



Captain shoots from the hip, PM Modi is his target

MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA
HOSHIAARPUR, MAY 14

LAST WEEK, when the *Time* magazine featured Prime Minister Narendra Modi on its cover as the 'Divider in Chief', no leader made as much political hay out of the situation as Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh. Addressing a rally at Bhoha in Pathankot, he said the PM had "lowered India's prestige" in the international arena.

Once known for his warm vibes with Modi — soon after the Assembly elections in 2017, he had gone on record to say that the PM was "cooperative" — Singh's poll pitch now focuses largely on Modi, besides incidents of 'sacrilege' under the previous Akali Dal government. In speech after speech, the CM, who is leading the Congress's ambitious Mission 13 to win all the Lok Sabha seats against the four it bagged in 2014, makes it a point to attack Modi and talk of why he should be voted out.

Of the 13 seats in Punjab, the Akali Dal is contesting 10 seats and the BJP three. Yet, the CM largely spares the Badals — attacking them when he is in Ferozepur, where Sukhbir Badal is contesting, and Bathinda, where Sukhbir's wife and Union minister Harsimrat Kaur Badal is in the fray — and directing a large part of his speech at Modi.

Hours before Modi's maiden poll rally in the state on May 9, Singh addressed a rally in Patiala, saying the PM has no right to seek votes in a state for which "he has done nothing". "My government was left to fend for itself despite the massive debt left behind by the SAD-BJP government," he said.

When Modi brought up Sam Pitroda's

AMARINDER SPEAKS

BHOA (GURDASPUR), MAY 11
"Modi's shameful attempts to destroy the secular fabric of the country are a threat to its very existence."

KHATKAR KALAN, MAY 6
"Rajiv sacrificed his life for the country, and our current Prime Minister, unmindful of the dignity of the chair he has been ensconced in for the past five years, deems it fit to drag the former PM's name into what he has reduced to a shameful saga of low-level electioneering."

KARTARPUR, MAY 2
"It is the *fauj* (soldiers) of India and its people who are getting killed everyday in the line of duty; it is not Modi's *fauj*. He is using their sacrifice for political gains."

SANGRUR, APRIL 24
"The Modi government's promises are hollow. They failed to get rid of black money, they failed to give the promised Rs 14 lakh to every poor, and they failed to double the income of the farmers."



Amarinder Singh campaigning for Congress's Sangrur candidate Kewal Singh Dhillon. Gurmeet Singh

Patiala to Jalandhar.

If the Badals thrive on reminding the audience about the alleged "injustices meted out" to them by the Nehru-Gandhi family, Singh often compares Modi unfavourably with Indira Gandhi and former PM Manmohan Singh.

Modi, he reiterates, is a self-obsessed man. "Look at the way he tried to steal the

credit for Balakot and the way Indira Gandhi handled her achievement in splitting Pakistan to create Bangladesh in the 1971 war... Balakot was a victory of the armed forces, not Modi."

Among voters, the CM's rhetoric has got a mixed response. At Ropar in the Doaba belt, Shamsher Singh, a former PWD union leader, says, "The Congress won because of

the Captain... he is a straight-shooter, speaks his mind."

But in Hoshiarpur, a reserved constituency, Dr Anita Kumari, principal of Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib College for Women, Chhabawal, makes no bones about her distaste for the present poll discourse of the leading parties. "Why don't they focus on real issues? There is no let-up in the sup-

EXPLAINED
E.

Aggressive pitch

WITH THE Akali Dal on the backfoot in Punjab and the party relying heavily on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity, as is evident in Parkash Singh Badal's speeches, Amarinder Singh, who is leading the Congress campaign, realises he has to hit his rivals where it hurts most.

ply of drugs. We have stopped wearing gold ornaments because snatchers have a free run."

Outside the college, Darshan Singh Saini, an ex-serviceman who retired from the Army's 16 Punjab regiment, says he doesn't like the CM's diatribe against Modi. "The PM gave us one rank, one pension. Despite being a soldier, the Captain doesn't think of the Army."

Jagroop Singh Sekhon, a professor of political science at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, says people in Punjab don't buy the Modi brand of nationalism. Yet, he says, Singh's focus on Modi is equally distasteful. "It is an admission of his government's failure to fulfill most of its promises."

Amarjit Kaur, whose family tills two acres near Bhang Rajaurrian village, says, "We will vote for whoever the sarpanch tells us, but please write that our children are not getting any jobs, only promises."

ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The battle of Pataliputra, featuring an 'uncle' and 'niece' and a relationship turned sour

KARISHMA MEHROTRA
PATALIPUTRA, MAY 14

ON THE terrace of a building at the end of the winding Gorya Toli gali, outside ministerji's bedroom, a group of 20-odd men wait underneath a clothesline with children's underwear. Outside, a large photo of Narendra Modi, arms crossed, welcomes the unending flow of men who have now crammed the entrance to the building. The name of the BJP's sitting MP from Pataliputra who lives here is scribbled — small and tilted — below the Prime Minister's face: "Ram Kripal Yadav".

"Earlier, he was on that side. Now, he has joined this side," a party worker whispers on the terrace, as another shouts into a phone with poor network: "Agar aap sab Bhumihar ke sath lag jate hain to accha hain (It will be good if you can stay with the Bhumihars)."

Four kilometres away, Ram Kripal's RJD opponent, Misa Bharti, who once called him "chacha" (uncle) when he was the close aide and confidant of her father Lalu Prasad, has just as many people vying for her attention in the mornings. But unlike the close quarters of Gorya Toli, they leisurely spread out on green lawn chairs in Lalu's courtyard on Circular Road, sipping lychee juice underneath the shade of a sprawling mango tree. With Lalu in Ranchi jail in the fodder scam case, his office doors remain shut, so the RJD workers instead face a staff office, discussing their "tallest" leader from a bygone era.

"I would say *zindabad* so much for Laluji, he would have to tell me to be quiet," says a longtime RJD supporter. He would also attend morning walks in Eco Park with Ram Kripal Yadav back in 2008, before the rupture that caused someone who used to defeat the BJP to join the party in 2014.

It's now 10 am and the RJD supporters are still waiting for Misa to emerge from her side of the residence. Outside, the gate bears the name Rabri Devi, who has been allot-



Ram Kripal Yadav and Misa Bharti during their campaign. Karishma Mehrotra

ted the residence in her capacity as former CM, and photographs of her brothers Tejashwi and Tej Pratap.

Misa emerges from the far side of the compound at 11 am in an SUV, ready to head out to her constituency in the rural areas in west of Patna. She briefly addresses party workers from her car window, telling them she can't be expected in every village: "How many programmes will I do? There are only four days left."

As she exits the front gates, a swarm of cameramen, entangling themselves in their cords, clamour to get a sound bite. She does little to entertain them, claiming that her voters get upset when she "wastes" time with media. Her van's RJD flag carries the face of her father.

Ram Kripal Yadav's schedule has gone awry. He had planned to leave home at 8 am for the day's campaign, but a murder in



Paliganj in the constituency and a late-night post-mortem had Ram Kripal, Minister of Rural Development in the Nitish Kumar Cabinet, arriving at 7 am from yesterday's campaign.

After a shower and prayer, he's now receiving a few men at a time to sit with him on his bed in his room. Interrupted by phones handed to him from all directions, he's told the name and village of the person on the line. "Jitender babu. Pranam. Ram Kripal Yadav bol rahe hain. Lag ja sab jaga, lag ja. Bohuth danyabad (Ram Kripal Yadav speaking. Go for it everywhere. Go for it. Thank you)." His free hand massages his head throughout.

The phone calls continue through his car ride to Sivalapur. The line of 10 SUVs and jeeps zip past the trains leaving Danapur station, past the petrol pump, and past the buildings and hoardings that give way to

the wheat fields.

"I was there, with Lalu and Nitish, everyone together. But the party broke when the RJD's policy was diverted and the atmosphere changed," he says, in between phone calls. "Someone who helped you for 30-35 years, and you throw them out, choosing your family instead? What has his daughter done for the party?"

Mid-sentence, the candidate dozes off. The guard hands him another phone call, and the assistant scolds him for not letting mantriji sleep.

Not a stone's throw away, Bharti has arrived in Bihta with much less fanfare. For every three slogans for the longevity of Lalu and Rabri, the RJD supporters mention Misa once. She steps out of the car for 10-odd minutes to sit underneath a covering for some selfies. "He left the party," she says of Ram Kripal. "He betrayed Laluji and his family. Of course, there is pain. Neither Nitish Kumar nor the gathbandhan has given me as much grief as Ram Kripal. *Peeth me chura bhonka* (He stabbed us in the back)."

As her vehicle lurches over the cragged dirt path, she asks, "Is this what Ram Kripal calls development?"

In Sikandarapur, a man peeps in through her car window and says, "We will never let the *chowkidar* in." "*Lekin aap logon ne dhoka diya* (But you all betrayed me)," says Misa, referring to her 2014 loss to Ram Kripal.

Asked if she would fight a third time if defeated again, she dismisses the question. "This is not a personal fight," she says. "This is an ideological fight. Now he has become a BJP candidate. He is no longer my *chacha*."

"Once a *chacha*, always a *chacha*," counters Ram Kripal. "As long as I live, I will be her *chacha* and she will be my niece. *Pyar abhi bhi hain lekin rajneeti mein pyar nahin hota hain*. Politics *alag hain* (I still have love for her but there is no love in politics. Politics is different)."

SEAT WATCH PATALIPUTRA

Ram Kripal and Misa in an absorbing contest

SANTOSH SINGH
PATALIPUTRA, MAY 14

ACROSS THE pontoon bridge in Danapur lies a vast stretch of *diara* (riverine belt) along the Ganga. Home to nearly 70,000 voters, most of them OBC Yadavs, the *diara*, part of the Pataliputra Lok Sabha seat, has small farmers who grow about two crops a year. Some people in the area have been allotted homes under the Indira Awaas Yojana and most homes have electricity. But their biggest worry remains soil erosion, the fear that they will eventually lose their fields and homes to the Ganga.

Most of Danapur residents have been committed RJD supporters for years, but are now upset with both RJD candidate Misa Bharti (Rajya Sabha MP and daughter of RJD chief Lalu Prasad), and BJP candidate and sitting MP Ram Kripal Yadav for failing to check the periodic floods.

Shiv Vachan Rai, a resident of Purani Panapur diara, says, "*Balubandi* (ban on the sale of sand) has hit us. After the Nitish Kumar government introduced new contract rules, Yadav youths who were in the business of selling sand lost their jobs. Earlier, demonetisation had affected all of us... Ram Kripal is a grassroots leader but he hardly enjoys any clout in the BJP."

Pataliputra is set to witness an absorbing contest between Ram Kripal, once a trusted lieutenant of RJD chief Lalu Prasad, and Lalu's daughter Bharti. Lalu Prasad had lost the seat in 2009 to his once aide and JD(U) candidate Ranjan Prasad Yadav, and in 2014, Bharti lost to Ram Kripal who had switched over to the BJP prior to the 2014 polls after being denied a ticket by the RJD. This time, with the JD(U) in the NDA

fold, Ram Kripal hopes to gain the ally's votes and increase his tally, but unlike in 2014, he has no Narendra Modi wave to bank on.

Yadav Rai, another *diara* resident, says, "This is Lalu Prasad's stronghold. All those supporters (of the BJP) here... will evaporate as soon as Ram Kripal leaves the area."

Lal Bahadur Rai, a *litti* and tea seller at Purani Panapur *diara* for the last 15 years, says no politician has addressed the problem of soil erosion. "Asha Sinha, the BJP MLA from the area, seldom visits us. Though CM Nitish Kumar has given us electricity, some of the houses allotted under the Indira Awaas Yojana were washed away during the floods.

We also need a bridge over the Ganga. That will shorten the distance between Patna and Chhapra and make it easier for us to reach the capital," says Rai.

Down the pontoon bridge, at some distance through the *kachcha* roads, a few youth and middle-aged people have gathered at a tea shop.

Deepak Kumar, a farmer, says, "There is no Narendra Modi wave this time. Many of us voted for the BJP last time hoping our lives would change for the better. But we do not remember Ram Kripal visiting us after becoming a minister. Misa has promised to do something to stop soil erosion, but we are disillusioned."

Deepak, called "masterji" for his eloquence, says, "Tejashwi has been picking up fast as a leader but is no match for his father."

As the residents continue chatting, there is some activity near the bridge. People on horses lead Ram Kripal, who is visiting the *diara*, amidst slogans.

After he leaves, resident Mukesh Rai says, "Ram Kripal may get some Yadav votes here because of his old connection with the RJD but he will largely bank on upper-caste votes."

PATALIPUTRA (VOTING ON MAY 19)

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

BJP's Ram Kripal Yadav	39.16%
RJD	35.04%

2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

JD(U)'s Ranjan P Yadav	42.86%
RJD	39.12%

Battling silicosis, Ratlam's tribals say 'no one comes here for votes'

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
JHABUA, MAY 14

FIVE MEMBERS of her family succumbed to silicosis a decade ago. Now, three remain. Of them, her two bedridden sons also suffer from the disease. At 60, Limbudi Khuma earns Rs 50 a day collecting tendu leaves in Satsera village in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district — part of the Ratlam Lok Sabha constituency that votes on May 19. It is not enough to pay the hospital bills for her sons, she says.

Located on the Gujarat-Madhya Pradesh border, the village has no roads, and is yet to see a political party campaign in the region. "No one comes here for votes. They know our demands, they can't fulfil them," says Khuma, a Scheduled Tribe. Her demands are simple: rehabilitation and water.

Across 87 tribal villages in the Ratlam region, 349 people have died due to silicosis since 2001. As per data from Madhya Pradesh government's Labour Department, there are over 3,000 confirmed silicosis cases in Alirajpur and Jhabua — two of the eight

Assembly segments in Ratlam.

In 2001, after acute water scarcity in Jhabua hit their cotton and corn cultivation, Khuma's entire family migrated to Gujarat's quartz crushing units. But without protective gears, the family was exposed to the toxic crystalline silica dust, which soon led to lung inflammation. Between 2003 to 2005, she lost her husband, her 21-year-old daughter, and three sons to silicosis.

"The water in our wells dried up and farming stopped. Even MGNREGA work was not available. Several villagers from the region migrated to Gujarat's quartz crushing units which paid Rs 100-150 for a day's work," says Rakesh, Khuma's son. The family received Rs 9 lakh compensation from the Gujarat government for the three deceased, but awaits compensation for the remaining two.

That money, she says, has all been spent in the treatment of her two sons.

In 2010, the National Human Rights Commission had directed the Madhya Pradesh government to provide rehabilitation to the patients, and the Gujarat government to provide Rs 3 lakh compensation to



Limbudi lost five members of her family to silicosis. Now her sons are ailing

the kin of dead. In 2016, the Supreme Court upheld NHRC's decision.

A few kilometres away, in Antarlaviya village, Vesta Madiya (70) lost four family mem-

bers to silicosis, and is yet to receive any compensation. "Both my brothers died within years of working at the quartz units. I was afraid to take up work there, but there was

no MGNREGA work here either. So seven years ago I had to migrate to feed my family. They would have died of hunger," says Madiya's son Dhula Vesta, 23.

In the 2014 general elections, he says, he voted for the BJP "because they promised employment". "But there is none," says Vesta.

Scheduled Tribes constitute 34 per cent of Madhya Pradesh's 91.07 lakh MGNREGA work force. However, alleges Mandli village resident Dinesh Raising, also a patient of silicosis, they have got no work despite visiting government officials several times. He has also lost his wife and sister to the disease.

Eighty-five per cent of Ratlam's 20 lakh voters are Scheduled Tribes. A traditional Congress bastion, the BJP won the seat for the first time in 2014 when the party's Dileep Bhuria defeated four-time MP and former Union tribal minister Kantilal Bhuria by 1.25 lakh votes. In the bypolls that followed Dileep's death in 2016, the Congress won the seat again.

Tribal residents of the region complain that while the Congress promised a loan waiver for farmers within 10 days of forming government in Madhya Pradesh, the

party remains silent on rehabilitation for silicosis victims.

"Monthly pension under rehabilitation is a Cabinet process, it will take time to fix the amount for patients. The BJP was in power in the state for 15 years, what did it do?" incumbent Congress MP Bhuria told *The Indian Express* as he campaigned in Rampura, 10 km from Satsera village.

In the contest for Ratlam, Bhuria is up against the BJP's Gumansingh Damor, who in the Assembly elections last year won the difficult Jhabua seat, defeating Bhuria's son Vikrant. "Health, education and self-employment are key issues for me," Damor said. He did not comment on the silicosis issue.

The BJP is confident that the anti-incumbency in Ratlam will ensure a win for the party. "The Jhabua win last year is an indication that people want change," says BJP district president Om Sharma. A decade ago, says the BJP's campaign manager O P Rai, "It was difficult to even campaign for the BJP in Ratlam, but we have broken into this bastion finally."

The Congress holds five of the eight Assembly segments in Ratlam.

7 DECISION 2019



BALLOTIN

EC show cause to Sanjay Nirupam on jibe against Modi

New Delhi: Congress leader Sanjay Nirupam was issued a showcause notice by the Election Commission on Tuesday for his “modern-day avatar of Aurangzeb” jibe against Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has been given 24 hours to respond.

Last week, Nirupam had said in Varanasi, “The people of this constituency chose a person (PM Narendra Modi) who is actually the modern-day avatar of Aurangzeb. Because in Varanasi, in the name of corridors, hundreds of temples have been demolished on the instruction of Prime Minister Modi.” **PTI**

Include money spent at temples in poll expenditure: Maya

Lucknow: BSP chief Mayawati Tuesday said the Election Commission should include the amount of money spent by a candidate while his offering prayers at temples during election time in his total electoral expenditure. In a statement, Mayawati also demanded that in a case a candidate has been banned from campaigning due to Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations, the person should also be banned from offering prayers at public temples with large-scale media coverage. **ENS**

Bengal govt urges EC to involve local cops for phase 7 polls

Kolkata: The West Bengal government, in a letter dated May 13, has urged the Election Commission to involve state police in the movement of Quick Response Teams alongside the Central Armed Police Forces during Phase 7 of the Lok Sabha elections on May 19 to enable them to reach troubled areas without delay. **ENS**

VIOLENCE IN KOLKATA

Govt of gangsters, asks Jaitley; TMC rally today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, KOLKATA, MAY 14

AS A BJP delegation met Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora and demanded bar on campaigning by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and deployment of more observers in the state following violence during a roadshow in Kolkata by party president Amit Shah, Union minister and senior BJP leader Arun Jaitley on Tuesday asked whether Bengal has “acquired a Government of Gangsters”.

Banerjee, who visited Vidyasagar College, the main site of violence, announced that her party will take out a protest rally on Wednesday to condemn the vandalism and destruction of Vidyasagar’s bust in the college.

After the BJP team met Arora on Tuesday night, the EC sought a report on the party’s allegations from its special observer in Bengal. Jaitley tweeted, “Has Bengal acquired a



Arun Jaitley

Government of Gangsters? The attack on Amit Shah’s peaceful rally by TMC is deplorable. Is a free & fair Poll possible in Bengal? All eyes now on Election Commission.... Keep it up Amit Bhai. Only Modi Ji and you can do in Bengal what others failed to realise. Victory is now at an arm’s length distance.”

TMC leader Derek O’Brien, meanwhile, accused the BJP of bringing “outsiders” and stoking violence. He tweeted, “Desperate BJP goons from outside Bengal smash statue of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar inside the college. Violent mob of BJP ‘outsiders’ in presence of Pukeworthy Shah. How little you know about

Bengal, its rich history, its culture. Bengal will never forgive for what you did today.”

In Chandigarh, Haryana CM and BJP leader Manohar Lal Khattar blamed the TMC’s student activists for creating the trouble, PTI reported. He said it is for the EC to ensure free and fair polling, but indicated that options like President’s rule can be opted for at a later stage, depending on how the situation unfolds. He said, “People of West Bengal are wise, they are watching what they (TMC) are doing. If they cross the limits then other things can be considered — like President’s rule. But at the moment, priority is that the EC should look into this...”

Sitaram Yechury, general secretary of the CPI(M), the main opposition party in Bengal, posted on the microblogging site: “BJP-RSS think nothing of when they vandalise the historic Vidyasagar College, break Vidyasagar statue. This is their advocacy of India’s civilisational heritage? Attacking knowledge is cen-

tral to getting their poisonous project going. Bengal will reject the destruction they offer.”

In Kolkata, CPI(M) state secretary and Leader of the Opposition in Assembly Surjya Kanta Mishra said in a statement: “The character of both TMC and BJP has come into the open through this. Both assembled miscreants who were outsiders. Both party workers provoked each other and pelted bricks and stones. Even (a) bust of Vidyasagar was destroyed. Both (parties) are trying to polarise voters.”

BJP national media in-charge and Rajya Sabha MP Anil Baluni said the party delegation made the EC aware about the entire episode and demanded a bar on Banerjee from campaigning in the elections.

The BJP also demanded that “miscreants” and “history-sheeters” present in constituencies that go to the polls on May 19 should be arrested and removed from these places. The BJP demanded that Central forces should carry out flag march in these constituencies.

the BJP. In Nagwa, several Brahmin voters said they will vote for the BJP because Prime Minister Narendra Modi had brought in development. “Are you watching TV? Whose name is the country chanting? That’s where I am going to vote,” says Dineshwar Pathak.

Aditya Pathak, a music teacher from the village, says, “Brahmins have Modi in their heart and everyone wants to vote for him. But things will be decided in the last two days. If all decide to go for Pandey, so will I.” In Bairia, the equations are no different. While Yadavs, Dalits and Muslims seem consolidated behind the gathbandhan, Rajputs and a significant chunk of non-Yadav OBCs said they preferred Modi and Brahmins here too were undecided.

Tribhuvan Tiwari says he has been a BJP voter since Atal Behari Vajpayee’s time but is changing his vote this time. He says his reasons are lack of jobs and the poor condition of education under the Modi government. His friend Jamuna Prasad, however, whispers that Tiwari is voting for the gathbandhan because of Pandey.

Dhan Gupta, who runs a paan shop at Haldi Market near Bairia says Mast had a good chance until a Brahmin was nominated. “Now, Brahmins have begun to think about the gathbandhan. But there are still a few days to go. Big rallies are scheduled. This contest could go anywhere,” he says.

But the BJP has hope in what Anil Sahni, a Mallah from Bharsauni village near Haldi, says, “A lot has happened under Modi. He has built the foundation and the walls. We want to give him a chance to build the roof as well. We gave them 60 years. Let us give him 10 years at least.”



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar at an election rally in Sasaram. **PTI**

erty, built any farmhouse or shopping complex, deposited money in foreign banks or bought property abroad.”

Stating that all partners of this “mahamilaawat” — the SP, the BSP and the Congress — are frustrated after six phases of polling, Modi said they are now left with only one job: “Modi ko gaali do, gaali do, gaali do (abuse, abuse, abuse Modi).”

In Buxar, Modi said the General Election this time is about “deciding the future of 21st-century children”, and deciding the speed at which the country will grow.

Without naming any party, he said, “Kuchh logon ne samajh liya hai kuchh jaatiyan unki ghulam hai, jaise woh kahenge waise log karenge (some people are under the illusion that certain castes are their slaves, and will do whatever they want).”

Accusing “such people” of getting votes in the name of the poor and then not doing anything for those people, Modi said, “Even though there is no great salary in politics, how do some people make big houses? I have been chief minister of Gujarat for a long time, and the Prime Minister for five years. I

have neither spent a moment for myself nor have given time to my relatives”.

In Chandigarh, Modi said, “Every vote of yours should be for the *kamal* (lotus, the BJP’s poll symbol). Every vote for Kamal will go into Modi’s kitty.”

He asked the crowd, “*Kya mujhe aapki bhalai ke liye kaam karna chaye ya nahi? Desh ki bhalai ke liye karna chahiye ya nahi? Uske liye gaali pade to bhi karna chahiye ya nahi? Anap shanap bola jaaye to bhi karna chaye?* (Shouldn’t I work for you, for the nation’s benefit? Shouldn’t I work even if I am abused for that?)”

Besides, he said, the government has installed a sewage treatment plant here, modernised the airport, among others.

Speaking on the Army’s strikes on terrorists, Modi said, “They (Opposition) raised several questions on the surgical strike and the airstrike. It was Modi who adopted the policy of killing terrorists by entering their home (*‘ghar mein ghuske’*). You tell me, is the approach of killing terrorists by entering their homes right or not? Should I do it or not?”



Rahul Gandhi greets supporters at an election rally in Neemuch on Tuesday. **PTI**

Won’t speak ill of PM’s parents as I’m not with BJP, RSS: Rahul

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 14

ACCUSING PRIME Minister Narendra Modi of insulting his father Rajiv Gandhi, Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said he would not speak ill of the PM’s parents because he does not “belong to the RSS or the BJP”.

Addressing a rally in Tarana town in Madhya Pradesh’s Ujjain district, Gandhi said, “Narendra Modi speaks with hatred. He insults my father, grandmother and great grandfather but I will never speak about his parents in my life. I will rather die but not insult his mother and father because I am not a member of the RSS or the BJP but of Congress party. I will respond to his hatred and anger with love and but will defeat him with love.”

The Congress leader said his party defeated had defeated the BJP in the recent Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan “with love”, and will also do so in the general elections.

At another rally in Neemuch town, Gandhi said that he had promised to waive of farmers’ loans at Mandsaur — where five farmers where killed in police firing in June 2017 — and had kept his vow after the Congress govern-

ment took charge in the state. “I don’t forget. You called me when you were fired at,” he said.

“When farmers don’t return money, Narendra Modi fires at them or sends them to jail,” he said, repeating the promise in his party’s manifesto that farmers won’t be sent to jail for non-repayment of their loans.

Gandhi began his speeches at Khandwa, Neemuch and Tarana with his “chowkidar chor hai” slogan, claiming that that is how he tests the mood of the Congress workers. “*Mood fit hai. Mamla fit hai* (Mood is good. Situation is good),” he said.

Repeating his challenge to Modi to debate the Rafale jet deal, the Congress leader said “The chowkidar with a 56-inch chest is scared to debate the Rafale deal with me fearing that truth will come out.”

Gandhi also took potshots at the PM for saying that a cloud cover helped IAF planes evade Pakistani radars during the airstrikes at Balakot. “When it rains do all airplanes disappear?” he asked.

The Congress president also targeted the PM for some of remarks made during an interaction with actor Akshay Kumar. “Don’t teach us how to eat mangoes or shorten sleeves of kurtas to save space, tell us what you did in five years of your rule,” Gandhi said.

SEAT WATCH INDORE VOTING ON MAY 19

With 8-time MP Sumitra bowing out, Cong says this time will be different

KRISHN KAUSHIK
INDORE, MAY 14

IN 1984, when there was a Congress landslide, one of the 404 seats it had won was Indore. That was the last time the party saw a winning candidate in the city. In 1989, Sumitra Mahajan defeated incumbent Prakashchand Sethi. Since then, Indore has sent Mahajan to the Lok Sabha eight consecutive times.

This time, Mahajan, the Lok Sabha Speaker who turned 76 in April, is out of the fray, and the Congress is hoping to win back the city after 30 years.

The BJP is confident that its new candidate, Shankar Lalwani, will win with the support of cadres, but there is a slight nervousness. “He does not have a grip on rural areas,” said Ankit Mukati (26), a BJP worker.

Mukati is part of the Khaati community, who are predominantly rich, landed farmers. Mukati said the Khaatis are upset as the ticket was not given to a member of their community, which has a larger base than Sindhis, to which Lalwani belongs.

His family — like a large part of the Khaati community which has more than 4 lakh votes in the Lok Sabha constituency — has mostly been voting for the BJP, he said. Sitting in his family’s bungalow in Bijalpur village just outside Indore city, Mukati said that Lalwani might win but with a very narrow margin.

Bijalpur is in Rau Assembly segment, one of eight Assembly seats in Indore parliamentary constituency. Another reason for Mukati’s uncertainty is that the Congress won four of these seats in the 2018 Assembly elections.

In neighbouring Pipliya Rau village, Subhash Verma, a 60-year-old farmer, said people would go back to the BJP because the “Congress government hasn’t waived farm loans”.



Sumitra Mahajan is not contesting from Indore this year, but has been present in almost all of BJP’s rallies, including on Sunday, in which PM Modi was present. **PTI**