

6 DECISION 2019



PM Narendra Modi

UTTAR PRADESH: 13 out of 80 seats (2014: BJP 12, Apna Dal 1) The most high-profile candidate is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is likely to retain the Varanasi seat against the gathbandhan's Shalini Yadav and Congress's Ajay Rai. Another important seats is Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's bastion of Gorakhpur, which the BJP lost in a bypoll to SP last year. This time, the BJP has fielded actor Ravi Kishan, while the SP has fielded Ram Bhuwal Nishad and the Congress's candidate is Madhusudan Tripathi.



Harsimrat Kaur Badal

PUNJAB: 13 seats (2014: AAP 4, SAD 4, BJP 2, Congress 3) These elections are a litmus test for the Badals, who faced revolt from senior SAD leadership last year. As a counter, the Akali Dal is projecting the election as referendum on the over two-year Congress rule and its "unkept" promises. The most keenly-watched contest will be in Gurdaspur, where actor Sunny Deol is fighting on a BJP ticket against Congress's Sunil Kumar Jakhar. Meanwhile, the closest contest is likely to be in Bhatinda, where Union minister

and SAD candidate Harsimrat Kaur Badal is up against three sitting MLAs — Congress's Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, Punjab Ekta Party's Sukhpal Singh Khaira, and AAP's Baljinder Kaur.



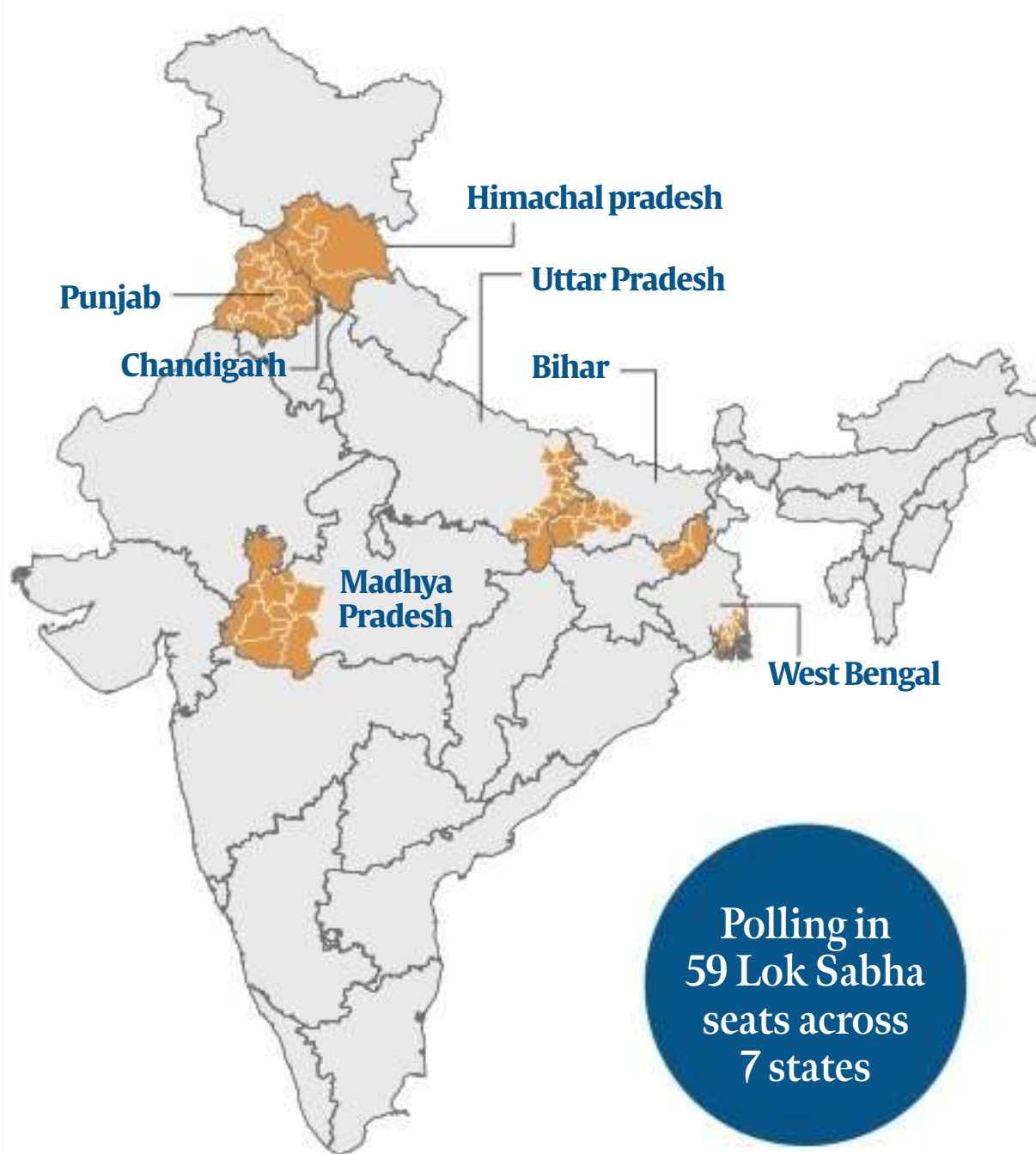
Abhishek Banerjee

seeking re-election and will face off against CPI(M)'s Fuad Halim and BJP's Nilanjan Roy. In Kolkata Uttar, BJP national secretary Rahul Sinha is contesting against heavyweight TMC candidate Sudip Bandyopadhyay.

BIHAR: 8 out of 40 seats (2014: BJP 5, RLSP 2, JD(U) 1) The most keenly-watched contest will be in Patna Sahib, where Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad is up against Shatrughan Sinha, who recently left the BJP for the Congress. The other seat to watch out for is Karakat, where RLSP chief Upendra Kushwaha will take on JD(U)'s Mahabali Singh.

MADHYA PRADESH: 8 out of 29 seats (2014: BJP 8) The Malwa-Nimad belt was considered a

VOTING ON MAY 19 : PHASE 7



BJP bastion but the party suffered losses in the recent Assembly elections. Also, for the first time after eight elections, Lok Sabha speaker Sumitra Mahajan will not contest from Indore. The veteran opted out after getting broad hints that the party may not field her again.



Anurag Thakur

face in the fray.

HIMACHAL PRADESH: 4 seats (2014: BJP 4) The BJP, which won all four Lok Sabha seats in 2014 and won 44 of the 68 Assembly seats in 2017, has an upper hand. Anurag Thakur, the BJP candidate from Hamirpur, is the most notable

JHARKHAND: 3 out of 14 seats (2014: JMM 2, BJP 1) The three seats of the Santhal Pargana region go to polls on Sunday: Godda, Dumka and Rajmahal. Both the BJP and the mahagathbandhan have been campaigning extensively in the region, pitching "jal, jungle and zameen (water, jungle and land)".

CHANDIGARH: 1 seat (2014: BJP) Congress has fielded former Railways minister Pawan Kumar Bansal, while the BJP has fielded sitting MP Kirron Kher. Making it a triangular contest, AAP has fielded former Union minister Harmohan Dhawan.



Polling officials leave for polling booths from a distribution centre in Varanasi Saturday. PTI

TURNOUT SO FAR

| Phase I | Phase II | Phase III |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 69.50% | 69.44% | 68.40% |
| Phase IV | Phase V | Phase VI |
| 65.51% | 64.16% | 64.40% |

**COUNTING DAY
MAY 23**

BALLOTIN

Mamata nephew sends defamation notice to PM

Kolkata: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's nephew and Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday sent a defamation notice to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alleging that Modi used purportedly derogatory remarks against him during a poll rally in Diamond Harbour constituency on Wednesday.

The notice was sent by advocate Sanjay Basu on behalf of Abhishek, seeking an unconditional apology within 36 hours.

BJP state president Dilip Ghosh reacted: "Such measures will not save him (Abhishek). Whether he wants to spend energy on serving legal notices or saving his party's MPs and ministers from the CBI is up to him."

Through the notice Abhishek accused Modi of making "certain wildly fabricated allegations" with the "sole intent to mislead the people...to besmirch my client's well-earned reputation". **ENS**

Silence at press meet shows PM's mental defeat: MNS chief

Mumbai: Criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his silence during Friday's press conference, his first since he came to power in 2014, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Saturday said that the PM was afraid of facing questions and that his silence was a sign of his mental defeat.

"If (BJP chief) Amit Shah was to do all the talking, what was the need for the Prime Minister to attend the press conference? If you can't face and answer journalists about the work that you have done in the last five years, then it is a sign of his mental defeat," Thackeray told mediapersons in Mumbai. **ENS**



Patiala MP, SAD candidate sit on dharna; booked

Patiala: Patiala MP Dr Dharamvira Gandhi and Shiromani Akali Dal candidate from Patiala Surjit Singh Rakhra sat on a night-long dharna in the middle of a road outside a rice sheller which allegedly stores illegal liquor near Samana. They alleged that liquor was to be distributed by the Congress. Patiala police booked both Dr Gandhi and Rakhra for violating Section 144 Cr PC and disrupting traffic on highway, said a police source.

Following their dharna, police raided the premises on Saturday morning and confiscated bottles of liquor. Patiala SSP Mandeep Singh Sidhu told The Sunday Express that a case of smuggling of liquor under the Excise Act has been registered against the owners. He said half of the liquor was smuggled from neighbouring Haryana. **ENS**



Polling officials at the Netaji Indoor Stadium distribution centre in Kolkata. Partha Paul

On eve of poll in Kolkata, TMC upbeat, Mamata plans moves

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA

KOLKATA, MAY 18

AS NORTH Kolkata — where Tuesday's violence between the Trinamool Congress and BJP and the vandalisation of the bust of BSWarchandra Vidyasagar led to an unprecedented curtailment of the campaign — prepared for Sunday's vote, the Trinamool exuded confidence about being a key post-election player.

North Kolkata is among the nine Lok Sabha constituencies in the state where polling will take place in the seventh and final phase of the elections.

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, who has been meeting leaders of regional and opposition parties over the last two days, spoke with West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

"Mamata Banerjee was the first person to protest against the (Centre's) anti-people policies and steps, apart from the tyrannical rule of the Modi government, be it demonetisation or improper implementation of GST. She has been vindicated. Her efforts to bring together the opposition forces culminated in United India rally at (Kolkata's) Brigade (Parade Ground) on January 19, where barring NDA al-

lies and the Left, almost all Opposition parties were present," Trinamool Rajya Sabha member Sukhendu Shekhar Roy said.

"We are happy that talks have finally started with all standing together against (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi after the polls. Initially when Mamata Banerjee gave a call, some parties were in a dilemma, but now all Opposition parties are trying to come to a greater understanding for the people of the country. The primary concept in the new government would be the federal character of the country enshrined in the Constitution, which the Modi government negated. Mamata Banerjee will play a major role in the Opposition alliance and in the formation of the government at the Centre thwarting the BJP," Roy said.

Trinamool sources said Naidu and Mamata discussed the Opposition alliance at length. The two Chief Ministers have had several earlier rounds of discussions as well. Naidu, who had joined Mamata on the stage in Kharagpur on May 9, had said the Trinamool chief would play a key role in the formation of the next government in New Delhi.

Naidu met with Congress president Rahul Gandhi and NCP chief Sharad Pawar before travelling to Lucknow to meet gathbandhan leaders Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati on Saturday.

According to Trinamool sources, Mamata believes that no single party will get a majority in the new Lok Sabha and that regional parties will have an important role to play — they should, therefore, being consultations and co-ordinate even before the results are declared.

"Recently when the BJP vandalised Vidyasagar's bust in Kolkata, and when the Election Commission cut short the campaign in West Bengal, other Opposition parties, be it the Congress, SP or BSP, protested," Roy said.

In almost all her speeches and press conferences during the campaign, Mamata has claimed that the BJP would not get anywhere close to the majority mark.

Mamata wrote to the Election Commission Saturday urging it to ensure "peaceful and impartial" elections without interference from the BJP.

"In the final phase of the election tomorrow, I would request your good office to kindly ensure that election is completed peacefully, impartially and without any undue interference of the central government and any intervention by the ruling party at the centre," the Chief Minister wrote to Chief Election Commissioner Sunil Arora. She also requested the poll body to "protect democratic institutions and federal structure of the country and extend due respect to the opposition parties".



Punjab is the highest contributor of wheat to the central pool. Express

"nearly 132 LT will be procured by government agencies," he said. Airy said total production is set to reach 182 or 183 LT — this is against 178 LT last year, when 128 LT was procured by government agencies.

On May 4, Chief Minister Amarinder Singh raised the issue of gunny bag shortage at an election rally and blamed the Narendra Modi government for diverting 16,000 bales of gunny bags (each bale contains 500 bags) from Punjab to Haryana. Amarinder alleged that the Centre did this at the behest of SAD, a BJP ally, to create a shortage of bags in Punjab during

the procurement season, and help neighboring Haryana, which has a BJP government.

The same day, Union Food Processing Minister and sitting MP and candidate from Bathinda, Harsimrat Kaur Badal, slammed the Congress government in Punjab. Addressing the CM, she said, "Raja Saheb, you have to tell farmers, who are sitting for days at mandis (wholesale crop markets), why your government failed to procure bags in advance."

K A P Sinha, Secretary, Food and Civil Supplies, Punjab, said the department had earlier made arrangement to procure 118 LT wheat (for which 4.72 lakh bales were required). But following extra production, an increased demand was raised with the Centre in April, when wheat procurement began, after which "extra bags started reaching", Sinha said. "We apprehended the shortage in advance. Now there is no shortage."

Harbans Singh Roshia, president of Khanna grain mandi, the "largest grain market of Punjab", said, "We didn't face any shortage of gunny bags." But Sukhdev Singh Kokrikalan, general secretary of Bhartiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan), said, "Due to shortage of bags in some mandis of Malwa region, farmers were forced to sit at mandis for days to sell their crop."

Ahead of polls, weather, unpaid dues haunt Himachal apple farmers

KAVITA UPADHYAY

KOTGARH, SHIMLA, MAY 18

COLD WINDS blow from snow-covered mountains facing Thanedhar, a village in Kotgarh area in Himachal Pradesh's apple belt. White sheets of anti-hail nets, which look like cobwebs, are strewn in patches all over the village.

In Kotgarh in 1916, American missionary Samuel Evans Stokes started to experiment with American apple varieties. Over a 100 years later, apple farming is one of the mainstays of the state's economy, with apple orchards currently spreading across 1,12,634 hectares, mainly in the areas that fall under the Shimla (reserved) and Mandi Lok Sabha seats. While the area under apple cultivation is increasing with each passing year, apple production is decreasing.

Moti Ram, who manages the orchards spread across around 200 bighas, says, "There was a hailstorm on April 18. The frost that followed has done immense damage to the apples."

The Economic Survey report for 2018-19 estimates a decline in the production of apple, which forms 79 percent of the total fruit production in the state. Till December 2018, around 3.59 lakh tonnes of apples were produced in the state - less than half of the 7.77 lakh tonnes of apples produced in 2015-16.

Erratic weather is but one of the many issues faced by the apple farmers in the state.

Apple farmers being duped by commission agents, locally called 'arthiyas', is perhaps a burning issue which is expected to impact the prospects of the BJP, especially in the Shimla seat.

Former Shimla mayor Sanjay Chauhan, who is secretary of the Kisan Sangharsh Samiti, a group working on farmers' issues, says, "Payments of apple farmers dating back to over five years are still pending. Most of these farmers have been duped by the commission agents into selling their produce, and later the farmers didn't get paid."

Sushil Chauhan, a farmer from Kyari village in Shimla district, tells *The Sunday Express* that his payment of Rs 11.72 lakh is pending since 2015. "I, along with other ap-



Apple orchards in Upper Shimla region covered in anti-hail nets. Pradeep Kumar

ple farmers whom a commission agent owes money, filed a complaint against him (the commission agent) in the Kotkhai police station. An FIR was registered, but he managed to get bail," he says, adding that the BJP in the state and the Centre has done "nothing" to help the farmers.

Over the past year, 205 complaints related to recovery of pending payments for apples sold to arthiyas have been filed in the Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC), Shimla.

After years of non-payment, many new complaints are frequently being filed in the APMC, Kashyap says. Ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had raised the issues of plight of the apple farmers. Blaming the then UPA-II government for its "flawed policies" at an election rally in Sujapur Tira, Modi had said, "The farmers work hard, cultivate apples. Even then, apple comes (to India) from foreign countries. Apple farmers in Himachal Pradesh don't even get fully paid."

On Friday, Congress president Rahul Gandhi attacked Modi over the unfulfilled promises made to apple farmers. Addressing a rally in Solan, he said that Modi "lied" when he said he would increase the import duty on apples. He said, "Modi came to Himachal Pradesh this time too. But, like 2014, did he say he would increase the import duty on apples? He cannot say that now."

SEAT WATCH SASARAM VOTING ON MAY 19 Meira Kumar eyes a win with new social combination

SANTOSH SINGH

PATNA, MAY 17

SASARAM IS witnessing a straight fight between Congress nominee from the Grand Alliance Meira Kumar and the BJP's Chhedi Paswan.

Kumar, the former Lok Sabha Speaker, lost the 2014 Lok Sabha election against Paswan, but seems to have a slight edge this time because of the reworked social combination. Paswan, on his part, is banking on the Narendra Modi factor to sail through.

Amarjit Kumar, a Sasaram resident, said: "While Kumar is likely to get overwhelming support of her caste group, Ravidas, she will also get split votes from OBC Kushwaha and upper caste Brahmins." He said that with Upendra Kushwaha in the Grand Alliance, there were signs of transfer of Kushwaha votes. "Besides, there could be better Muslim-Yadav vote transfer to Kumar this time," he added.

Kumar has invoked the legacy of her father and former Deputy PM Jagjivan Ram in

her bid to wrest the seat from Paswan. While her father represented the constituency eight times, Kumar won it twice.

Paswan has been playing up the Modi factor and banking on the social combination of Scheduled Caste Paswan, upper castes and EBCs. "He has been also hoping that the BSP candidate cuts into some Ravidas votes. CPI-ML presence could help him too. Overall, Paswan has invoked Modi to get support beyond caste lines," said Manoj Kumar, another Sasaram resident.

A senior Congress leader said they were counting on Kumar as a winner. "Sasaram, Samastipur, Purnia, Katihar and Kishanganj are the seats we hope to win this time," the leader said. Bihar Congress spokesperson Harkhu Jha told *The Sunday Express*: "We are taking Sasaram as one of winning seats because it has been a traditional Congress seat. Besides, we have always got Ravidas, Kushwaha and Muslim votes. This time, there would be additional Yadav and EBC votes."

Paswan, however, maintained that the Modi factor prevailed over anything else.