar MLA Ajay Kumar Lallu, who

is the Congress Legislative Party leader in the Assembly and has been travelling across the region for campaigning, says, "We are in a direct fight with the BJP in Kushinagar, Sant Kabir Nagar, Pratapgarh, Bhadohi and Maharajganj, and in a triangular fight in Sultanpur, Salempur, Deoria, Domariyaganj and Mirzapur."

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's statement in an interview to *Dainik Jagran* recently that "the Congress will perform better" than the gathbandhan of the Samajwadi Party-BSP-RLD at some places was seen as hinting at these constituencies. Adityanath had added that the BJP was doing far better than both.

What also seems to be helping the Congress, which ended up behind the SP and BSP in a majority of the 27 seats in 2014, is that the SP votes of Muslims and Yadavs appear to be coming to it because of the weak BSP nominees at several places. Compared to Dalits, Muslims and Yadavs are in larger numbers here.

Additionally, the Congress appears to be drawing the support of other backward and most backward classes like Bindis, Lonias (called Nonia in some parts) and Sainthwar etc, who are in good numbers.

In some constituencies, the BJP is hobbled by both anger against sitting MPs who have been fielded again, and infighting, especially in Sant Kabir Nagar, Gorakhpur, Kushinagar, Deoria and Salempur. Recently, a video had gone viral of sitting Sant Kabir Nagar MP Sharad Tripathi beating up local party MLA Rakesh Singh Baghel with shoes. Sharad is not contesting this time, with father Ramapati Ram Tripathi given the BJP ticket from Deoria.

The Congress candidate in Sant Kabir Nagar, Bhalchandra Yadav, who had secured over 2.40 lakh votes in 2014 as SP candidate, is now seen as giving a strong fight to BJP candidate Praveen Nishad and the BSP's Bhism Shanker Tiwari, fighting on the gathbandhan's behalf.

SEAT WATCH BHIWANI-MAHENDRAGARH VOTING ON MAY 12

Women poll issue in this contest of old family name vs US-returned entrant

ANKITA DWIVEDI JOHRI
BHIWANI-MAHENDRAGARH, MAY 9

IN THE dusty lanes of Bigowa village in Haryana's Bhiwani district, where most women have *dupattas* wrapped tightly around their faces, and the men sit around smoking *hookah*, Swati Yadav stands out.

Dressed in a *salwar-kameez* and sneakers, an Apple watch on her wrist to count her daily steps, and a few fading blonde streaks in her straight hair, the Jannayak Janta Party (JJJ) candidate for Bhiwani-Mahendragarh parliamentary seat seems aspirational to the crowd gathered to listen to the 30-year-old at the panchayat building.

But the director of Haryana's Euro Group of Schools, who has spent the last decade studying and working in the US, seems at ease as village elders welcome the 'Haryana ki beti' with shawls — @HaryanaKiBeti is also her Twitter handle — and youth record her videos on their phones.

"*Karoron ki naukri chod kar yahan aayi hoon apke liye* (I have left a job that paid me crores to serve you)," she declares amid applause. She goes on to talk about bringing Wi-Fi, technology, and better healthcare and education to Haryana's villages, and urges people to vote for "Dushyant *bhai* (Dushyant Chautala)", the 31-year-old JJP founder and Hisar MP. "*Chhappal pe mohar lagayiega* (Press the slipper button)," she says, as she takes off in her Audi car for her next campaign destination.

"I was in the US when the December 16 Delhi gangrape happened. That was the first time I felt I needed to go back to my roots. I have been here for one-and-a-half years, and I see people struggling for basic necessities. Also, there is a huge need for educated people in politics," says Yadav, who left for the US at the age of 17, and holds a Bachelors in Electrical Engineering from Clemson University and an MBA from Georgia Tech University.

Women and youth are her "main audience", Yadav says, and believes her experience with "working in technology and Obamacare in the US" will help her bring change in Haryana.

"Women are so frustrated here. They do everything. Men smoke *hookahs*, there are so many drunk men on the streets. Women don't have access to education, employment, and that is also the reason why such few of them join politics," says Yadav, the lone woman candidate among the seven fielded by the JJP. Its ally, the Aam Aadmi Party, is contesting the remaining three seats in the state. Of the 223 candidates in the fray for Haryana's 10 seats, only 11 are women.

In Bhiwani-Mahendragarh seat, that came into existence after the 2008 delimitation, Yadav is up against sitting BJP MP Dharambir Singh and former Congress MP Shruti Choudhry, daughter of ex-Haryana minister Suresh Singh and Congress MLA Kiran Choudhry, and granddaughter of former Haryana chief minister Bansi Lal.

While Yadav is contesting for the first time, her family is not new to politics. In 2014,



Swati Yadav campaigning in Ranil, Bhiwani; (left) Cong's Shruti Choudhry at the party office. Gajendra Yadav



her father Satbir had contested the election from Ateli, one of the nine Assembly segments in the constituency, on an Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) ticket and is now the JJP's Mahendragarh district president.

However, says Yadav, she comes from a "humble" background. "My great-grandfather was a farmer, my grandfather was a truck driver... My father did his MBA from IIM Ahmedabad... My father has always told me that as a woman you have to work twice as hard to get half the success," says Yadav, greeting women on street from her car with "*Ram Ram maaji*".

"In India, if you come from dynasty politics, and do good work, people will love you like crazy, and if you don't, people will hate you like crazy. The Congress candidate is hated so much because she did not deliver when she could," says Yadav, now getting onto a tractor for campaigning in Ranila village.

During Yadav's month-long campaign so far, apart from Dushyant, his father Ajay Chautala, who has been granted 21-day furlough from Tihar Jail and who represented the Bhiwani seat earlier, has campaigned for her.

Contrary to claims that she is an 'NRI', Yadav says she studied and worked in the US on a visa. She has a younger brother, and members of her extended family are helping her in her campaign.

Of her competition, she says, people in her constituency "don't like the BJP, because

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

BJP's Dharambir Singh	39.26%
INLD	26.70%
Cong	26.02%

2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

Cong's Shruti Choudhry	42%
INLD	16%
BJP	12%

SEAT WATCH MEDINIPUR VOTING, MAY 12

Facing 'popular' BJP state chief, TMC banks on new face

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KHARAGPUR, MAY 9

IT'S 9 pm on a Wednesday and a small group of people have assembled opposite Kharagpur College, where West Bengal BJP president and the party's candidate for the Medinipur Lok Sabha constituency, Dilip Ghosh, is scheduled to inaugurate a *dhaba*. Ghosh turns up despite rumours that he may not after a hectic day of campaigning. "Dilipda is so humble and grounded. He talks simple and straight to the point," gushes the owner of the *dhaba*.

This election, the Trinamool Congress has dropped Sandhya Roy, its sitting MP from Medinipur, and instead fielded its Rajya Sabha MP Manas Bhunia. BJP sources point to this change to say that the Trinamool is nervous about Ghosh's "popularity".

In the 2014 polls, Sandhya Roy, a popular Bengali film actor, had won the seat, till then a CPI bastion, for the Trinamool.

Ghosh, who hails from Gopiballapur village in West Medinipur, won the 2016 state polls from Kharagpur, one of the seven Assembly segments under the Medinipur seat.

Bhunias, a six-time Congress MLA who defected to the Trinamool only in 2016, said, "The state BJP president will not be able to win. People have witnessed all-round development under the Mamata Banerjee government and they have now aligned with the Trinamool."

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

TMC's Sandhya Roy	46.5%
CPI	31.36%
BJP	14.26%

2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

CPI's Prabodh Panda	47.29%
TMC	42.68%
BJP	4.99%

they know Modiji will not come and work in their village, their MP will", and the MP is not working. "Unlike Modiji, Dushyantji is not a marketer, he is a doer. People see that. As for the Congress candidate, I have never heard her say more than two lines," says Yadav, who in a recent tweet challenged her opponents to an "open debate". "I want to transform politics. Tomorrow, if I don't win, it's not the end, I will go back to my work," she adds.

The BJP's MP, Dharambir Singh, had told the party earlier that he didn't want to contest. "I wanted to be in the Vidhan Sabha. But I am following the party's orders now," he says. He also asserts that Yadav is "no threat" to him. "Our voter is intelligent. It's good that she is educated, *par yahan America, Europe ki neeti nahin chalegi* (Policies of the West won't work here)," he says.

Congress candidate Shruti Choudhry, who is contesting for the third time, says she and her family "have cultivated our base through work", and that "the BJP's *masala*, pretense have boomeranged". "On the ground there is unemployment, farmers' distress," she says, sitting at the Congress office in Bhiwani, surrounded by photographs of her grandfather, father and mother.

An only child, Choudhry says she has been going for campaigning since a young age and "imbibed everything very fast". "My grandfather was the architect of Haryana, which was once known as the *registan* (desert) of Punjab. He got electricity to all its villages," she says.

Choudhry believes people will keep in mind her "historic work" when they vote on May 12. "This area had a big water problem. I got water supply to a hundred villages through the canal system. Even today when people talk about water here, they call it 'Shruti paani'," says Choudhry, who is married to Supreme Court advocate Arunabh Chowdhury.

While Choudhry says having a woman (Yadav) contesting against her is a "welcome move", she is upset about what Ajay Chautala allegedly said about her. "At a village in Mahendragarh he said I have been pretending to be pregnant while campaigning. Swati Yadav said no such thing happened. Despite being a woman, she said this," she says, adding that people in politics should not cross the line.

Asked about her 2014 loss, she argues that "elections are not just about work". "People vote for work, but you may not just win with that alone. However, in the long run, these things pay off," says the 43-year-old, who had defeated Ajay Chautala in 2009 by over 55,000 votes.

Choudhry's campaign too focuses on women and she says they have the "fire and talent" and only "need the wherewithal" to move ahead. Tell her about her opponent raising the same issues, and she says, "When she goes to villages, she has to say something... But just lip service is not enough."

Signing off, she adds, "We will talk on May 23. I will take the seat... I am absolutely sure the BJP and Mr Narendra Modi are not coming back."



Dilip Ghosh in Kharagpur. Partha Paul

The BJP, however, dismissed Bhunia's candidature, saying he is "not a factor". "The Trinamool has realised that they are losing this seat. So much so that Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee spent four days in Kharagpur to monitor the movement of Cyclone Fani. The real reason is that she knows her party is fast losing ground here," Ghosh told *The Indian Express* while eating at the *dhaba*.

"Of the seven Assembly segments, we are far ahead (of the TMC) in three — Kharagpur Sadar, Kharagpur and Keshari. The Trinamool, on the other hand, is strong in three other Assembly segments — Egga, Dantan and Narayanganj. The only remaining seat, Medinipur, holds the key to victory. A result in our favour in Medinipur will seal the seat for us," said a local BJP leader requesting anonymity.

Though the Congress and CPI have also fielded their candidates, the fight is expected to be between the BJP and TMC.

So far, the election campaigning in Medinipur has been far from peaceful. The BJP has accused the Trinamool of vandalising over a dozen two-wheelers belonging to its workers and attacking Ghosh's vehicle on the night of May 7, a charge that the Trinamool has denied.

Among India's most underprivileged tribes, but off Jharkhand poll map, they hope for attention

ABHISHEK ANGAD
GHATSHILA (JHARKHAND), MAY 9

SIXTY-YEAR-OLD Bishoka Sabar's daily routine includes a trek to the forest range of Dalma Hills for collecting wood, which she sells in a nearby market, earning Rs 100 on best days. That leaves little for her family of four, including two grand-daughters, ages 4 and 7, who mostly survive on starch and rice, availed through the PDS. When Bishoka has money to spare, she buys some *daal* for Rs 10.

This afternoon, the girls have been fed rice, starch and mango *chutney*.

Bishoka is a Sabar tribal, one of 24 families belonging to the Primitive and Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) living in similar dilapidated homes in Ramchandrapur village of Ghatshila block in Jharkhand's parliamentary constituency. Flies hang over her younger grand-daughter's face, and a stench over the entire area.

The Jharkhand government classifies a tribal community with particularly 'low development indices' as 'PVTG', to be provided an 'enabling improvement'. The PVTGs are entitled to Rs 600 pension along with 35 kg of free rice. Bishoka is among the luckier ones to get some benefits; some families have not gone to the bank to rectify errors to receive the Rs 600 pension. The Ujjwala Scheme for gas cylinders has not percolated down to here yet.

Census 2011 put the Sabar numbers at 9,688 in Jharkhand, spread out thinly across the state. Consequently, they as well as other PVTGs don't figure in election plans of any party. Ramchandrapur has no political banners of any sort, nor has anyone come seeking Sabar votes.

With voting in Jamshedpur four days away, Bishoka's neighbour Nomita says, "I don't know when the election is and I don't know who the candidates are. We will discuss and vote."

Less than 15 km away, in the same block, Bhadua village is home to 22 families of



A woman with her underweight child at Bhadua village. Abhishek Angad

EXPLAINED
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Integration through motivation

The PVTGs in Jharkhand do not have much representation in the government or politics because of their low population. They also seem to be absent from the election discourse. As their condition continues to worsen in spite of the availability of a few government schemes, the only solution seems to be their integration into the mainstream, which officials say can happen only through intensive "motivation".

Behror community, another PVTG, numbering 10,276 in last Census. At the entrance of the village stands a van bearing the Jharkhand Mufti Morcha's flag and seeking votes for Mahagathbandhan candidate Champei Soren.

A few women standing nearby are unsure who is running for elections. "Shibu Soren (the JMM president) maybe," says one, adding she has not seen any political leader in their area. Champei Soren is running against incumbent BJP MP Bidyut Baran Mahto, who had polled 1 lakh votes more than his rival, the JMM(P)'s Dr Ajoy Kumar, in the last election. This time the JMM(P) is allied with the JMM.

Only three-four families in the Behror settlement have *pucca* houses under the PM Awas Yojana; some are excluded from the pension scheme due to lack of Aadhaar linking; almost all get rations, but not enough to last a family an entire month; and only a few consume *daal* on a daily basis. Like the Sabars,

many Behror families rely on forest wood and bark of "*charhod*" tree, with which they make ropes, for sustenance.

Arun Behror, who works in Tamil Nadu, says he recently arrived to find that his wife was among those whose Aadhaar was not linked with schemes, denying them pension.

Ten kilometres away, in Digba village, a local block level employee is distributing free rice to 15 Sabar families, who live in even worse conditions. Officials say most girls here are married off below 18 years of age and many bear underweight children.

Logen Soren, who has a month-old son, says he was 1.4 kg when born. There is an anganwadi, but she doesn't go there.

Besra Savar's 10-year-old daughter now collects firewood to cook, after his wife and six children died when a tree fell on their roof and it collapsed. Besra, who battles a liquor addiction, doesn't send the daughter to school.

Denying that PVTGs remain ignored by parties, JMM spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya says his party has been focusing on them. "Our government started a Special India Reserve (Primitive Tribe) Battalion... We try to give them some representation during panchayat elections."

The ruling BJP lays claim to the tribe battalion as its government's achievement, adding that they have also ensured benefits to PVTGs such as ration at doorstep and lower qualification for government jobs.

Ghatshila Block Development Officer Sanjay Kumar Das says they had done an informal survey of the PVTGs, and found a lot of resistance from within to education, and to availing government facilities such as anganwadis and MNREGA. "Immediate intervention of district- and state-level authorities is needed" to change that, he adds. Das also claims that only a few PVTG members are without Aadhaar cards, and would be covered once elections were over.

However, at least in the case of the MNREGA, the tribals say the payment comes "many days later", causing them to stay away.

7 DECISION 2019



At epicentre of Jat quota stir, divide resurfaces over choice of candidates

VARINDER BHATIA
JHAJJAR, ROHTAK, MAY 9

IN FEBRUARY 2016, Haryana was gripped in a wave of violence as Jats took to the streets in the thousands demanding reservation. That wave left 30 dead, dozens injured as scores of shops and establishments were either looted or burned to the ground.

Three years later, in the state's Jat heartland of Jhajjar and Rohtak, the shadow of the protests still looms large and has cleaved the electorate down the middle ahead of polling for the Lok Sabha elections on May 12. And a binary — Jat versus non-Jat candidates.

At ground zero, families of those who died during the protests signal the divide. While Jats vociferously say they will only vote for a Jat candidate, Other Backward Classes (OBC) say they have not and will not forget the violence they faced at the hands of Jats — and won't let Jats forget either.

And in the two LS seats of Rohtak and Sonapat, the Congress, INLD and the JJP-AAP have fielded Jats, while the BJP has nominated non-Jats to both seats, hoping to consolidate the anger against Jats.

In the months after the violence, the state government has compensated and given jobs to families of the victims, irrespective of the caste to which they belonged. But in rural areas and urban centres, the divide is visible.

At Chhawani mohalla in Jhajjar, a huge mob went on a rampage in February 2016 and lynched two men. On Thursday, BJP flags fly high on the street — and on most homes — where two members of the Saini community, Krishan (45) and Shyama (43), were killed by a mob.

Krishan's wife Angoori still feels terrified. Living with her two sons who were injured in the clash and an unmarried daughter, she said,



BJP flags at Chhawani Mohalla in Jhajjar. Kamleshwar Singh

"My children are yet to forget that trauma. My sons have not forgotten the horrific sight when their father was butchered by an unruly mob. What was his fault? Whom did he harm? My son Harish has got a job in PGIMS, Rohtak and we got a compensation of Rs 10 lakh. We shall vote with our entire locality."

Her neighbour, Rajesh Kumar, echoes this sentiment. "Jats will now have to pay for what they did three years ago. The entire violence was orchestrated to remove the non-Jat Chief Minister," he said referring to Haryana BJP CM Manohar Lal Khattar.

"Deepender (Hooda) is good, but people around him are corrupt and unruly. The time has come to throw them out of politics." In

Jhajjar, which falls under the Rohtak constituency, Deepender Hooda (Congress), Dharamvir Singh (INLD), Pradeep Deswal (JJP-AAP) — all Jats — and the BJP's Arvind Sharma are in the fray.

Om Prakash, a retired teacher, said they initially considered other parties. "We thought about voting for BSP or Raj Kumar Saini (BJP rebel) but that would mean that our vote will go waste. So, we have decided to go with BJP to strengthen Narendra Modi. How will people whose houses were looted, whose family members were slaughtered, forgive Jats?" he said.

In some non-Jat localities, Jat leaders have been "banned" from campaigning. Bhatari, the wife of another 2016 victim Shyama, said,

SEAT WATCH SIWAN, VOTING ON MAY 12

RJD banks on Muslim-Yadav votes, JD(U) nominee plays development card

SANTOSH SINGH
SIWAN, MAY 9

AT A college ground in Mairwa, motorcyclists sporting RJD flags shout slogans in favour of RJD nominee Hina Shahab, wife of convicted former Siwan MP Mohammed Shahabuddin. The podium has posters of Lalu Prasad and Shahabuddin. Sanjay Singh Kushwaha, a local leader in a green pagdi, is master of the ceremony. RLSP chief Upendra Kushwaha, the chief guest, has not yet arrived.

The RJD is looking at a consolidation of OBC Kushwaha votes along with Muslim-Yadav support to stitch a winning combination in Siwan. Hina lost two back-to-back elections from here. She sees this as her best chance to win the seat, which her husband won four times till Om Prakash Yadav wrested it, first as an Independent in 2009 and then as a BJP nominee in 2014.

As the BJP gave the seat to its alliance partner, JD(U), Yadav had to sit out. JD(U) has fielded local MLA Kavita Singh, wife of Ajay Singh, a controversial leader, and daughter-in-law of former MLA Jagmatu Devi. An upper-caste Rajput, Kavita is banking primarily on Narendra Modi and Nitish Kumar's development agenda,

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

BJP's Om Prakash Yadav	42.16%
RJD's Hina Shahab	29.28%
CPI-ML(U)'s Amar Nath Yadav	9.16%
JD(U)'s Manoj Kumar Singh	8.96%



Hina Shahab is contesting against JD(U)'s Kavita Singh

besides a good presence of Rajputs in the constituency. Ajay Singh is also seen as someone who had opposed Shahabuddin.

Addressing a sizeable crowd in Mairwa, Hina seeks everyone's support. "I would like to vote for women, youth and the underprivileged. I appeal to you all to join hands and ensure my win... Nitish did not come up with any scheme for free treatment for the poor. He has started speaking the language of PM Modi."

Most Kushwaha and Sahni speakers expressed solidarity with Hina. They stressed how their leader Upendra Kushwaha was humiliated in the NDA and it was "time to avenge" that.

Siwan has about 3 lakh Muslim and 2.5 lakh Yadav voters, 1.25 lakh Kushwaha and 80,000 Sahni voters, besides 4 lakh upper caste and 2.5 lakh EBC voters.

Krishna Mohan Sharma, a local resident, said, "It has been a tough contest, but sitting BJP MP Om Prakash Yadav could have been a more formidable challenger than Kavita. Yadav had potential to split Yadav and some Muslim votes, but this time RJD's base of Muslim-Yadav votes are intact..."

"Deepender's entry is totally banned here in our locality. How can we vote for the community that ruined our life?"

But 20 km away, in villages where Jats were killed, the narrative changes. At village MP Majra, Krishan (41) was shot dead by security forces during the protests. His father Nathu Ram (96) is not impressed that Krishan's son was given a government job.

"Toh naukri dekar kaun sa ehsaan kar diya sarkaar ne (What favour has the government done us by giving him a job). We will vote only for Hooda," he said.

Another Jat-dominated village, Akheri Madanpur, some 30 km from Chhawani Mohalla, was home to two Jats Sandeep (24) and Arjun (18) who were killed in Jhajjar when security forces fired on protesters to curb the violence. "It took a 60-day protest for Union Steel Minister Birender Singh to visit us. He promised jobs to us and many got them too. But it is not a favour to us, I lost my son too," said Sunderpal, Sandeep's father.

Arjun's brother Jagbir, too, got a job in MDU, Rohtak but said, "Bhai, naukri mili nah, naukri toh li hai (We were not given the job but took it). We protested, then got the job. This government did nothing for us. They did not give us reservation. No Jat will vote for anybody, except a Jat."

Girdhari Sharma, a shopkeeper in Rohtak, who witnessed the violence, said "the violence will definitely impact polling. It is a clear battle of Jat versus non-Jat, not only in Rohtak or Sonapat, but across the state".

And while the BJP has repeatedly accused former Congress Chief Minister Bhupinder Hooda of "burning Haryana", Hooda has alleged that the BJP indulges in "divisive politics". Sonipat, too, has three Jat leaders, including Bhupinder Hooda (Congress), Digvijay Chautala (JJP-AAP) and Surinder Chhikara (INLD) while the BJP has nominated Ramesh Kaushik.

EXPLAINED

RJD looks to restore clout

THE RJD dominated Siwan from 1996 till 2004, when Mohammed Shahabuddin represented the seat. But Independent candidate Om Prakash Yadav, who later joined the BJP, wrested the seat in 2009 and won it again in 2014. Shahabuddin's wife Hina Shahab has been trying to give her husband the seat by proxy and restore his clout in the RJD. For the JD(U), winning Siwan could be a huge boost.

At Ziradei, the village of India's first President Dr Rajendra Prasad, there was strong support for Kavita. "We still recall Shahabuddin's rule of terror. NDA voters have gone silent this time. There is surely the Modi factor working on the ground. Youth have supported Modi's tough stance against terrorism," said Amar Kumar, adding that neighbouring villages such as Bhalua and Surwal supported Modi. Ramesh Prasad, another Ziradei resident, said RJD was under the illusion that Kushwahas would support it.

Modi hits back at Mamata: Your slap will be blessing for me

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 9

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Thursday hit out at Trinamool Congress chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, saying that her slap would be a blessing for him. He claimed Banerjee has insulted the Constitution by saying that she does not accept the country's Prime Minister while gladly accepting Pakistan's Prime Minister as the PM. Modi claimed that Banerjee would not have been scared today if she had had the courage to slap her friends who were involved in the chit fund scam.

The remarks come days after Banerjee said that Modi needs a tight slap of democracy for saying that the TMC is a party of extortionists.

Speaking in districts which form the tribal belt of Bengal, Modi Thursday alleged that the mafia is now part of the TMC which does not care about adivasis but only about looting money.

"I have heard that Didi said that she wants to slap me... I call you Didi and respect you. Your slap will be like a blessing for me. I will accept that too," Modi said at a public meeting in Purulia.

"But I will say this. Had you shown the courage to slap your friends who were involved in looting money through chit fund scams, you would not have been so scared like you are today. Had you shown the courage to slap those who extort money from poor people in Bengal, you would not be as scared as you are today," Modi said.

"I have heard that Didi talks about stones and slaps for me. One can understand how frustrated Didi is by just hearing her language... I have the strength to digest all abuses in the dictionary," Modi said at another public meeting in Bankura. "Didi is angry, but Modi does not care about that anger. This is because Modi has the blessings of 130 crore people," he said.

The Prime Minister said that Banerjee will get a jolt after results are announced on May 23. "After May 23, Didi will get a jolt. Modi government will return. Each of the infiltrators who have become Trinamool Congress cadres will be identified," claimed Modi.



PM Modi at a rally in Bankura in West Bengal on Thursday. PTI

He also said that Banerjee has insulted the Constitution. "In her frustration, Didi is also insulting the Constitution. She is saying that she does not accept the Prime Minister of the country as the Prime Minister. But she gladly accepts the Prime Minister of Pakistan as the Prime Minister. When the Cyclone (Fani) hit West Bengal, I called her twice. But in her arrogance she did not receive my calls. When central government officers wanted to hold a meeting with their state counterparts on the issue of the cyclone, she refused," Modi alleged in Bankura.

"TMC government is a government under which teachers, youths and farmers are troubled, even those who chant the name of Ma Durga, Ma Kali and say Jai Shri Ram are sent behind bars," Modi said.

"Here you all are sitting on black gold (coal). How is TMC-mafia raj going on in the coal belt. They are looting money, but the workers are not receiving wages. Mafia is now part of Trinamool Congress. Will you pardon such a party who is only looting you? We will come to power and by 2022 all the poor in Bengal, be it tribals or Dalits, will get their own concrete houses with toilets, electricity and cooking gas connection," Modi said.

Modi also said the Bengal government is blocking central schemes in Bengal, including health insurance schemes for the poor.



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee with her Andhra Pradesh counterpart Chandrababu Naidu at an election meeting in Kharagpur. Hailing Banerjee as "Bengal tigress", Naidu said she will play "a vital role" in forming the new government at the Centre and deciding on the new PM. Partha Paul

'DO 100 SQUATS IF NO TMC MEN INVOLVED IN ILLEGAL MINING'

Spoke about slap of democracy... means mandate, says Mamata

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 9

CHIEF MINISTER Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi will have to do "100 squats holding his ears" if he failed to prove that her party candidates were coal mafia.

The Trinamool chief was responding to Modi's allegation that leaders of her party were making money from illegal open cast coal mines, while labourers were not getting their wages. Banerjee said she will withdraw her party nominees from all the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal if even one was found involved in such activity.

"If you (Modi) prove what you have claimed, then I will withdraw all my candidates from election. If you have lied, then you will have to do 100 squats holding your ears," she said at a rally in Bankura, couple of hours after the PM addressed an election meeting in the same Lok Sabha constituency.

"People from the BJP are involved in illegal coal business. I have information in a pen drive and if I make it public, several secrets about cattle smuggling and coal mafia will tumble out of the closet," she shot back. She

claimed the pen drive contains information about a central minister and a BJP MP "dealing in cattle smuggling".

Banerjee also clarified that she never said that she would slap the PM. "He is saying that I have said I will slap him. Arre, I spoke about the slap of democracy. Try to understand the language. Why should I slap you? I am not that kind of a person. What I understand is democracy. Slap of democracy means the mandate people will give by casting their votes," the Trinamool chief said.

The TMC supremo had said on Tuesday, "Narendra Modi should get a tight slap of democracy."

Meanwhile, Banerjee also warned Modi against speaking about her family. "Don't talk about my family, I am alone and the people are my family," she said.

Speaking in Bankura, Modi had said, "She (Banerjee) is not interested in the betterment of the state, but in that of her family, nephew and *tolabaj* (extortionists) of her party." Banerjee's nephew Abhishek is a sitting Lok Sabha MP and TMC candidate from Diamond Harbour seat.

Banerjee, without naming anyone, said the country is being run by Duryodhan and Dushshasan — the ignoble characters of epic 'Mahabharata'.

BALLOTIN

602 companies of central forces for polls in Bengal

New Delhi: On May 12, eight seats in West Bengal — Tamluk, Kanthi, Gathal, Jhargram, Medinipur, Purulia, Bankura and Bishnupur — are going to the polls. In wake of violence reported from parts of the state in the last few phases and security concerns related to the LWE-affected Jungle Mahal area, 602 companies of Central Armed Police Forces, besides the State Armed Police, have been deployed for election duty in the state on May 12, said officials in the Ministry of Home Affairs. **ENS**

BJP seeks EC action against Monserrate

Panaji: The BJP has written to the Election Commission seeking action against Congress's Panaji candidate Atanasio Monserrate for failing to publish the list of criminal cases against him in newspapers, as mandated by a 2011 Supreme Court judgment. BJP's Goa unit has also said that it amounts to contempt of court. **ENS**

'TN: Votes cast by agents led to repoll'

Chennai: Votes of elderly people getting cast by party agents and mock poll data not being cleared before commencement of election were among the factors for ordering repoll in 13 polling stations in Tamil Nadu on May 19, CEO Satyabrata Sahoo has said. **PTI**

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, DANIYAWA, MAY 9

IT IS 8.45 am. BJP's Patna Sahib nominee Ravi Shankar Prasad gets ready for the day's campaign. Sporting a kurta-pyjama and half-jacket, the Union minister sits for a while as visitors — mostly political workers — arrive at his East Boring Road residence in Patna. Above his revolving chair is a portrait of his father, former Bihar minister Thakur Prasad.

As Prasad wraps up the meetings and gets ready to leave for Gaighat to meet Patna City court lawyers, some persons with disabilities arrive. He meets them and takes their application.

Meanwhile, his media in-charge Saurav and driver Ashok ensure that the vehicle is stocked with enough water bottles. Prasad takes the middle seat in the white SUV, ready for the campaign. He is taking on Congress nominee Shatrughan Sinha, who represented Patna Sahib in the last two Lok Sabhas.

As the vehicle sets off, Prasad talks about his journey — how he would walk 3.5 km from his home to school, his first political assignment at a polling booth in Patna, his struggle during the JP Movement and im-



BJP candidate Ravi Shankar Prasad addresses a public meeting in Patna Sahib. Express

prisonment in Bankipore jail with Lalu Prasad and Sushil Kumar Modi.

About his work, the BJP leader says, "I have been in-charge of eight states, a Union minister holding several key portfolios. Some people call me Digital Bhaiya for my work in the IT Ministry."

The vehicle reaches Patna City court. Prasad, along with local BJP MLA and Road Construction Minister Nand Kishore Yadav, visits every lawyer's chamber. Aditi Sinha, a lawyer, talks about how many women have

independent opinions which could differ from their families.

A litti-chokha seller says: "It is all BJP here. Sinha lives mostly in Maharashtra, and has little appeal here." A villager who has come to court in connection with a case, says CM Nitish Kumar has done a good job by banning liquor. "People are drinking less," she says.

Prasad has visited 100-odd chambers of lawyers, many of whom are happy with a fellow advocate being in the poll fray. S Khalid Shah, a lawyer, says: "We wish him all the best. We should not speak ill of anyone."

Back in his car, Prasad talks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi emerging as a "global leader". Asked why the BJP is using the plank of "muscular nationalism" in this election, he raises his voice to ask why the BJP should not be doing so. "It is a matter of national security. How can the Opposition question the valour of soldiers?"

About Sinha, his rival, Prasad says, "He is facing strong anti-incumbency... what hurt me is him not giving credit to political workers after his big win in 2014."

Prasad has been moving in areas of Nitish's influence. Danyawa, adjoining Nalanda, has a dominant OBC Kurmi population. A meeting of 100-odd people is held at Saidanpur village,

