



Adityanath camped in Gorakhpur to get equations right

MAULSHREE SETH
LUCKNOW, MAY 17

AFTER WITNESSING first-hand the effects of the SP-BSP alliance on his home turf in the bypolls last year, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is leaving little to chance in the Gorakhpur constituency, which goes to polls in the seventh and last phase on May 19.

Despite his busy campaign schedule across the country, Adityanath has camped in Gorakhpur, a seat he has won every time since 1998, for the last week — since campaigning ended for Phase 6 on May 10 — in a bid to get the social, religious and caste equations right. The BJP's pick for Gorakhpur this time is actor-turned-politician Ravi Kishan Shukla.

Since the BJP suffered defeats at the hands of the gathbandhan in the Gorakhpur and Phulpur bypolls last year, the party has faced an uphill battle in a region where politics revolves around Thakurs and Brahmins.

Sources said that Adityanath has put to task his own organisation — the Hindu Yuva Vahini — which has remained dormant since he became CM in 2017. However, Shukla's nomination has irked many and former Yuva Vahini chief Sunil Singh is campaigning for gathbandhan candidate Ram Bhuwal Nishad.

And while Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not campaigned here, Adityanath is pulling out all the stops: since May 10, he has addressed Sikh, intellectuals, trader, social and booth worker sammelans in all five assembly segments, state and Union ministers have campaigned in Gorakhpur and Adityanath, who has tried to either begin or end his schedule in Gorakhpur daily, has ensured at least one public meeting every day.

And as campaigning ended for the Lok Sabha polls Friday, Adityanath addressed his last rally in the Shahjanwa area of Gorakhpur.

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- May 13: He started with a rally in Jeetpur market in Gorakhpur before travelling to the Maharajganj and Deoria constituencies. He ended the day with a rally in Gorakhpur's Sehjanwa area.
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- May 16: Started the day in the Pipraich area of Gorakhpur followed by BJP chief Amit Shah's roadshow.
- May 15: Adityanath was in West Bengal.
- May 17: Union Minister Smriti Irani held a bike rally. Adityanath ended the campaign at the Shahjanwa area of Gorakhpur.

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Speaking to The Indian Express, PK Mall, general secretary of the Hindu Yuva Vahini said, "This election cannot be compared with the bypolls as voters had not taken it seriously and even the polling percentage was quite low. However, there has been more awareness this time and everyone has given time."

State Rural Development Minister Mahendra Singh said, "Lots of things have changed since the bypolls. A lot of work has been undertaken since then. It should not have been seen as he was camping in Gorakhpur because during the west UP campaign, he made Delhi his base and for central UP he made Lucknow the base. For east UP, he made Gorakhpur the base and travelled to not in UP but also Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal from here. He also stayed in Varanasi for two days."

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Last lap, and countdown



PM Modi and Amit Shah at a press conference in New Delhi. Anil Sharma

Modi: Will return with full majority, a big deal in itself

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

AT THE end of the campaign for Lok Sabha elections, both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah claimed that the party will return to power with a majority, and while all pre-election allies would be part of the government, the "doors will be open for anyone who wants to join the agenda of the BJP" afterward.

At a press conference in the BJP headquarters, Modi made his first appearance since he came to power in 2014, but refused to field any media question, leaving the floor for Shah to address them.

"I am a disciplined soldier of the party. The party president is everything for us," Modi said when asked questions.

Responding to a question to the Prime Minister on the Rafale fighter jet deal, Shah said, "It is not necessary that the Prime Minister responds to every question."

Modi, who in a surprise move showed up on the dais at the press conference convened by Shah, gave a speech, exuding confidence that his party would return to power. "A government with full majority (is) coming back after remaining in power for five years. This is probably happening after a very long time. This is a big deal in itself," Modi said.

Modi said, "The public has decided on the next government. We have promised many things in our manifesto to take the country forward. As soon as possible, the new government will take charge and we will take decisions one after another."

He said there was a time when the Indian Premier League (IPL) had to be shifted out of India due to the polls, but under the current government Navratni, Ram Navami, Easter, Ramzan, IPL, Board examinations as well as elections could take place simultaneously.

Claiming that his coming to power was the beginning of the "era of honesty" in Indian politics, Modi said, "Election results came on May 16, 2014, and a huge casualty took place on May 17, 2014. Today is also May 17. People in the 'satta bazaar' (betting market) who bet for the Congress to win in the elections faced huge losses on May 17 (in 2014). It was the beginning of an era of honesty," he added.

Modi said work to fulfil promises made in the BJP's manifesto will be started as soon as the party returns to power. "We ensured last-

TMC: Shah violated poll conduct by speaking of Bengal

Kolkata: The TMC is contemplating lodging a complaint with the Election Commission (EC) against BJP national president Amit Shah for violating the model code of conduct. According to party's secretary general Partha Chatterjee, Shah violated the poll conduct after he spoke about Bengal in a press conference held in Delhi, as the campaigning for the state ended at 10 pm on Thursday.

"They (BJP) are violating poll conduct day in and day out, and the EC is taking no action against them. Today Shah spoke about Bengal. But he forgot that campaigning in Bengal ended last night after EC curtailed the campaigning schedule by invoking Article 324. This amounts to violation of poll conduct..." Chatterjee said. **ENS**

mile delivery, which was a new structure of governance.... Our government will take up its responsibility as soon as possible," he said.

Before Modi's speech, Shah addressed the media. "The BJP will have enough seats to form a government on its own," he maintained. "We will get more than 300 seats. This election is to choose the country's Prime Minister. Narendra Modi will be the Prime Minister."

Emphasising that the campaign ahead of April-May elections were "most extensive and most hard-working" since Independence, Shah said Modi's outreach was unprecedented. According to Shah, Modi flew 1.5 lakh km and addressed 142 public rallies in "temperatures ranging from 18 degrees to 46 degrees". "On March 28, the campaign started from Meerut. Prime Minister Modi addressed 142 public rallies, held four roadshows and, according to conservative estimates, he directly addressed about 1.5 crore people in these rallies. Modi's campaign involved air travel of around 1.5 lakh km," Shah said.

The BJP president said he himself visited 312 Lok Sabha constituencies and addressed 161 public rallies. He said he travelled 1.58 lakh km and held 18 roadshows.



Rahul Gandhi at a press conference at the AICC office in New Delhi. Prem Nath Pandey

Rahul cautious, Cong says will be single largest party

MANOJ CG
NEW DELHI, MAY 17

ASTHE one-and-a-half month-long election campaign came to a close, Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Friday refused to hazard a guess on the number of seats his party would get and who could be the next Prime Minister if the BJP is defeated.

He merely said he was sure that parties like the TDP, TMC, BSP and SP would not support a BJP government. His party, on the other hand, said it would emerge as the single largest party and naturally lead the next government.

Addressing a press conference, Rahul mocked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, called the Election Commission "partial", and argued that even the parties that did not have an alliance with the Congress were "ideologically" "on the same page as us."

However, Rahul parried questions on the post-May 23 possibilities: "I am not going to disrespect the people of this country by judging what they are going to do... The people will decide on May 23. And we will work and take a decision on the basis of the people's decision."

He said he did not see Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mamata Banerjee, Chandrababu Naidu supporting a BJP or Narendra Modi government. He said that while the Congress may not have had an alliance in Uttar Pradesh or West Bengal, he was sure that "secular formations are going to win the maximum number of seats in those states".

Hours earlier, his party predicted that a situation similar to 2004 and 2009 would emerge on May 23. "We believe the Congress will be the single largest party. Naturally if we have the numbers and is the single largest party, the single largest party... which is the Congress party must lead the next government," Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said. He added that the Congress "will like to carry people and political parties with different shades of opinion along with us", and if necessary "walk an extra mile to carry them with us".

On Modi's press conference, Rahul said, "Very impressive. So the Prime Minister's first press conference has come 4-5 days before the election results. Very good. I heard the Prime Minister is accompanying Amit Shah in a press briefing. Unprecedented event.

He tweeted later, "Congratulations Modi

Rahul thanks media

New Delhi: Wrapping up his media interaction, Congress president Rahul Gandhi asked reporters, "You must have seen that I have improved at press conferences. You have seen that." He added, "How do you think I have improved? Who made me improve? Who do you think? You made me improve. So it is because I come here and do press conferences in front of you, that my gurus... all my friendly press people with the cameras teach me... So I would like to thank you." **ENS**

Ji. Excellent Press Conference! Showing up is half the battle. Next time Mr Shah may even allow you to answer a couple of questions. Well done!"

On the EC, he alleged, "Modi says whatever he wants. Someone else (saying) the same thing, gets pulled up, but Modi can say whatever he wants. So there was clear partiality. And we saw partiality in one more thing. The election schedule, it seems, was drawn up for Modi's campaign."

He said the BJP had unlimited funds, unlimited marketing, unlimited television, but the Congress put up a great fight. "The election was fought on three-four issues. Unemployment, the plight of farmers, Rafale fighter jet corruption, the state of the economy, notebandi and gabbar singh tax and Narendra Modi did not reply to any of these issues," he said.

He also took a dig at the media, "I have a complaint to the media people. You ask hard questions to me. Where will the money for the Nyay scheme come and all... But to Modi, saab how do you eat mangoes, saab how do you dress up, why are you wearing half sleeve kurtas... Be a bit fair."

Rahul said Modi "had a huge opportunity" to take on the challenge of joblessness, help farmers, but "he lost sight of the real picture. He forgot that the Indian people had not put him as Prime Minister to give speeches, and to tell the Indian people what he thought. They had put him in place to do a couple of concrete jobs. Unemployment, farmers' situation, economy and put India on a trajectory, on a path and give India a new vision."

CPM looks to put up tough fight in two South Bengal seats

SANTANU CHOWDHURY
KOLKATA, MAY 17

EVEN AS the TMC and BJP dominate the election narrative in West Bengal, the CPM — once a formidable force in the state — is working at the grassroots to put up a tough fight in two of the nine Lok Sabha seats that vote in the last phase.

As campaigning in the state ended a day before schedule following an Election Commission order, the Left seemed hopeful of wresting both Jadavpur and Diamond Harbour seats. In Jadavpur it is a three-cornered contest as the Congress has not fielded a candidate. In Diamond Harbour, however, the competition is relatively tough as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee is seeking re-election from there.

"If elections are held in a free and fair manner, then we will win both the seats. We have received reports from these two constituencies and we got a positive response from the people," said CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury.

While both TMC and BJP organised massive public meetings, road shows and rallies, the CPM conducted door-to-door campaigning and street corner meetings to re-establish a connect with the people.

DIAMOND HARBOUR

This constituency has been a Left bastion since 1967. CPM candidates won 12 Lok Sabha polls here including a bypoll until 2009, when TMC candidate Somen Mitra (now state Congress president) put end to the Left domination. In 2014, Banerjee's nephew Abhishek Banerjee won the seat after defeating his nearest rival and CPM candidate Dr Abul Hasnat by over 70,000 votes.

In a bid to put up a strong fight, the CPM has fielded Dr Fuad Halim, son of the state's longest serving Legislative Assembly Speaker Hashim Abdul Halim (1982 to 2011).

Fuad was the CPM candidate for Ballygunge constituency in the 2011 Assembly elections, but lost to TMC's Subrata Mukherjee by 41,000 votes. This time, he feels the wind has changed. "There are reasons why we will do well this time. There have been numerous attacks on me during campaigning. People have come out of their houses to take part in our rallies. The support from the grassroots is immense," said Halim.

There were three instances of attacks on him allegedly by TMC goons.

Recently, the EC removed the Diamond Harbour SDPO over allegations of partiality towards the ruling party.

The BJP, meanwhile, depended on its star campaigner and Prime Minister Narendra



CPI (M) Lok Sabha candidates on their way to filing their nomination. Express

DIAMOND HARBOUR: 2014 LS

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| TMC's Abhishek Banerjee | 40.31% votes |
| CPM's Dr Abul Hasnat | 34.66% votes |
| BJP's Abhijit Das | 15.92% votes |
| Congress's Md Qamaruzzaman Qamar | 5% votes |

stituency. The Committee has extended support to Bhattacharya.

However, Jadavpur constituency is one of the most unpredictable seats in West Bengal. It is this seat that kickstarted Banerjee's political career after she defeated sitting MP and former Lok Sabha speaker Somnath Chatterjee in 1984.

Later, Krishna Bose, wife of freedom fighter Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's nephew Sisir Bose, CPM leader Suján Chakraborty and Harvard professor and Krishna Bose's son Sugata Bose also won Lok Sabha polls from here.

Former CPM chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has been a five-time MLA from Jadavpur Assembly constituency, one of the seven Assembly seats under Jadavpur Lok Sabha constituency.

In 2014, Sugata Bose defeated sitting MP Suján Chakraborty by a margin of over 1,20,000 votes. Sources in the TMC said that by giving Mimi Chakraborty a Lok Sabha ticket this time, Banerjee had tried to quell the infighting in Baruipur and Bhangar areas of the constituency.

In December last year, three people, including a driver and an associate of TMC MLA Biswanath Das, were gunned down after unidentified persons opened fire at his vehicle in Baruipur. In Bhangar area, factions of

TMC leaders Arabul Islam, Kaiser Ahmed and Rezzak Mollah have been at loggerheads.

"People are fed up with TMC and BJP. Both tried to polarise voters. We have tried to address burning issues like unemployment, corruption and agrarian crisis. Our workers have reached out to the people and received a positive response," Bhattacharya said.

Relatively weak here, the BJP has focused on bringing star campaigners to woo voters. WWE wrestler The Great Khali had campaigned for Hazra, prompting the TMC to complain to the EC over bringing in a US citizen for canvassing.

The TMC, meanwhile, is banking on a Tollywood star. "People want development and Banerjee is the only person who can usher in development here," said Chakraborty.

JADAVPUR: 2014 LS

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| TMC's Sugato Bose | 45.92% votes |
| CPM's Suján Chakraborty | 36.08% votes |
| BJP's Swarup Prasad Ghosh | 12.22% votes |
| Congress's Samir Aich | 2.07% votes |

8 DECISION 2019



‘Every missile has a camera...why are you not showing this? That is what we want to know’

A DAY before campaigning wound up for 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Punjab Chief Minister **CAPT AMARINDER SINGH** spoke with **MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA** on the elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his “claim” that the Balakot strikes are “his personal success”, and the state of affairs in Punjab. Excerpts:

How is this election different from the previous ones?

What has made a major difference is the social media. Also, there are at least 25 per cent more TV channels than five years ago. The coverage is much more, and people are very aware.

How many seats do you hope to win, considering you (Congress) had only three last time (in Punjab)?

We will sweep the state, and it is not a statement I am making just like that. The Akali Dal is divided into three, so is the Aam Aadmi Party. The Congress will be the biggest gainer. This division, coupled with the anger against the Akalis, our principal opposition, on the sacrilege issue will have a major impact on voting. The Congress will get an upper hand.

You have decided to build a memorial to victims of the unprovoked firing at Bargari.

Yes, we actually announced it earlier, but we were in a quandary. Putting money into a cenotaph is not really worth it. We left it to the village to decide but I would suggest that they should set up an institute of sorts, or a college, that really benefits people.

Today the tendency is to make gates. But what is the benefit of a gate? It should be something where children can study, or may be a hospital.

What are the prospects of Congress in rest of the country?

I have been talking to colleagues I have been flying with, and everyone is very upbeat. Statistically, if you ask me which state is doing what, I can’t tell you, but indications are that we are doing well.

Your speeches have been largely on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. You were the first to take on the Prime

Minister on the Balakot strikes.

I don’t think Modi has any right to claim these as his personal success. No Prime Minister before him — from 1947 until now - has claimed any strike (by the forces) as their personal success. They have always attributed it to the armed forces. Mrs Indira Gandhi gave full credit to Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw (for the 1971 war).

After that, (Atal Bihari) Vajpayee gave credit for Kargil success to the defence services - to the then (Army) chief Gen VP Malik. The decision is obviously taken by the Prime Minister in consultation with the Cabinet and the (service) Chiefs do brief the Cabinet. But it is the defence services that finally carry out the mission.

As for people questioning the Balakot strikes, I think people have the right to question. When the Air Force chief tells me he has hit the target, I believe him because I am a [retired] serviceman, but there are millions and millions of other people who would like to know whether the strikes took place or not. Why I am saying this is because during Kargil (War), you showed every picture on the television screen. The strike of the Air Force on Pakistani ammunition dump was flashed across the screens. Today your technology is far more sophisticated.

Forget about sending a reconnaissance aircraft, your satellites provide you information on a minute-

to-minute basis. Similarly, when missiles were fired, every missile has a camera in its cone, on its nose, and it keeps relaying information until the point of its impact. That must have all been there with the Air Force. Why are you (government) not showing this? That is what we want to know.

I think a lot of people want to know, and I want to know. It’s been a protocol in all wars of the past. In Second World War, the Air Force used to go and bomb German factories and dams and military installations...and the reports used to be given by the force commander. The next morning, a reconnaissance aircraft would be sent to verify the reports.

Even in those days, fighter jets carried a gun camera movie and intelligence officers would screen the movie to confirm whether the pilot was telling the truth. These are tried and tested methods, so what are you trying to hide here?

Naidu meets Kejriwal, Yechury; talks about post-poll alliance

building possibilities during his meetings with Yechury and Kejriwal.

“We welcome not only the TRS but any party which is against the BJP. We welcome all such parties to be a part of our grand alliance,” Naidu told reporters, when asked whether a Congress-led grand alliance will join hands with the TRS.

Naidu also met with the Election Commission (EC). He said he has requested the poll panel to take note of complaints filed by his party, including against the re-poll ordered in Chandragiri Assembly segment in Andhra Pradesh, and demanding an increase in physical counting of VVPAT slips from the present five random EVMs in each Assembly segment.

Questioning EC’s working style, Naidu said, “I have been the party president for the last 25 years. I have never seen this type of Election Commission.”

Death by starvation haunts village in Dumka

ABHISHEK ANGAD
DUMKA (JHARKHAND), MAY 17

IN JHARKHAND’S Mahuadanr village, which falls under the Anansol Kuruwra panchayat in the Dumka Lok Sabha constituency, JMM party chief Shibui Soren — the sitting MP who is known as ‘Guru ji’ — is very popular. However, there is another Soren whose name crops up often.

Kaleshwar Soren, 45, lived alone in a dilapidated kuccha house in the village. He had damaged his legs, and after his ration card was cancelled because it was not linked to an Aadhaar card, Kaleshwar had to depend on others for food. He sold off many of his belongings to avail rice, but eventually died — allegedly of starvation — on November 11.

According to his sister-in-law Santari Murmu, in his last days Kaleshwar had mortgaged his land, and his children have not been able to reclaim it till now.

“We used to give him food, but we too had little than we could afford. People in this village are generally poor and somehow manage to meet their ends meet,” she said.

Rameshwar Kisku, a neighbour, said Kaleshwar was last seen a day before his death and when he did not come out of his house on November 11, he went to check on him where he found him dead. “His house



Kaleshwar Soren’s sister-in-law Santari Murmu at his house in Mahuadanr.

had only two utensils,” he said.

Kaleshwar is survived by his five children — Santosh, Arbin, Sarbin, Mantosh and Manisha. His wife died a few years ago. Sarbin says his father was also neglected by the villagers. He was working in Rajasthan when his father died, but he now stays in the village.

“We left home in search of better prospects, and I had sent some money to my



Amarinder Singh said people like someone to be frank and open, “and I think that is what Rahul (Gandhi) is doing”, Express Archives

It’s become a CM versus PM narrative in Punjab.

(The Prime Minister is being criticised) because the fight is for a national government — my fight (Assembly polls) will come in three years. Now the fight is for a new Prime Minister, a new government (at the Centre). I think the time has come, and people of Punjab and India want a change.

Priyanka Gandhi has proved to be a big draw in the state and elsewhere. Do you think making her the face of the Congress would have worked better?

No, I don’t think so. She is complementing her brother and she is getting a lot of response, as I saw twice in Bathinda and Gurdaspur. Rahul (Gandhi) is doing a great job also — his openness and frankness is what people like. People like someone to be frank and open, and I think that is what Rahul is doing.

Voters in Varanasi threatened, how can polls be fair, says Maya

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, MAY 17

BSP CHIEF Mayawati Friday alleged that people in Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s constituency were being threatened and questioned if the polling there could be held fairly.

Mayawati tweeted in Hindi, “In an attempt to ensure a victory at any cost for PM Narendra Modi, outsiders are going to each lane and house in the city and first trying to lure them and then threatening them. How can polls be fair? Why doesn’t the Election Commission keep an eye on Varanasi, like they are doing in West Bengal.”

Later in the day, at a joint rally in Mirzapur, Mayawati claimed that the PM was creating confusion by misinterpreting what SP chief Akhilesh Yadav is saying in his poll speeches. She said, “Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in

order to hide his failures, hinted at SP chief Akhilesh Yadav said that they (gathbandhan) are saying the PM starts his speeches with “toilets” and ends them with “toilets”. I would like to tell all of you here that during most of Akhilesh Yadav’s speeches, I have been present... He said this, but the objective was to tell people that the toilets constructed by them are lying incomplete... Some toilets have no doors, no water... He (PM) was trying to twist what he (Akhilesh) said.

Targeting the BJP and the Congress, Akhilesh told the crowd in Mirzapur, “Our Prime Minister spent a lot of money on toilets... And when Congress was in power, toilets were built with one pit, under BJP it has two pits. Neither the Congress nor the BJP could give water in these toilets. We believe in giving the people education. When they are educated, they will build their own toilets.”

supporter of Shibui Soren, said, “Guru ji fought for our Jharkhand and it is the emotional connect that we vote for him, but our condition has not improved.” Tudu owns a small piece of land and survives on subsistence farming. His home has a sack full of rice, and his wife cooks food on wood fuel, but lacks nutritious food such as dal, which they are not able to afford daily.

Even Shibui Soren agrees that the plank on which the Jharkhand was formed has not been fulfilled. “Development should happen and it will happen now,” he said. However, when asked about the death of Kaleshwar, he seemed unaware.

After Kaleshwar’s death, villagers say that the Block Development Officer and other officials visited the family and gave them some money for conducting the last rites as well as a few blankets, 50 kg rice and tarpaulin sheets to cover the roof.

The villagers, however, did not allow officials to take the body for postmortem. This has left a loophole in the accountability of the officials in the district administration department — an official on the condition of anonymity said they could not ascertain the cause of death because of the lack of post-mortem report. The official said that the death could have been as a result of an illness.

But for the villagers, it is clear: Kaleshwar’s death was “because of lack of food”.

ward-looking person, a person who knows how to handle things, and I said someday you will see him as the chief minister of Punjab. I didn’t say the next government. I said you will see him as a future chief minister.

What about the (Navjot) Sidhu situation?

Well, Sidhu has gone off to campaign elsewhere. I have told him that 17th (May 17, the last day of campaigning for final phase of polling) he should give to Punjab. Let’s hope he does that. After all, Punjab is his state. How can you avoid your own state? You are going all over the country.

I went around the state and found that people are worried about drugs, and employment. Drugs are yet to be wiped out in Punjab.

That is correct. Drugs gave not been to-

We will sweep (Punjab), and it is not a statement I am making just like that. The Akali Dal is divided into three, so is the Aam Aadmi Party. The Congress will be the biggest gainer. This division, coupled with the anger against the Akalis... on the sacrilege issue will have a major impact on voting

tally wiped out. We have said we have broken the backbone, which was our commitment. (But) drugs are still being traded. Can you imagine that he Kashmir police caught 30 kg drugs at Uri, (which was) headed for Amritsar? Then we found 100 pounds of drugs at Kandla port (in Gujarat), (also) destined for Amritsar.

So although we are checking at every point, we have recently started a new thing: our police is in close cooperation on the drugs issue with police departments of various states so that we can exchange information and work on that. Do you know a lot of our drugs come from Delhi?

What about unemployment? Most youngsters are just looking to go abroad.

It has become a big tragedy in a way: if somebody’s parents has 2 acres, they get them to sell the land and send them abroad. They go abroad and leave their parents in the lurch. It is becoming a big problem. That is why we are concentrating on industrialisation of Punjab so that we can create jobs here and keep our children here.

There are people who see you as a Prime Ministerial candidate.

No, no, no, not at all. Look, I only have one ambition in life: to see Punjab on top again. That is all.

Is Capt Amarinder, the military historian, working on some new projects?

Well, I will be writing on the Gallipoli battle (in Turkey, as part of First World War). But before I do that, I will be writing on the troubled period of Punjab. I was part of it, I kept notes, and I am in a position to bring out the truth.

In Panaji, Velingkar aims to ‘finish BJP’

SMITA NAIR
PANAJI, MAY 17

ON THE last day of campaigning for Panaji Assembly seat — left vacant by late Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar — former RSS Goa chief Subhash Velingkar was confident of his sole mission, to “finish the BJP in Goa”.

Velingkar (70), who was responsible for the BJP’s inroads in Goa and mentoring Parrikar in the 1980s, had rebelled and founded Goa Surakasha Manch (GSM), backed by an RSS faction which separated.

While the fight for Panaji is a four-cornered one — between the BJP, Congress, AAP and him — Velingkar believes it has boiled down to a face-off between two candidates — him and Congress’s Atanasio Monserrate.

Ending his campaign at the Catholic-dominant neighbourhood of Ribander, with karyakartas assembling outside Ribander Church, Velingkar says, “The biggest advantage is Catholics have decided to support me. In Goa, the RSS is cultivated different from the rest of the country...Also our ancestry, before the Portuguese arrived and converted, was the same. The DNA is same.”

While his manifesto reflects many issues Panaji citizens face, he says the larger fight is to enter the Assembly and be the voice that “questions both Congress and BJP”.

Across the campaign trail, voters know Velingkar. Xavier, a Portuguese passport holder, welcomes him with a smile, Lucy wonders if he can resolve her wild tree problem, and Messias Taveras feels government jobs “not coming to the minority” is a big problem. Sacrament Rodrigues says no party thinks of senior citizens left behind by children with Portuguese passports.

Velingkar hears them all, and says he needs one chance. Since 1994, the seat always been occupied by Parrikar. Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday pointed to Velingkar’s foray into politics and candidature as a decision to split BJP votes.

“I am winning,” a confident Velingkar asserts. He explains, “BJP candidate Siddharth Kunkoliencar was backed by Parrikar and is now running on his favours. He was imposed on the party, which refused a ticket to Parrikar’s son Utpal. Many of his supporters are physically with him, but mentally with me. How then can I be splitting votes of BJP?”

He added, “The non-BJP votes which went to AAP instead of Congress in the last

EXPLAINED E.

For BJP, matter of numbers and prestige

GOA SAW three Assembly bypolls — Shiroda, Mandrem and Mapusa — on April 23, and one in Panaji is due on Sunday. The bypolls are crucial for the ruling BJP as it needs to keep its numbers in the Assembly intact. In the 40-member House, the party has 14 MLAs, and allies GFP and independents account for six more. The Congress also has 14 MLAs.

The three seats that have already voted have weak BJP candidates. And winning Panaji seat, where crowd-puller Manohar Parrikar is gone, is a matter of prestige for the BJP.

few elections now have an alternate party.”

On the campaign trail, the group bumps into Congress’s Monserrate. Velingkar admits Monserrate is a challenger, “even though he too is imposed in the Congress though he is an outsider”. Velingkar says the BJP is the most vulnerable in Goa this term, with “their vendetta to remain at any cost proving to be difficult for everyone”.

In Goa, he says, the narrative is different, with his supporters reaching out to Muslims and Catholics in the last few months. “Here we are trying to reach out and say Hindutva is not a religion...We are trying to break religious barriers here and start preaching patriotism as only then can you rise together for the nation. We are not going to believe in violence for that approach. Goa will show the way,” he adds.

At the end of the campaign, several pamphlets have been shed. “Vote for GSM. We are not going to jump parties or join anyone,” says Velingkar, who believes that is the biggest promise to win people in a state where most MLAs defect after coming into power.