



‘There is Modi *saheb* and no other face... The surgical strikes were *lajawaab*’

RAAKHI JAGGA

AT 92, the grand old man of Punjab politics, Parkash Singh Badal, is out on one more campaign. Through condolence meetings and worker meetings, he has been reaching out to people. While so far his focus has been on Lambi — his Assembly constituency, which is part of Bathinda Lok Sabha seat, from where daughter-in-law Harsimrat Kaur Badal is standing — Badal would be campaigning at other places too:

Your son Sukhbir Singh Badal and daughter-in-law Harsimrat are both contesting this time. How bright are their prospects?
For Biba Harsimrat Kaur Badal, this is her third election from Bathinda. She is a leader and has already made a place in the hearts of masses. She served as a minister in the NDA government. She will win easily as her work speaks... She has brought the AIIMS hospital project to Bathinda, three food parks to Punjab. Sukhbir started his political career with Lok Sabha polls back in 1996 and has been a Union minister apart from a three-time MP from Faridkot. It was the party's demand to field him from Ferozepur. It goes without saying that we will win both Bathinda as well as Ferozepur. Rather, we will win all the 13 seats in Punjab.

There was talk that even you could contest Lok Sabha polls this time.
I have decided not to contest any polls now, whether the Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha. I am an MLA from Lambi, I have been the chief minister of Punjab five times, I started my political career as a sarpanch of Badal village. I have always believed in the principle of doing *sewa* (service) rather than thinking of getting anything in return. The party's core committee knows I am not going to contest any other election now. However, I will serve the party till my last breath. This is the reason I am still accessible to masses. I am going from village to village.



Badal campaigning in village Channu in Bathinda Lok Sabha seat. Gurmeet Singh

You have been holding a lot of condolence meetings. Is this a way of remaining in touch with the masses?
I have been meeting people on a regular basis during their good times or bad since I joined politics. Even when I was CM, I visited houses of my constituents in case of any misfortune or good news. There are 70 villages in my constituency and our party representatives inform us about deaths in these villages on a regular basis... Here, I don't talk anything political, I just share their grief. To which party they belong hardly matters to me.

What is your campaign strategy for the Lok Sabha elections?
One thing is simple, this is an election to choose the country's PM. So, before us, there is Narendra Modi *saheb* and no other face who can match his aura. Though the Congress has not formally announced their prime ministerial candidate, it is evident Rahul Gandhi is the candidate from

their side. He is no match for Modi *saheb*. So I tell villagers that he does not have a single day's administrative experience, while Modiji was CM of Gujarat four times and has served as PM for five years. Above all, the two surgical strikes done on Pakistan were *lajawaab* (fantastic). After the Balakot airstrikes, citizens, the Army, everyone is all praise for Modiji and they feel that the country is safe. So our alliance (the Akali Dal-BJP) is campaigning with one-point agenda: vote for another term to the Modi government.

Your rival and Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh says the present Akali Dal has lost its Panthic values and thinks only about self-promotion.
What sacrifices had Amarinder himself made when he was a part of the Akali Dal for 13 years before he switched to the Congress? Ours is a party with a rich history of sacrifices... In my political career, I have been in jail for 15 years, before and even after independence. He (Amarinder) doesn't have a single contribution, he never took part in any *morch*a or struggle movements that the party launched. He has never gone to jail even for a day.

Your party had a dismal performance in the 2017 Assembly elections and the Guru Granth Sahib sacrilege incidents were cited as the main reason. Do you think these will still cast a shadow?
No Sikh can tolerate such incidents. Everyone wants that the culprits be punished. However, making it a political issue, as Amarinder is trying to do, is uncalled for. One SIT member inquiring into the sacrilege incidents was just playing into the hands of the Congress and hence we complained against him. Otherwise, we are not against any inquiry... In 2017, fake propaganda was done by rivals, but this time people have understood the truth. People are talking about the performance of the Amarinder government and it is they who are at the receiving end.

What are the prominent issues in Punjab this time?
People are talking more about the non-governance of the Congress government. Amarinder had promised to waive off entire farm loans, had promised '*ghar ghar naukri*' and many other things. However only a fraction of the farm loans have been waived off while they could not provide employment. They did not give free mobiles as promised. Development works have been stalled and the CM is inaccessible to masses. So this election, state issues are overpowering and our party is also campaigning on these issues... Last time there was an Aam Aadmi Party factor too, with their candidates winning four seats. But this time, the AAP factor has diminished altogether. So, it is a direct fight between the Akali Dal-BJP and Congress candidates. We are going to win all the seats and support Modiji in Parliament.

Any message for new-age politicians?
I have a message for all politicians. They must consider politics as *sewa* and not as a profession. We have all struggled a lot as a part of politics. Even now, at 92, I work from 5 am till 8 pm daily, with a two-hour break. I am there for the party and people always... New-age politicians need to be more disciplined and realise that individuals are not above parties. This way, they can serve the people and remain popular for ages.

In NDA's appeal to Sahni votes after four phases, a Bihar caste reality check

SANTOSH SINGH
MUZAFFARPUR, KHAGARIA, JAMUI, PURNIA, MAY 2

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi himself appealing to the boatmen community from the dais in Muzaffarpur on April 30, promising a separate ministry of fisheries if voted to power, has strengthened speculation that the BJP is worried about the Mahagathbandhan taking away its EBC (Extremely Backward Classes) votes in Bihar.
Modi also made a mention of his government having made a local Sahni (Mallahs, Nishad or boatmen caste) leader, Bhagwan Lal Sahni, the first chairman of the newly created National Commission for Backward Classes. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who spoke before him, hailed Bhagwan Lal as "Muzaffarpur *ke lal* (Muzaffarpur's dear son)".
BJP sources say that an internal assessment of 19 Bihar seats that have voted so far indicates the Mahagathbandhan allies may have been able to transfer their caste votes to each other. Apart from the Congress and RJD, the Grand Alliance includes the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party (RLSP) of Upendra Kushwaha, Jitan Ram Manjhi's Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) and Vikasshil Insaan Party of Mukesh Sahni — all parties that draw their support from specific caste groups. The alliance also has an understanding with the CPI(M-L), which is contesting the Ara seat.

On paper, this brings together the RJD's vote base of Muslims (17% of the population) and Yadavs (14%); the Congress's share of upper caste (12%) and Dalit (16%) votes; the RLSP's Kushwaha (8%) votes; Manjhi's appeal among fellow Scheduled Caste Mushahar (about 2.5% of the population) votes; and Sahni's ability to draw Sahni (about 8%) votes. The gathbandhan is confident some of that maths has held out on the ground.
Besides, both the ex-NDA allies, Kushwaha and Manjhi, appear to have weathered the separation well, drawing significant crowds at their rallies.
The NDA state government led by Nitish has been assiduously wooing the EBCs, who together comprise 28% of the state population, with sundry schemes. Asked about the RLSP, VIP and HAM(S) before the start of the campaign, the JD(U) leader had dismissed them, refusing to talk about "*sadak par chalte hue log* (irrelevant people)".
However, a BJP leader admitted to *The Indian Express*, "We have heard that the VIP has done well in Khagaria (it voted on April 23), the RJD's Abdul Bari Siddiqui in Darbhanga (April 29) and the Congress's Ashok Ram in Samastipur (April 29). We have been wary about Kushwaha, Sahni and Manjhi votes splitting. In Ujiyarpur, where BJP state president Nityanand Rai contested against Kushwaha (polling was on April 29), we have booth reports of a very close fight, with most Kushwaha voters going with the Mahagathbandhan."
A senior RJD leader said their estimate is that "in at least 20 seats, the victory margin could be between 15,000-20,000. It could be only because of mutual vote transfer among our allies".
AJD(U) leader conceded this too, adding that "social arithmetic" was giving a tough challenge to the "development and national security plank" of the NDA.
The Mallahs are in sizeable numbers in North Bihar and the Mithilanchal belt — especially Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, Jhanjharpur and Supaul. The Mahagathbandhan has given three seats to the VIP, floated early this year. Its leader Sahni is believed to be giving a stiff challenge to the sitting MP of NDA ally LJP, Choudhary Mehboob Ali Qaisar, in Khagaria, banking on not just Sahni but also



Rahul with Kushwaha, Manjhi at a rally in Supaul, Bihar, April 20. PTI

EXPLAINED
E.
Again, caste key
WITH THE RJD-Congress behind the NDA by 10-12% votes in 2014, any transfer of votes between Mahagathbandhan allies, especially the RLSP, HAM (S) and VIP, could prove challenging for the NDA. Led by Narendra Modi, the NDA hopes to counter this with its "national security and development" plank.

Kushwaha and Mushahar votes.
The Musahars, who had tasted political power for the first time with Manjhi's brief tenure as CM, are spread across Bihar. Contesting the Lok Sabha elections for the first time, the HAM(S) has been allotted three seats in the Mahagathbandhan.
Manjhi's April 15 meeting at Banmankhi, a Dalit-dominated area of Purnia, drew people from 10-15 km away. As he sought to know why Nitish had made him CM, only to remove him within nine months, the crowd cheered him. Ramamand Rishidev, a local, said: "We have lost all respect for Nitish for trying to use Manjhi as a rubber stamp."
Kushwaha has been trying for long to establish himself as a Kushwaha leader. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, he had polled 3% of the votes, and in 2015 Assembly polls, 2.84%.
One of the BJP's prize allies in 2014, he had found himself redundant after the BJP tied hands with Nitish's JD(U), as the two compete for the same base of OBC Koeri (Akushwaha)-Kurmi votes. While the NDA had offered him three seats, the gathbandhan gave him five.
In Kushwaha-dominated Launa-Khudia village in Jamui Lok Sabha seat, Barun Kumar Kushwaha, who works in a private firm, said, "In 2014, if 10 out of 10 Kushwahs voted for the NDA, it is a vertical split this time." Even in Purnia where the JD(U) has fielded Santosh Kushwaha and which voted on April 18, the RLSP seemed to have an edge.
RJD leader Tejashwi Prasad Yadav said their party agreed to fight just 19 seats, against 27 in 2014, precisely to accommodate a varied alliance. Since it won 22 out of 40 seats in Bihar in 2004, the RJD's tally has never crossed four.
In the 2014 polls, the RJD and Congress — then in alliance with the JD(U) — had got over 30% votes. Whether its alliance calculations will add up to a critical 8-10% more is the question.

SEAT WATCH LUCKNOW

Vajpayee name lingers, Rajnath holds strong

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, MAY 2

THE SP-BSP-RLD alliance chose BJP rebel Shatrughan Sinha's wife and former actress Poonam Sinha to take on senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh from this BJP bastion.
But going into polling on May 6, it is clear that this seat, once represented by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, still bears the large shadow cast by him.
The Congress candidate is self-styled spiritual guru Pramod Krishnam. He was a surprise choice given that in 2014, fielded by the party from Sambhal Lok Sabha seat, he had won only 1.52% of the votes.
Last week, among those trying to invoke Vajpayee's legacy was Krishnam, who promised to build a grand statue of Vajpayee in Lucknow on the lines of the Statue of Unity for Sardar Patel in Gujarat.
During the 2014 election campaign, Rajnath Singh, who served as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh between October 2000 and March 2002, had claimed that Vajpayee had gifted him an *angvasatram* (stole) when he filed his nomination. Campaigning for his Congress rival Rita Bahuguna Joshi was Vajpayee's niece Karuna Shukla. However, Rajnath had handsomely defeated Joshi, winning by over 2.72 lakh votes. In



Mayawati, gathbandhan's Poonam Sinha in Lucknow Tuesday. Vishal Srivastav

2016, Joshi quit the Congress to join the BJP.
With its sizeable Muslim population — around 13% of the residents of the city are Muslim — the community is witnessing effort by all parties to woo it. Among them even Rajnath Singh.
On Tuesday, the Union minister met with Muslim clerics, including Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahali. Rasheed, however, told *The Indian Express* that the meeting was "non-political and there was no discussion about the elections".
Earlier this week, gathbandhan candidate Poonam Sinha held public meetings in Amina-

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
BJP's Rajnath Singh	54.23% votes
Cong	27.28% votes
2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
BJP's Lalji Tandon	34.93% votes
Cong	27.93% votes

bad, an area with a large Muslim population. An SP leader told *The Indian Express* that the party "is hoping that the entire Muslim population would vote for the SP-BSP alliance and

is working hard to consolidate the votes".
Sinha said that she has been meeting Muslim leaders and will continue to hold such meetings in the coming days. "We are meeting Muslim clerics because we feel they are important. We need their blessings," she said.
Asked how the caste arithmetic would play out following the alliance between the SP and BSP, Sinha said, "The alliance will work in my favour. The BSP's votes will be transferred to us and we will win Lucknow." She added, "The euphoria then (in 2014) was different than it is this time. They (the BJP) have wasted the last five years. People want change now."
Owais Gaffar (42), a shopkeeper in the Muslim-dominated Chowk, is not sure if their votes matter. Saying Rajnath Singh will win irrespective of who they vote for, he added, "They (the BJP) have won the seat for as long as I can remember. He will be supported by some Shias too in Old Lucknow. He is a good, secular leader, unlike some others in his party."
A sugarcane juice seller in Lucknow's Gomti Nagar area, Siddhartha (28), who belongs to the Jatav caste (Scheduled Caste) and claims to be a traditional BJP voter, says people in Lucknow have no choice but to vote for the BJP. "Now that Rajnathji is contesting, we have to vote for him. We would have liked to see a strong candidate from the *vipaksh* (Opposition). But they have fielded *kamzor* (weak) candidates," Siddhartha says as people in his shop, who have stopped for a drink, nod.

In Kharge's seat, it's his work vs Modi's, as BJP pitch focuses on PM

JOHNSON TA
GULBARGA, MAY 2

AS THE late evening bus from Shahpur to Gulbarga hurtles into the night, a dozen mobile phone screens come alive all around.
On some screens it is the latest news on Elections 2019 — Gulbarga voted on April 23, with the electorate split between "*Sol illada sardar*" or "undefeated leader", the Congress's Mallikarjun Kharge, and Congress turncoat Umesh Jadhav. Some screens flit between IPL games, film songs and political news.
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's boast at some of his rallies that his government has given the country "low-cost smartphones and the cheapest data costs in the world" is clearly *no jumla* on this bus ride.
Around 20 km into

ACROSS A NATION

LENGTH & KARGIL KANYAKUMARI

BREADTH PORBANDAR PASIGHAT

2 LINES, OVER 7000 KM 30 DATELINES, 15 STATES

the 70-km journey, the bus makes a stop and a young man with a backpack enters, carrying a carton. Nobody notices the carton until the bus starts moving and the conductor asks the passenger what is in it. "Alcohol," comes the reply.
The conductor whistles for the bus to halt and orders the man out. "There will be checking along the way and I will be held responsible," he says. As the man leaves, one passenger pipes up to tell the conductor, "You must be alert about these things. Modi has warned that people will be enticed with liquor in the polls."
As the BJP tries to wrest the Gulbarga parliament seat from the Congress, the PM is a key factor — making it a Modi vs Kharge contest, rather than Jadhav vs Kharge. A two-term Congress MP from the Scheduled Caste reserved constituency, Kharge has never tasted defeat across the 11 elections he has contested from here (including

Assembly), since the 1970s.
"Modi has worked for the country. Look at the awards conferred on him by countries like the US, Israel and Russia. They have recognised what he has done for the people. The Congress fellows never won such awards," auto driver Basavaraj says in Gulbarga city.
He goes on to talk about corruption having come down "since Modi became PM" — another refrain heard all around Gulbarga.
"Although the main concerns here are farmer suicides, unemployment and the alarming economic situation, the BJP has made Modi and Pulwama, Balakot their main issues," says a Gulbarga resident, C B Patil. "This has become a presidential type of election, with BJP candidates being just namesakes for Modi."
Congress supporters too mention Modi, to make the point that the PM had himself acknowledged Kharge's credentials as a parliamentarian (he was the Congress's leader in the outgoing Lok Sabha). "Modi said Kharge *saab* is an exceptional MP and he wishes for him to be a part of the next Parliament," says Bhima Shankar, a Congress worker from Afzalpur region in the constituency.
The other name that surfaces repeatedly is of RSS ideologue Chakravathy Sulibele,



Farmers wait for the start of a poll meeting near Afzalpur in Gulbarga. Johnson TA

whose statements around the state were a part of the poll buzz, including in Gulbarga. Shankar points out that Sulibele said the Congress had done nothing for the country in

60 years it had ruled the country. "A father works for 60 years and turns blood into water for the sake of his children. The children then turn around and say what have you done

for us. This is the situation of the Congress in India," he says, also questioning Modi's silence over quotes by BJP leaders about "changing the Constitution".
Many Congress workers in the region carry a booklet on Kharge, where he is projected as a defender of the Constitution.
However, among some section of the voters, there is a general fatigue at the name-calling by leaders, rather than any outlining of vision for the future. "There should be a limit to lying," says Raju Patil, about the Congress's promise of Rs 72,000 per annum to poor families. "There is no faith in these promises. The BJP too had promised Rs 15 lakh to every one last time."
At the same time, Kharge, known for getting the region special status, helping youths get government jobs, introducing specialised government hospitals and medical and engineering colleges, is seen as facing a challenge due to the distancing of the backward class and Scheduled Tribe votes from the Dalit and minority base behind Kharge.
Says M R Patil, "It is true that Kharge has contributed to development of this region, but old developments do not count in a new election. Kharge will be in trouble if the traditional Congress base does not consolidate on the ground."

6 DECISION 2019



‘There is Modi *saheb* and no other face... The surgical strikes were *lajawaab*’

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Badal campaigning in village Channu in Bathinda Lok Sabha seat. Gurmeet Singh

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their side. He is no match for Modi *saheb*. So I tell villagers that he does not have a single day’s administrative experience, while Modiji was CM of Gujarat four times and has served as PM for five years. Above all, the two surgical strikes done on Pakistan were *lajawaab* (fantastic). After the Balakot airstrikes, citizens, the Army, everyone is all praise for Modiji and they feel that the country is safe. So our alliance (the Akali Dal-BJP) is campaigning with one-point agenda: vote for another term to the Modi government.

Your rival and Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh says the present Akali Dal has lost its Panthic values and thinks only about self-promotion.
What sacrifices had Amarinder himself made when he was a part of the Akali Dal for 13 years before he switched to the Congress? Ours is a party with a rich history of sacrifices... In my political career, I have been in jail for 15 years, before and even after independence. He (Amarinder) doesn’t have a single contribution, he never took part in any *morch*a or struggle movements that the party launched. He has never gone to jail even for a day.

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Rahul with Kushwaha, Manjhi at a rally in Supaul, Bihar, April 20. PTI

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In Kushwaha-dominated Launa-Khudia village in Jamui Lok Sabha seat, Barun Kumar Kushwaha, who works in a private firm, said, “In 2014, if 10 out of 10 Kushwahs voted for the NDA, it is a vertical split this time.” Even in Purnia where the JD(U) has fielded Santosh Kushwaha and which voted on April 18, the RLSP seemed to have an edge.
RJD leader Tejashwi Prasad Yadav said their party agreed to fight just 19 seats, against 27 in 2014, precisely to accommodate a varied alliance. Since it won 22 out of 40 seats in Bihar in 2004, the RJD’s tally has never crossed four.
In the 2014 polls, the RJD and Congress — then in alliance with the JD(U) — had got over 30% votes. Whether its alliance calculations will add up to a critical 8-10% more is the question.

SEAT WATCH LUCKNOW

Vajpayee name lingers, Rajnath holds strong

ASAD REHMAN
LUCKNOW, MAY 2

THE SP-BSP-RLD alliance chose BJP rebel Shatrughan Sinha’s wife and former actress Poonam Sinha to take on senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh from this BJP bastion.
But going into polling on May 6, it is clear that this seat, once represented by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, still bears the large shadow cast by him.
The Congress candidate is self-styled spiritual guru Pramod Krishnam. He was a surprise choice given that in 2014, fielded by the party from Sambhal Lok Sabha seat, he had won only 1.52% of the votes.
Last week, among those trying to invoke Vajpayee’s legacy was Krishnam, who promised to build a grand statue of Vajpayee in Lucknow on the lines of the Statue of Unity for Sardar Patel in Gujarat.
During the 2014 election campaign, Rajnath Singh, who served as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh between October 2000 and March 2002, had claimed that Vajpayee had gifted him an *angvasatram* (stole) when he filed his nomination. Campaigning for his Congress rival Rita Bahuguna Joshi was Vajpayee’s niece Karuna Shukla. However, Rajnath had handsomely defeated Joshi, winning by over 2.72 lakh votes. In



Mayawati, gathbandhan's Poonam Sinha in Lucknow Tuesday. Vishal Srivastav

2016, Joshi quit the Congress to join the BJP.
With its sizeable Muslim population — around 13% of the residents of the city are Muslim — the community is witnessing effort by all parties to woo it. Among them even Rajnath Singh.
On Tuesday, the Union minister met with Muslim clerics, including Maulana Khalid Rasheed Firangi Mahali. Rasheed, however, told *The Indian Express* that the meeting was “non-political and there was no discussion about the elections”.
Earlier this week, gathbandhan candidate Poonam Sinha held public meetings in Amina-

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
BJP's Rajnath Singh	54.23% votes
Cong	27.28% votes
2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE	
BJP's Lalji Tandon	34.93% votes
Cong	27.93% votes

bad, an area with a large Muslim population. An SP leader told *The Indian Express* that the party “is hoping that the entire Muslim population would vote for the SP-BSP alliance and

is working hard to consolidate the votes”.
Sinha said that she has been meeting Muslim leaders and will continue to hold such meetings in the coming days. “We are meeting Muslim clerics because we feel they are important. We need their blessings,” she said.
Asked how the caste arithmetic would play out following the alliance between the SP and BSP, Sinha said, “The alliance will work in my favour. The BSP’s votes will be transferred to us and we will win Lucknow.” She added, “The euphoria then (in 2014) was different than it is this time. They (the BJP) have wasted the last five years. People want change now.”
Owais Gaffar (42), a shopkeeper in the Muslim-dominated Chowk, is not sure if their votes matter. Saying Rajnath Singh will win irrespective of who they vote for, he added, “They (the BJP) have won the seat for as long as I can remember. He will be supported by some Shias too in Old Lucknow. He is a good, secular leader, unlike some others in his party.”
A sugarcane juice seller in Lucknow’s Gomti Nagar area, Siddhartha (28), who belongs to the Jatav caste (Scheduled Caste) and claims to be a traditional BJP voter, says people in Lucknow have no choice but to vote for the BJP. “Now that Rajnathji is contesting, we have to vote for him. We would have liked to see a strong candidate from the *vipaksh* (Opposition). But they have fielded *kamzor* (weak) candidates,” Siddhartha says as people in his shop, who have stopped for a drink, nod.

In Kharge’s seat, it’s his work vs Modi’s, as BJP pitch focuses on PM

JOHNSON TA
GULBARGA, MAY 2

AS THE late evening bus from Shahpur to Gulbarga hurtles into the night, a dozen mobile phone screens come alive all around.
On some screens it is the latest news on Elections 2019 — Gulbarga voted on April 23, with the electorate split between “*Sol illada sardar*” or “undefeated leader”, the Congress’s Mallikarjun Kharge, and Congress turncoat Umesh Jadhav. Some screens flit between IPL games, film songs and political news.
Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s boast at some of his rallies that his government has given the country “low-cost smartphones and the cheapest data costs in the world” is clearly *no jumla* on this bus ride.
Around 20 km into

ACROSS A NATION

LENGTH & KARGIL KANYAKUMARI

BREADTH PORBANDAR PASIGHAT

2 LINES, OVER 7000 KM 30 DATE LINES, 15 STATES

the 70-km journey, the bus makes a stop and a young man with a backpack enters, carrying a carton. Nobody notices the carton until the bus starts moving and the conductor asks the passenger what is in it. “Alcohol,” comes the reply.
The conductor whistles for the bus to halt and orders the man out. “There will be checking along the way and I will be held responsible,” he says. As the man leaves, one passenger pipes up to tell the conductor, “You must be alert about these things. Modi has warned that people will be enticed with liquor in the polls.”
As the BJP tries to wrest the Gulbarga parliament seat from the Congress, the PM is a key factor — making it a Modi vs Kharge contest, rather than Jadhav vs Kharge. A two-term Congress MP from the Scheduled Caste reserved constituency, Kharge has never tasted defeat across the 11 elections he has contested from here (including

Assembly), since the 1970s.
“Modi has worked for the country. Look at the awards conferred on him by countries like the US, Israel and Russia. They have recognised what he has done for the people. The Congress fellows never won such awards,” auto driver Basavaraj says in Gulbarga city.
He goes on to talk about corruption having come down “since Modi became PM” — another refrain heard all around Gulbarga.
“Although the main concerns here are farmer suicides, unemployment and the alarming economic situation, the BJP has made Modi and Pulwama, Balakot their main issues,” says a Gulbarga resident, C B Patil. “This has become a presidential type of election, with BJP candidates being just namesakes for Modi.”
Congress supporters too mention Modi, to make the point that the PM had himself acknowledged Kharge’s credentials as a parliamentarian (he was the Congress’s leader in the outgoing Lok Sabha). “Modi said Kharge *saab* is an exceptional MP and he wishes for him to be a part of the next Parliament,” says Bhima Shankar, a Congress worker from Afzalpur region in the constituency.
The other name that surfaces repeatedly is of RSS ideologue Chakravarthy Sulibele,



Farmers wait for the start of a poll meeting near Afzalpur in Gulbarga. Johnson TA

whose statements around the state were a part of the poll buzz, including in Gulbarga. Shankar points out that Sulibele said the Congress had done nothing for the country in

60 years it had ruled the country. “A father works for 60 years and turns blood into water for the sake of his children. The children then turn around and say what have you done



Cong wants to separate Kashmir from India: Shah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEEMUCH, RAJGARH (MP), MAY 2

BJP CHIEF Amit Shah on Thursday claimed that the Congress and National Conference wanted Kashmir's separation from India, and vowed to scrap Article 370 if his party is voted back to power.

Shah addressed three rallies in Madhya Pradesh, where three phases of polling are yet to be held.

Speaking at Ashta in Dewas Lok Sabha constituency, Shah said, "If elected to power again, Article 370 (which gives a special status to Jammu and Kashmir) will be wiped out from its roots."

"The Congress and the National Conference want to separate Kashmir from Hindustan. But the Modi government will never allow the secession from India," he said.

Even if Modi did not return to power, BJP workers will not allow Kashmir to secede, he said. "No BJP worker will let such a thing happen. We will scrap Article 370 if you make Modi the PM again," he added.

On Congress's promise to scrap the sedition law, he said, "The Congress is siding with those who raised anti-national slogans. You talk about scrapping the sedition law. Tell me, if someone is caught spying for Pakistan, should action be taken under sedition law or not?"

"Anti-national slogans like 'Bharat Tere Tukde Honge' were raised in JNU. Shouldn't these people be sent to jail?" he said.

Shah slammed Congress leader Sam Pitroda's statement that India should hold talks with Pakistan.

"Rahul Baba's (Congress president Rahul Gandhi) guru Sam Pitroda made a statement...tell me, should we talk to those who killed our 40 jawans or should we attack them? Congress says we should talk to them. Rahul Baba, you be happy with your policy. This is Narendra Modi government which will reply to gunfire with a bombshell," the BJP leader said.

Speaking at Biora in Rajgarh district, Shah credited Modi for the UN Security Council designating JeM chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist.



BJP chief Amit Shah addresses a rally at Ashta in Dewas on Thursday. PTI

Rise and rise of Kesto, TMC leader who speaks his mind, and gets away

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

FOR THREE days, April 28 to April 30, Trinamool Congress's Birbhum district president Anubrata Mandal was under the Election Commission's (EC) watch, without his mobile phones. However, Mandal used the phones of his "boys" to coordinate electioneering in the district on April 29, when clashes were reported from Nanoor, Ilambajar and other areas.

Mandal's confinement came after the EC received complaints from other parties, particularly the BJP. Every now and then, especially when there is an election to be fought and won, Mandal's audacious statements keep both the opposition and his voters on their toes.

In a recent meeting, he urged school teachers on poll duty to allow his workers to poll "not much, just 500-600 votes". During the 2016 Assembly elections, he had told his boys, "If somebody comes, you should play the drums" — a statement that was interpreted as an instruction to resort to violence if required.

This election season, he asked his supporters to offer "nakuldana" (a sugary ball usually served as prasad) and water to all — again interpreted as a threat. However, he has been more blunt in the past. In 2013, Mandal threatened to cut off hands of Congress workers — a party he once belonged to.

What catapulted him to recognition was Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's indulgent statement soon after: "Kesto (as Mandal is better known) is not well, he has to move around with an oxygen cylinder because the oxygen does not flow to his brain."

Mandal has not lost that rapport with the TMC supremo. A few days ago, while canvassing in Birbhum district, Banerjee said, "The only person I know here is Kesto. Whatever your issue, go to him." With polling over in



Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at Sareni in Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, on Thursday. Tashi Tobgyal

PRIYANKA CAMPAIGNS IN RAE BAREILLY, ADDRESSES SP WORKERS

'Would rather die than help BJP, our ideologies are poles apart'

ANKITA DWIVEDI JOHRI
RAE BAREILLY, MAY 2

A DAY after Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said that the Congress has fielded candidates to eat into the BJP's votes and not the UP mahagathbandhan's, the party general secretary in-charge of eastern UP said she would "rather die than help the BJP. Our ideologies are poles apart."

Speaking to *The Indian Express* during a daylong road show across Rae Bareilly, her mother Sonia Gandhi's constituency, Priyanka said, "I can't say how we will perform in Uttar Pradesh, but we are putting up a spirited fight. We are putting up strong candidates against the BJP everywhere. There will definitely be an improvement in our vote share."

During a stopover in Jagatpur, she addressed Samajwadi Party workers. "My mother is a candidate from here. Voting is on May 6. No matter which party you belong to, you cannot deny the fact that Sonia Gandhi has worked for the development of Rae Bareilly. She has built roads, hospitals, but a lot still needs to be done here, for which you need to ensure that Sonia wins again with a high margin." She was speaking to around 500 SP workers, all sporting red caps.

Priyanka shared the stage with SP's Unchahar MLA Manoj Kumar Pandey, and chants of 'Priyanka Gandhi zindabad', and

'Akhilesh Yadav zindabad' echoed across the venue.

"The event was specific to Rae Bareilly, they (SP) support us here. We wanted to ally with them but we accepted their wisdom, their decision. We are fighting alone in UP, but the objective of their (mahagathbandhan) and our fight is the same," Priyanka told *The Indian Express* after the address.

Priyanka's visit comes a day after Congress president Rahul Gandhi said in Barabanki: "(PM Narendra) Modi holds the remote control for Mayawati and Akhilesh Yadav." The SP and the BSP chiefs, in turn, targeted the Congress in their campaigns. "I don't believe the Congress has fielded weak candidates anywhere. No party does it. People are not with them, so they are making excuses," SP's Akhilesh Yadav told ANI. BSP's Mayawati, meanwhile, said in a statement, "Like the BJP, the Congress has started saying absurd things about the SP-BSP Alliance. It is clear that both have a tacit understanding and are contesting against our alliance unitedly."

On Wednesday, Priyanka had said, "It is clear that our candidates are putting up a tough fight. Where they are strong enough, they will win on their own. Where they are weaker, we have fielded candidates that will eat into BJP votes."

Priyanka began her campaign from Rae Bareilly's Rahi Block on Thursday morning, and stopped at nearly 10 villages. "Did demon-

etisation help you? Did GST help you? I have gone to several villages, farmers are crying about stray animals destroying their crops. No gaushalas have been built. The PM Kisan Samman Yojana is kisaan apmaan yojana (farmer honour scheme is actually farmer humiliation scheme)," she said in Babuganj.

Priyanka's road show culminated in a joint rally with Sonia in Sareni village. This was the former Congress president's first rally in these elections. She had earlier addressed small meetings.

"You have the right to vote, through which you can teach those who have made false promises a lesson. You remember the promises PM Modi made — Rs 15 lakh in your bank accounts, 2 crore jobs, farmers' income to be doubled and several schemes for women. But the truth is now in front of you and you are suffering. The youth are looking for jobs, the farmer has realised that doubling income was a jumla. Notebandi and GST have destroyed small businesses. The Modi government has spent the country's wealth on big businessmen. They have shut down schemes that we started for your welfare," Sonia said, addressing the rally of about 3,000 people.

Earlier in the day, at a village near Jagatpura, Priyanka held up snakes while listening to complaints of the snake charmer community. "It won't do anything, don't be scared," she told an onlooker.

Pilot talks communal harmony to counter BJP national security pitch

HAMZA KHAN
SIKAR, JHUNJHUNU, DAUSA, MAY 2

FACED WITH the BJP's rhetoric on national security, the Congress in Rajasthan is trying to change the poll narrative by talking about communal harmony, farmers' issues, unemployment and the BJP "going back on its promises".

A campaign trail of Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress chief Sachin Pilot shows how, at rally after rally, he is focusing on propagating a message of love and harmony between "36 quam (communities)".

At a rally in Patan, Sikar, on Wednesday for party candidate Subhash Maharia, district Congress president P S Jat says, "They talk of Indira Gandhi, I'll tell you what she did," and goes on to list her achievements — abolition of privy-purse, nationalisation of banks, the first nuclear test in 1974 and the division of Pakistan. "And now they indulge in propaganda after a small (surgical) strike," he says.

Taking the microphone, Pilot says, "A situation of confrontation has been created in the society. There is talk of emotional issues to mislead the people. What does Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister (Yogi Adityanath) talk about in his speeches? Ali and Bajrangbali. You have to realise the seriousness of these elections. Modi sahib was in Rajasthan and he will not tell why a gas cylinder sells for Rs 1,000. He will talk of Hindu Muslim, mandir masjid, and Hindustan Pakistan because he has now understood that farmers are committing suicide, there is a downturn in every economic sector, youths are not getting employment... You have to use your vote wisely."

"This is a land of the brave. People of all castes and communities have lived with love and harmony. Hence, we are working against the politics of BJP leaders, who are trying to create a conflict between people," he adds.

In his election rallies in the state, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken at length on the armed forces, even bringing up 1998

SEAT WATCH HISAR

It's family versus family versus family

COOMI KAPOOR &
VARINDER BHATIA
HISAR, MAY 2

HISAR, AN industrial-agricultural Jat-dominated belt, is home to three prominent dynasties of Haryana. The scions of these families are fighting the Lok Sabha elections from here to establish their credentials amid the intertwined histories and old vendettas of the clans.

Sitting MP Dushyant Chautala, leader of the Janayak Janta Party (JJP) and great-grandson of Devi Lal, is one of the contestants. Despite the Modi wave of 2014, Dushyant had managed to defeat Kuldeep Bishnoi, whose party Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC) was in alliance with the BJP.

Kuldeep is the son of Dushyant's great-grandfather's bête noire, Bhajan Lal, who topped Devi Lal as chief minister in 1979, introducing the political phenomenon of defections then known as "Aaya Ram and Gaya Ram".

At 26, Dushyant became the youngest Lok Sabha MP in 2014.

This time the youngest candidate from Hisar is Bhajan Lal's foreign-educated 26-year old grandson Bhavya Bishnoi, now contesting on a Congress ticket, who wants to avenge his father Kuldeep's defeat. Bhavya has brought out a thick glossy manifesto only for Hisar, probably the first of its kind. He claims he has been visiting the region regularly for weddings and funerals, and touring the constituency for the last two years.

A Dushyant admirer in the town, Tushar Sharma, was skeptical of Bhavya's knowledge of the constituency and said, "Bhavya probably does not even know names of all the villages to which Dushyant has sent water tankers."

There is a third candidate in the fray, adding a twist to the tale. The BJP's Brijendra Singh also has a distinguished political lineage. His father is Steel Minister Birender Singh, who is the grandson of Sir Chhotu Ram, a highly educated Jat of his day, who in the 1920s was a social reformer and educationist in united Punjab.

Brijendra, 46, an IAS officer for 21 years, had ranked ninth in the civil services examination and studied at St Stephen's College, JNU and King's College, London. He resigned from civil services to enter politics even as his father offered to give up his ministry and Rajya Sabha membership to uphold the BJP's non-dynastic principles. Birender's punchline at electoral meetings is, "This is my son. He has sacrificed his sarkari job to serve you. Now I leave it to you."

The polished Brijendra has been asserting that he is not at a disadvantage in politics, having grown up in a political family. "Being a soft Jat doesn't make you less of a Jat," he points out, "remember education always helps".

About Dushyant, he says, "We know how to deal with them." He was referring to the fact that his father defeated Devi Lal in the same constituency in 1984 and his mother Premalata Singh defeated Dushyant in the Assembly election of Uchana in Hisar parliamentary constituency in 2014, within six months of Dushyant's parliamentary victory.

For Dushyant, the stakes in this election are high. It will decide who inherits the legacy of



(From top) Dushyant Chautala, Bhavya Bishnoi and Brijendra Singh

HISAR 2014 LS POLLS		
INLD's Dushyant Chautala	42.79%	
HJC-BL's Kuldeep Bishnoi	40%	
Haryana's 10 seats vote on May 12		

Devi Lal, known affectionately as Haryana 'Tau'. After Devi Lal's son and former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala was sentenced and jailed along with his elder son Ajay, a bitter fight broke out between Chautala's younger son Abhay and Ajay's children, Dushyant and Digvijay, over control of the INLD.

Abhay as party president seemed to have the upper hand as the party organisation was with him and his father backed him. But Dushyant and Digvijay, members of the party's youth wing, formed a new party, JJP, last year. In the recent Jind Assembly bypoll, Dushyant's party came second behind the BJP's winning candidate. They were followed by the Congress and INLD. Dushyant has to now campaign not just for himself but for all other candidates from his party. "We are a young party," he says, pointing out that six out of 10 candidates of JJP-AAP alliance are below the age of 40. "Legacy," he says, "cannot be inherited, it has to be won."



Pilot at a rally Wednesday. Rohit Jain Paras

EXPLAINED

E.

Rafale not loud enough, Cong changes pitch

THE CONGRESS in Rajasthan seems to be out of options to effectively counter the BJP rhetoric around national security. The Congress's attempts to dictate the narrative with the Rafale row and the NVAY scheme do not seem to have worked as effectively as it would have liked. Hence, it is left with little choice than to repeat its rhetoric on the need to fight BJP's "divisive politics".

nuclear tests in Pokhran under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, apart from the Pulwama attack, 26/11 Mumbai attack, the cross border airstrikes, the Sri Lanka attacks, and more recently, Masood Azhar. A few days ago, BJP president Amit Shah said in Jalore that this election is "to take revenge for the martyrs."

"People will vote on issues that matter to them in daily life. I think this sort of rhetoric will not cut any ice," Pilot tells *The Indian Express*, adding, "when the SC and EC have clearly said that religion and armed forces must not be a part of the political narrative then people in high position must take cognisance and I think he and the government are answerable on the issue of development."

At the second rally of the day in Khetri, Jhunjhunu, Pilot says, "We are fighting elections against people who are trying to destroy the environment of debate, of disagreeing with each other. No one is ready to discuss development. The BJP candidates who are contesting don't talk of water, school, college, electricity or hospital. Instead, they talk of Hindu-Muslim and mandir-masjid."

"People are tired of an environment of violence, bitterness, hatred, toxicity and confrontation, elections should be conducted around love, brotherhood, development and employment," he says.

At the third rally in Mahuwa in Dausa, once a Pilot family stronghold, local Congress MLA Murari Lal talks of a "harmonious time" when all castes used to live in harmony with the Pilot family at the helm. He adds that then there was a "grahan (eclipse)" and the castes were divided.

Addressing his last rally of the day here, Pilot says, "Ever since we gained consciousness, we have understood that the nation is one and we have to rise above caste, religion and language and the nation's farmers and the youth have to unite for the nation to progress."

The remaining 12 seats in Rajasthan will vote in the fifth phase on May 6.

7 DECISION 2019



Cong wants to separate Kashmir from India: Shah

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Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at Sareni in Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, on Thursday. Tashi Tobgyal

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At 26, Dushyant became the youngest Lok Sabha MP in 2014.

This time the youngest candidate from Hisar is Bhajan Lal's foreign-educated 26-year-old grandson Bhavya Bishnoi, now contesting on a Congress ticket, who wants to avenge his father Kuldeep's defeat. Bhavya has brought out a thick glossy manifesto only for Hisar, probably the first of its kind. He claims he has been visiting the region regularly for weddings and funerals, and touring the constituency for the last two years.

A Dushyant admirer in the town, Tushar Sharma, was skeptical of Bhavya's knowledge of the constituency and said, "Bhavya probably does not even know names of all the villages to which Dushyant has sent water tankers."

There is a third candidate in the fray, adding a twist to the tale. The BJP's Brijendra Singh also has a distinguished political lineage. His father is Steel Minister Birender Singh, who is the grandson of Sir Chhotu Ram, a highly educated Jat of his day, who in the 1920s was a social reformer and educationist in united Punjab.

Brijendra, 46, an IAS officer for 21 years, had ranked ninth in the civil services examination and studied at St Stephen's College, JNU and King's College, London. He resigned from civil services to enter politics even as his father offered to give up his ministry and Rajya Sabha membership to uphold the BJP's non-dynastic principles. Birender's punchline at electoral meetings is, "This is my son. He has sacrificed his sarkari job to serve you. Now I leave it to you."

The polished Brijendra has been asserting that he is not at a disadvantage in politics, having grown up in a political family. "Being a soft Jat doesn't make you less of a Jat," he points out, "remember education always helps".

About Dushyant, he says, "We know how to deal with them." He was referring to the fact that his father defeated Devi Lal in the same constituency in 1984 and his mother Premalata Singh defeated Dushyant in the Assembly election of Uchana in Hisar parliamentary constituency in 2014, within six months of Dushyant's parliamentary victory.

For Dushyant, the stakes in this election are high. It will decide who inherits the legacy of



(From top) Dushyant Chautala, Bhavya Bishnoi and Brijendra Singh

HISAR 2014 LS POLLS

INLD's Dushyant Chautala	42.79%
HJC-BL's Kuldeep Bishnoi	40%

Haryana's 10 seats vote on May 12

Devi Lal, known affectionately as Haryana 'Tau'. After Devi Lal's son and former Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala was sentenced and jailed along with his elder son Ajay, a bitter fight broke out between Chautala's younger son Abhay and Ajay's children, Dushyant and Digvijay, over control of the INLD.

Abhay as party president seemed to have the upper hand as the party organisation was with him and his father backed him. But Dushyant and Digvijay, members of the party's youth wing, formed a new party, JJP, last year. In the recent Jind Assembly bypoll, Dushyant's party came second behind the BJP's winning candidate. They were followed by the Congress and INLD. Dushyant has to now campaign not just for himself but for all other candidates from his party. "We are a young party," he says, pointing out that six out of 10 candidates of JJP-AAP alliance are below the age of 40. "Legacy," he says, "cannot be inherited, it has to be won."

Rise and rise of Kesto, TMC leader who speaks his mind, and gets away

ABANTIKA GHOSH
NEW DELHI, MAY 2

FOR THREE days, April 28 to April 30, Trinamool Congress's Birbhum district president Anubrata Mandal was under the Election Commission's (EC) watch, without his mobile phones. However, Mandal used the phones of his "boys" to coordinate electioneering in the district on April 29, when clashes were reported from Nanoor, Ilambajar and other areas.

Mandal's confinement came after the EC received complaints from other parties, particularly the BJP. Every now and then, especially when there is an election to be fought and won, Mandal's audacious statements keep both the opposition and his voters on their toes.

In a recent meeting, he urged school teachers on poll duty to allow his workers to poll "not much, just 500-600 votes". During the 2016 Assembly elections, he had told his boys, "If somebody comes, you should play the drums" — a statement that was interpreted as an instruction to resort to violence if required.

This election season, he asked his supporters to offer "nakuldana" (a sugary ball usually served as prasad) and water to all — again interpreted as a threat. However, he has been more blunt in the past. In 2013, Mandal threatened to cut off hands of Congress workers — a party he once belonged to.

What catapulted him to recognition was Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee's indulgent statement soon after: "Kesto (as Mandal is better known) is not well, he has to move around with an oxygen cylinder because the oxygen does not flow to his brain."

Mandal has not lost that rapport with the TMC supremo. A few days ago, while canvassing in Birbhum district, Banerjee said, "The only person I know here is Kesto. Whatever your issue, go to him." With polling over in



Anubrata Mandal

Birbhum, Mandal is now headed to Bishnupur where Trinamool turncoat Soumitra Khan is contesting on a BJP ticket.

The TMC leader was most recently in the news after former Trinamool MP from Bolpur and now BJP candidate from Jadavpur Anupam Hazra touched his feet in Bolpur, triggering speculation. Referring to Mandal as Kesto *kaka* (uncle), Hazra said he called on him because he recently lost his mother. Caught on the wrong foot, a day later he said he had been sidled into the photo-op.

Mandal, however, said doors are open for Hazra's "homecoming", an interesting statement given the fact that he has no love lost for Hazra. He did ensure Hazra's win in the 2014 general election, but that was putting the party's interests above his own dislike. When *The Indian Express* met him last month in his swanky office near Bolpur police station, Mandal had said, "I never liked him (Hazra). I did not want him to contest here. But didi trusted Mukul (Roy) and it was his idea." Wily political strategist that he is, Mandal knows the talk of a "homecoming" would make both Hazra and the BJP uncomfortable with each other.

Mandal, who began as a local strongman, was one of the earliest to leave the Congress

and join the Trinamool after its formation. And he is now one of the few in the party who can be vocal about his opinion even when it is not in consonance with that of the Trinamool supremo.

In Birbhum district, the tall idol at the Kali Puja organised by Mandal every year is the pride of Bolpur.

The Trinamool brass in Birbhum and outside knows that every election in the district is essentially his to win or lose; yet, Mandal has never sought a ticket for himself. He says, "I am not even interested in fighting elections."

He probably does not need to.

According to the BJP candidate from Bolpur, Ramprasad Das, Mandal is the "DM and SP" of Birbhum, who had made it impossible for BJP to hold meetings and rallies, with bus owners refusing to give their buses and landowners being threatened into withdrawing their no-objection certificates.

Mandal, who oversaw the Trinamool's campaign in Bolpur and Birbhum, said, "I have so far attended 44 meetings, each with 1-2 lakh people. I did not take the candidates along; if I did, they might get the impression that people are coming for them."

The arrogance is not without reason. Mandal has a strong hold over the district, particularly its tribal population, partly because he listens to their voice.

In 2006, tribals in Aamkhoi village stumbled upon wood fossils from 15-20 million years ago (Miocene age) and refused to part with what had been dug out of their land. For long, the artefacts stayed in the open after they were excavated. After the Trinamool came to power in 2011, Mandal got the state government to approve a fossil park in the area. The park is still a work in progress but the villagers of Aamkhoi are grateful to Mandal.

Meanwhile, on Wednesday, rice mills around Bolpur turned into lunch halls as an estimated 10,000 people from across the district poured into the town for a meal. The occasion was the *shradh* of Mandal's mother, who died days before his district voted.

HAMZA KHAN

SIKAR, JHUNJHUNU, DAUSA, MAY 2

FACED WITH the BJP's rhetoric on national security, the Congress in Rajasthan is trying to change the poll narrative by talking about communal harmony, farmers' issues, unemployment and the BJP "going back on its promises".

A campaign trail of Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress chief Sachin Pilot shows how, at rally after rally, he is focusing on propagating a message of love and harmony between "36 quam (communities)".

At a rally in Patan, Sikar, on Wednesday for party candidate Subhash Maharia, district Congress president P S Jat says, "They talk of Indira Gandhi, I'll tell you what she did," and goes on to list her achievements — abolition of privy-purse, nationalisation of banks, the first nuclear test in 1974 and the division of Pakistan. "And now they indulge in propaganda after a small (surgical) strike," he says.

Taking the microphone, Pilot says, "A situation of confrontation has been created in the society. There is talk of emotional issues to mislead the people. What does Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister (Yogi Adityanath) talk about in his speeches? Ali and Bajrangbali. You have to realise the seriousness of these elections. Modi sahib was in Rajasthan and he will not tell why a gas cylinder sells for Rs 1,000. He will talk of Hindu Muslim, mandir masjid, and Hindustan Pakistan because he has now understood that farmers are committing suicide, there is a downturn in every economic sector, youths are not getting employment... You have to use your vote wisely."

"This is a land of the brave. People of all castes and communities have lived with love and harmony. Hence, we are working against the politics of BJP leaders, who are trying to create a conflict between people," he adds.

In his election rallies in the state, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken at length on the armed forces, even bringing up 1998



Pilot at a rally Wednesday. Rohit Jain Paras

EXPLAINED

Rafale not loud enough, Cong changes pitch

THE CONGRESS in Rajasthan seems to be out of options to effectively counter the BJP rhetoric around national security. The Congress's attempts to dictate the narrative with the Rafale row and the NVAY scheme do not seem to have worked as effectively as it would have liked. Hence, it is left with little choice than to repeat its rhetoric on the need to fight BJP's "divisive politics".

nuclear tests in Pokhran under the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, apart from the Pulwama attack, 26/11 Mumbai attack, the cross border airstrikes, the Sri Lanka attacks, and more recently, Masood Azhar. A few days ago, BJP president Amit Shah said in Jalore that this election is "to take revenge for the martyrs."

"People will vote on issues that matter to them in daily life. I think this sort of rhetoric will not cut any ice," Pilot tells *The Indian Express*, adding, "when the SC and EC have clearly said that religion and armed forces must not be a part of the political narrative then people in high position must take cognisance and I think he and the government are answerable on the issue of development."

At the second rally of the day in Khetri, Jhunjhunu, Pilot says, "We are fighting elections against people who are trying to destroy the environment of debate, of disagreeing with each other. No one is ready to discuss development. The BJP candidates who are contesting don't talk of water, school, college, electricity or hospital. Instead, they talk of Hindu-Muslim and mandir-masjid."

"People are tired of an environment of violence, bitterness, hatred, toxicity and confrontation, elections should be conducted around love, brotherhood, development and employment," he says.

At the third rally in Mahuwa in Dausa, once a Pilot family stronghold, local Congress MLA Murari Lal talks of a "harmonious time" when all castes used to live in harmony with the Pilot family at the helm. He adds that then there was a "grahan (eclipse)" and the castes were divided.

Addressing his last rally of the day here, Pilot says, "Ever since we gained consciousness, we have understood that the nation is one and we have to rise above caste, religion and language and the nation's farmers and the youth have to unite for the nation to progress."

The remaining 12 seats in Rajasthan will vote in the fifth phase on May 6.