



‘Induction of regional parties into Central govt welcome... it changes their outlook’

RAM VILAS PASWAN, Union minister and president of Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), an ally of the BJP-led NDA, speaks with **LALMANI VERMA** on the General Election, the “mahamilawati” Opposition, and NDA allies a day before results are announced:

In your 50-year political career — you have been in politics since 1969 — how do you see 2019 Lok Sabha elections? Are they different?
The biggest thing in this election was that even a poor person in a village thought about the nation, national unity and integrity, and found Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the symbol (of those ideas). Hence, he voted for the local candidate in the name of Modi. Modi remained at the centre of this election.

NDA meetings were not a regular exercise in the last five years. But more than 30 parties of the alliance met on Tuesday and leaders such as you were given special attention. Was it an exercise to show NDA’s unity and strength?

The media has become concerned about this meeting because of the exit poll results (most of which forecast a big NDA victory), and because this is the election period. Otherwise, NDA meetings had been organised in every Parliament session over the last five years. Since the Opposition had called a similar meeting, the media called the NDA meet a show of strength. Had the Opposition not called its meet, the NDA would still have held its meeting.

Are there any apprehensions of a



‘Induction of new allies tells about regional aspiration.’

Renuka Puri

decrease in numbers for the NDA?
No. There is nothing like that.

BJP president Amit Shah recently hinted that more parties can join the NDA after the election results. How do you see that?

Induction of new allies tells about regional aspiration. When a regional party joins a government (at the Centre), then its regional outlook changes to a national outlook. It is good that more allies join a national party (or alliance led by such parties).



JD(U) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish did not appear comfortable with the BJP’s allies in Tuesday’s meeting. What is your impression?

Nitish-ji has been very comfortable — as he was in yesterday’s meeting. Nitish-ji is not as outspoken as we (some of the other leaders) are, but he is happy (being in NDA) and

he worked hard in these elections. Sushil Modi (BJP leader and Bihar Deputy CM) and I were with him during the campaign across (Bihar’s) 40 Lok Sabha constituencies — he

put all his strength (in the campaigning).

How do you look at Mamata Banerjee’s politics, and incidents of violence in West Bengal during the elections?

Whatever Mamata Banerjee is doing and speaking...that is inappropriate. She is chief minister of a state and she threatens to arrest the Prime Minister. Everyone should thank the Election Commission because violence did not occur at any other part of the country, excluding West Bengal. The whole country should condemn the violence that occurred in West Bengal.

The Opposition is raising questions on EVMS.

Peene wale ko peene ka bahana chahiye (one who drinks looks for excuses to drink). Their argument is baseless and has no substance. They are making noise only because they see defeat after the exit polls.

The Prime Minister has called the Opposition’s alliance ‘mahamilawati’ (grand mixture). The Opposition has shot back, asking why the NDA should not be called ‘mahamilawat’ because it has more than 30 parties.

If a juice is mixed with another juice, it will not make a toxin (poison). But what will happen if a toxin is mixed with another poisonous substance? They are called so (mahamilawati) because of their (opposition parties’) track record. Did anyone raise issues of corruption and price-rise in the last five years? No. Hence the word mahamilawati was used.

RAIDING HIS PREMISES: BIHAR ADGP Gun in hand, ex-RJD MLA says: Ready to fight, save democracy

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MAY 22

A DAY after RLSP chief Upendra Kushwaha warned the BJP of violent protests in case of attempts to tamper with EVMs in Bihar, a former RJD MLA and Independent candidate from Buxar in this Lok Sabha election, Ramchandra Yadav, on Wednesday urged people to be ready to fight and shed blood, if needed.

Yadav addressed the media in Kaimur, in western Bihar, carrying a licensed weapon. Bihar’s Additional DGP Kundan Krishnan said: “We are raiding the premises of the former MLA. His arms licence could be cancelled and he might be arrested.”

Bihar DGP Gupteshwar Pandey told *The Indian Express*, “We have issued a red alert in all districts ahead of counting on Thursday.”

Claiming that he has taken out his licensed gun to save the Constitution and democracy in the country, Yadav said, *“Loktantra bachane ke liye agar hathiyar uthana padey to uthaunga. Khoon ki nadiyan bhi baha dunga. Tejashwi Yadav aur Upendra Kushwaha-ji ke kehne se kuchh nahi hoga; karna padega, ladna padega. Bagair ladey hue adhikar nahi milnevala* (I will pick up a weapon if that is required to save democracy in the country. I am ready to shed blood. Mere words and protests from Tejashwi Yadav and Upendra Kushwaha words will not do; we will have to do something and fight it out. We will not get our rights without fighting).”

Not commenting directly on Kushwaha or Ramchandra Yadav, RJD spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha said: “We do not agree with metaphors (used by some leaders), but we will protest if there is any attempt



Ramchandra Yadav

ANI

to rig the counting tomorrow. We will take our protest to the roads to expose such people.”

Condemning this “unconstitutional and undemocratic” behaviour, BJP spokesperson Nikhil Anand said: “It is really sad that Grand Alliance partners and their leaders have resorted to provoking people to take up arms in rebellion in case they lose in the polls. Are they running a political party or a private militia?”

Kushwaha’s remarks had come on Tuesday, amid reports — and several videos circulating on social media — of “suspicious” movement of EVMs at some places. The Election Commission of India had dismissed all allegations as baseless.

On Wednesday, Yadav, too, slammed EVMs. He said that he is “ready to fight, die and go to the jail” to protect the Constitution. *“... Magar aguai aapko karna padega, hum log ladenge puri takat ke saath. Upendra Kushwaha ne jo baate rakhi hai, sabhi netaan ko ekatrit ho jana chahiye ab... (But you will have to lead. We will fight with full force. Kushwaha has called for unity of all leaders, and leaders should stand united).”*

BJP Barrackpore candidate gets SC protection from arrest till May 28

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 22

THE SUPREME Court on Wednesday granted BJP’s Barrackpore candidate Arjun Singh protection from arrest till May 28 to enable him to participate in the counting of votes on Thursday.

A vacation bench comprising Justices Arun Mishra and M R Shah, which took note of the indefinite strike by lawyers in West Bengal, granted the relief to Singh who has been charged with around 20 criminal cases.

The bench clarified that once the protection ends, he will have to seek bail from the competent court.

Appearing for Singh, Senior Advocate Ranjit Kumar contended that the state police, acting out of political vendetta, had

lodged about 20 cases against him to ensure that he is not able to attend the counting of votes.

“If I go back without protection, I will be arrested. Tomorrow I have to be present at counting,” Kumar said. He also drew the attention of the court to the ongoing lawyers’ strike in Kolkata.

During the hearing, the Bench also referred to the post-election violence in the state. After having dictated the order, Justice Mishra remarked: “People who indulge in arson and rioting do not belong to a party. They join the party in power to commit violence.”

A four-time MLA, Singh recently parted ways with the state’s ruling Trinamool Congress and joined the BJP.

Counsel for the West Bengal government said that cases for rioting and arson were lodged against Singh.

PREPARATIONS, THE DAY BEFORE



Tashi Tobgyal



Ganesh Shirsekar

Outside the Congress headquarters in New Delhi on Wednesday; Buoyed by exit poll predictions, preparations underway at the BJP office in Mumbai.



Union minister DV Sadananda Gowda

‘Kumaraswamy will be CM till Friday morning’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, MAY 22

UNION MINISTER D V Sadananda Gowda claimed on Wednesday that the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) coalition government in Karnataka would collapse after the Lok Sabha election results and H D Kumaraswamy would be the Chief Minister only till the morning of May 24.

Gowda, a former Karnataka CM, also said the stage would be ready for the formation of a new state government. “Kumaraswamy will be the chief minister of Karnataka till tomorrow evening only. Tomorrow evening or by day-after-tomorrow morning, because if he does not get to sleep in the night...so day-after-tomorrow morning, hundred per cent Kumaraswamy will step down,” he said.

Speculation is rife that an adverse outcome in the Lok Sabha polls would impact the stability of the coalition government in Karnataka. Exit polls have forecast that the Congress-JD(S) alliance is likely to perform badly in the parliamentary polls.

The two parties had faced the polls in an alliance, despite resentment at the grassroot level, especially in the old Mysuru region, where they consider each other arch rivals.

The BJP will win 21 of 28 seats, exit polls have predicted.

Another Karnataka Congress MLA strikes discordant note

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BENGALURU, MAY 22

IN A note of dissent from the Karnataka Congress, MLA K Sudhakar questioned on Wednesday why the issue of alleged EVM manipulation was being introduced into the discourse about the Lok Sabha exit poll predictions.

Sudhakar’s stand is contrary to that of the Congress, which has joined other opposition parties in upping the ante on alleged EVM tampering or manipulation ahead of the counting of votes on Thursday.

The Congress MLA’s remarks came a day after senior party lawmaker Roshan Baig’s scathing attack on the party’s state leadership, calling Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chief Dinesh Gundu Rao a “flop show” and party general secretary KC Venugopal a “buffoon”.

Sudhakar, who had often been vocal in airing his grievances against the Congress-JD(S) coalition government in the southern state, tweeted on Tuesday night, saying EVM tampering and exit polls were two different things.

The Chikkaballapura MLA tweeted, “Personally I am confused why the issue of EVM manipulation is being brought into conversation while talking about the exit poll results. When in fact the exit poll results indicate the feeling of the voter at the conclusion of polling.”

Later, talking to PTI, Sudhakar clarified that he had only said exit polls had nothing to do with EVM tampering.

“I have only spoken about exit polls because some people have a difference of opinion on them. I said it had nothing to do with EVM tampering...because exit polls are conducted on the polling day,” he said.

The Congress MLA added that exit polls



K Sudhakar’s remarks came a day after senior Congress leader Roshan Baig’s scathing attack on the party’s state leadership.

were conducted by media houses and different professionals who went to the polling booths, spoke to the voters, and determined their opinion. “Whatever opinion is built, becomes part of the exit polls,” he said.

“Sometimes they predict it right and sometimes they go wrong. So, how can you blame the EVMs for that?,” he asked.

Locked in a battle with the Election Commission (EC) over the reliability of electronic voting machines (EVMs), the opposition pressed for their demand for increasing the tallying of the paper trail of votes (VVPATs) with EVM figures and submitted a memorandum to the poll panel in New Delhi on Tuesday.

In the memorandum, leaders of 22 opposition parties, including the Congress, demanded that the verification of VVPAT slips of five randomly-selected polling stations in an Assembly segment should be done prior to the initiation of counting of votes and not after the completion of last round of counting.

New MPs to be lodged in Western Court, state Bhavans

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 22

NEWLY-ELECTED members of the 17th Lok Sabha will be lodged in the Western Court, its newly-built Annexe and state Bhavans, doing away with the system of providing them transit accommodation in five-star hotels.

Secretary-General Snehlata Shrivastav, who made this announcement at a press conference on Wednesday, said the move would help save money. In the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, over 300 people were elected for the first time. Since the outgoing members took time to vacate their official residence, the Lok Sabha Secretariat was forced to make arrangements for the new members’ stay in hotels. Sources disclosed that it cost the exchequer Rs 30 crore. Taking note of this, the House Committee proposed that 88 new blocks and a two-level parking facility be added in the Western Court to address the issue on a permanent basis.

At least 265 rooms will be made available to new MPs in state bhavans.

The counting of votes is to be held on Thursday and the new members are expected to start pouring in from Friday. The process for the election of the new prime minister and the swearing-in of the government will start thereafter.

Shrivastav said registration formalities and all paperwork related to salaries, allowances and a host of other matters would be completed at a single desk.

The Secretariat has also set up helpdesks at all three terminals of the Indira Gandhi International Airport and railway stations in the Capital. A total of 56 nodal officers have been assigned eight to 10 constituencies each to get in touch with the newly elected parliamentarians.

BJP divided over demand for special session of MP House

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 22

THE BJP’S central leadership on Wednesday denied that the demand for a special session of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly was aimed at a floor test and said that it was only to discuss important issues such as drinking water shortage and law and order situation in the state. This has exposed divisions within the party over the call for a special sitting.

Former chief minister and BJP vice-president Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday claimed that the party did not demand a floor test but only a discussion on important issues. “The BJP does not believe in horse-trading and bringing down governments,” he said, adding that the Congress government could fall on its own due to “internal contradictions”.

State BJP chief Rakesh Singh also distanced himself from the floor test demand, claiming that the Congress was so scared that it was interpreting the special session request by the Opposition party as a test of its majority. He said the government was on crutches and the CM was desperately trying to stop it from falling but won’t succeed for long.

Leader of Opposition Gopal Bhargav had on Monday written a letter to the Governor requesting her to direct the Chief Minister to hold a special session to discuss pressing issues like lack of water, law and order and power failures. Though the letter did not mention a floor test, Bhargav said the priority was to call a special session and then demand division of votes in the House. His letter came a day after exit polls projected that the BJP was heading for a landslide win in MP, where it recently lost power to the Congress.

Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Tuesday alleged that 10 party MLAs had been offered between Rs 10 and Rs 25 crore and posts by



Shivraj Singh Chouhan said the BJP does not believe in bringing down governments, two days after Leader of Opposition Gopal Bhargav demanded a special session of the Assembly.

the Opposition party in an attempt to poach legislators to destabilise the Congress government.

A senior BJP leader told *The Indian Express* that Bhargav was probably driven by the desire to take credit for disturbing the Congress government and wrote the letter in a hurry to pre-empt others from doing so. Bhargav was not available for comment.

The demand did not find favour with the central leadership as it came before the poll results and without consulting the national leadership, sources said.

BJP leaders have said that the return of the Narendra Modi government at the Centre will hasten the fall of the Kamal Nath government, which has been supported by two BSP, one SP and four Independent MLAs.

Meanwhile, two of the four Independents who are supporting the government claimed that they had been promised ministerial berths and will be accommodated in the next expansion. One Independent MLA is already a minister.