

7 DECISION 2019



BALLOTIN

Bengal candidate injured in accident, BJP says conspiracy

Kolkata: Shantanu Thakur, the BJP's Bongaon Lok Sabha candidate, sustained head injuries after his car was hit by another vehicle in North 24 Parganas district on Saturday.



Bongaon will vote on May 6 in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls. According to sources, a vehicle bearing a police sticker collided with Thakur's car, which was driving at a speed of 20 kmph. Two of his associates and the drivers of both cars were also injured. Police claimed that the "speeding" car was hired for ferrying central force personnel within the constituency. While police termed it an accident, BJP leaders called it a conspiracy against Shantanu Thakur, who is contesting against his aunt Mamata Thakur of the Trinamool Congress. "His car was at a very low speed. It is not an accident, but a plot to kill him. The speeding car had a police sticker and was running at 100 km/hr," said BJP leader Kailash Vijayvargiya. **ENS**

Another AAP MLA joins Congress

Chandigarh: In another setback to the Aam Aadmi Party in less than a week in Punjab, its Ropar MLA Amarjit Singh Sandoya joined the Congress on Saturday in the presence of Chief Minister Amarinder Singh. AAP's Mansa MLA Nazar Singh Manshahia had joined the party on April 29. Sandoya said he was disenchanted with the functioning of AAP and the disinterest of its leadership in the party's affairs in Punjab. He said that he opted to join Congress because of better awareness in the party regarding issues of the state and the common man. Welcoming Sandoya into the party fold, the chief minister said the development was a clear endorsement of his government's initiatives in the past two years. **ENS**

In town of defence forces, job issue jostles with Pulwama

DEVYANI ONIAL

UNA (HIMACHAL PRADESH), MAY 4

POSTERS OF Hindi films and action heroes dot Una in Himachal Pradesh. There is Mogambo from Mr India grinning down at you in that timeless combination of glee and menace from the back of a roadways bus. Action hero Shaktimaan towers from another billboard. The images may be old but the message is new. Mogambo is happy because people have turned up in large numbers in Una to vote. And well, if Shaktimaan was your childhood hero, you are old enough to vote. As Una goes to the polls on May 19, the administration has come out with out-of-the-box ideas to get voters to the polling booths. "Una had a voter turnout of 71% in the 2014 elections, the highest in Himachal," says Rakesh Kumar Prajapati, deputy commissioner-cum-district election officer of Una. "We want to ensure it betters even that."

With first-time voters specially being encouraged, students say they are looking forward to cast their first vote. Within Una's government college campus, jobs and national security are what they discuss when they talk about politics. "Modiji is a strong leader. Hasn't he taken *badlaa* (revenge) for Pulwama? Attacks used to happen before but no one did anything. *Manmohan Singhji toh baithe hi rahe*," says Shalu, a sophomore in Vocational Studies. The circle grows bigger. Most nod in agreement. But the availability of jobs remains a niggling concern that even the drumbeat of military might can't quite drown. "This vocational degree started two years ago and we are really excited to be studying here but we get demoralised sometimes when we see so many young people, our seniors who have degrees but no jobs," says another as a group of boys joins the conversation. "That may be true," cuts in another, "but this government is working for development. It has taken strong steps against ter-



Poster of kabbadi champion Ajay Thakur, who belonged to Himachal Pradesh, asking people to vote. *Yash*

rorism and I think that's very important."

The February 14 attack in Pulwama and the subsequent airstrike on Balakot in Pakistan find a deep resonance in this town nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas in Himachal. The sentiment is not really surprising. One in every few houses here has someone working for or retired from the armed forces. A petrol-pump in the centre of town stands in the name of local boy Capt Amol Kalia, who was killed in the 1999 Kargil War. Vikram Batra, another Kargil hero, remembered famously for his "*Yeh dil maange more*" cry after a battle victory, belongs to Himachal's Palampur.

Una is part of the Hamirpur constituency represented by Anurag Thakur in the Lok Sabha. Thakur, son of veteran BJP leader and former state chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal, won the seat first in 2009 and is seeking re-election for the third time. Before him, the BJP's Suresh Chandel had held it for two terms. BJP state chief Satpal Satti, whom the EC issued a notice recently over his derogatory remarks against Congress president Rahul Gandhi, too belongs to Una, as does

the state's leader of Opposition in the Assembly, the Congress's Mukesh Agnihotri, making it an electoral crucible in the hill state.

At the Sainik canteen in the bustling market in the centre of town, ex-armyman Chanan Singh, says, "Of course, development is important, but the nation comes first. *Hindustan hai toh sab kuchch hai*."

Just a few kilometres away stands the Himachal Pradesh Academy for Defence Services, run by a local organisation, which trains students wanting to join the forces. Lt Col Kuldip Singh (ret'd), one of the directors at the academy, says, "As compared to other states, Himachal is relatively prosperous. Of course, unemployment is a concern but lots of the pressing issues of other states are not here."

The main issue, agrees Amit Vashisht, who teaches at the academy, remains employment. "This is what concerns the young, who are very aware these days because of social media. They constantly compare what they have and what others do. They all know which party is offering what but these days it's difficult to tell who will vote for whom. Despite all the noise, this time, it's a silent vote," he says.

In a village bordering Punjab, Kashmir Singh, whose age in the electoral rolls puts him at 106, remembers the past and talks of the future. He remembers voting for Prime Minister Nehru and says, "*Iss barr Congress ke munde ko chance milna chahiye* (Congress's son Rahul Gandhi should get a chance)".

On May 19, Una will decide who to give that chance to.



whom the EC issued a notice recently over his derogatory remarks against Congress president Rahul Gandhi, too belongs to Una, as does

SEAT WATCH RANCHI, JHARKHAND

Congress old-hand vs BJP's newbie: close fight on the cards

ABHISHEK ANGAD

RANCHI, MAY 4

APRIL 21 saw a debate between the two main Lok Sabha candidates from Ranchi constituency at the Jharkhand capital's premier medical institution Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS). Both Subodh Kant Sahay of the Congress, multiple-time Lok Sabha MP who last won in 2009, and lost to the BJP's Ramtahal Choudhary in 2014, and BJP's Sanjay Seth, a newcomer, were asked to debate on issues concerning medical fraternity and the health sector.

It was a close debate, and just as it began to get delayed in due course, an irked Seth, stating that he is a disciplined political worker, left midway, citing other engagements. Sahay said he would never have done that.

This, in a nutshell, is the fight at hand in Ranchi — between an experienced, three-time MP and former Union minister, and a relative newcomer who was the state Khadi board chief. For most people in Ranchi and areas surrounding it, May 6, the polling day, is a tough contest.

Seth is riding on what his party calls the Modi wave, and Sahay is relying on Opposition unity plus sitting MP Ramtahal Choudhary, denied a ticket by the ruling party, contesting as an Independent, and thereby splitting votes.

Narendra Kumar, a resident of Ranchi city, said: "Ramtahal Choudhary has a Kurmi support base. He is bound to split votes. For Seth, this will be the first election. That this is set out to be a tough contest was clear from Modi's unplanned roadshow in Ranchi recently."

State Congress president Ajoy Kumar had earlier claimed that Sahay will win, but the party will have to be "careful".

In 2014, Choudhary had polled more than 4.48 lakh votes — against Sahay's 2.49 lakh — and some people believe the BJP erred in denying him a ticket. But the party's Jharkhand in-charge for the polls, Mangal Pandey, said it's a BJP "voter base", not of any particular candidate. "There is a Modi wave and we will perform better this time," he



Shatrughan Sinha with Subodh Kant Sahay; BJP's Mathura candidate Hema Malini addresses a public meeting in Ranchi to support Sanjay Seth. *PTI*



VOTING ON MAY 6

said. The BJP had won 12 out of 14 Lok Sabha seats in

Jharkhand in 2014. But another state BJP leader, who did not want to be named, said, "It is a tough contest because Sahay is a seasoned politician who has made inroads in rural areas. Very few people know Seth there (in rural Ranchi), but we are counting on Modi-ji's image."

Ranchi Lok Sabha constituency comprises more than 1,400 villages, which can swing votes in favour of either candidate.

But people in rural areas may also vote on the state government's perceived performance. Parmila Kumari, who stays in a rented accommodation in Ranchi city and whose in-laws are based in Sati village that is part of the constituency, said, "Five years ago, my in-laws' village did not have roads and electricity, and some people did not have ration cards. I have seen change taking place in these last five years under this (Raghubar Das) government. I will definitely vote for his party."

2014 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

BJP's Ramtahal Choudhary	42.7%
Cong's Subodh Kant Sahay	23.7%
AJSU's Sudesh Kumar Mahto	13.5%

2009 LS POLLS VOTE SHARE

Cong's Subodh Kant Sahay	42.8%
BJP's Ramtahal Choudhary	41%

Omar: Head to polling booths to bring J&K back on track

NAVEED IQBAL

SRINAGAR, MAY 4

AS THE campaign for the last leg of Parliamentary polls for Jammu and Kashmir wound up on Saturday, NC leader and former CM Omar Abdullah urged party workers to "show some strength and head to polling booths to bring the state back on track" on Monday.

He was speaking in Pulwama, where around 250 party workers had assembled on the lawns of the National Conference (NC) office a day after the encounter in Shopian. The South Kashmir seat is voting in three phases.

Unlike Srinagar or Baramulla, party paraphernalia such as flags, banners and posters remained restricted within the compound of the party office. Outside the walls, a single hoarding outside the district administration's office reminding people to vote was the only sign of an ongoing election.

The fight will not be easy, the NC vice-president said, "The forces we are fighting are perturbed by the identity, position and special status of J&K. They are worried about Article 35A and 370 and are eager to amend the Constitution in order to fully integrate J&K with the rest of the country. We will fight this in court and in Parliament."

Reiterating his promise to repeal the Public Safety Act if voted to power, Abdullah said, "The Parliamentary polls are a semi-final. We were



Omar Abdullah at a rally in Pulwama on Saturday. *Shuaib Masoodi*

preparing for polls in June (Assembly polls) but owing to the central government and representatives in the state, that will not happen. Whenever elections take place, we will have to take some important decisions."

He added that cases against those booked for stone-pelting will be reviewed "to give the young people a fresh start. We don't want bloodshed here, whether it is a policeman or a militant, those losing their lives are our own people."

Appealing to party workers to vote, Abdullah said, "Don't sit at home like (PDP leader) Mehbooba Mufti's brother. He didn't vote for her, I don't know how she goes and asks others to vote."

Ghulam Hassan, a party worker, said, "I find it difficult to go to my area and ask people to vote. During Governor's rule, disenchantment has reached deeper."

BASHAARAT MASOOD

PULWAMA, MAY 4

THE ELECTION campaign across the country has revolved around Pulwama. Here, at ground zero, people are talking of anything but polls.

The only semblance that Pulwama, part of the Anantnag constituency from where former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti is contesting, will vote on May 6 are two buildings — a makeshift office of Mufti's Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the expansive district office of National Conference, both housed in a high-security zone of Pulwama town.

But beyond the flag-festooned lawns, there is little activity at the NC office. On Wednesday, ex-CM and NC vice-president Omar Abdullah's rally drew less than a couple of hundred people. The 24-odd polling agents at the PDP's makeshift office are going through electoral rolls to identify potential voters, but it's not looking too good for Mufti. In its unprecedented three-phase polling exercise, Anantnag in South Kashmir has so far registered less than 12% voting.

Now Pulwama, a militant hotbed, may see even lower turnout given the anger over the "crackdown" since the February 14 terror attack that left over 40 CRPF men dead. Sources admit dozens of arrests of local youths since the incident, the number al-



NC district chief Ghulam Mohidin Mir at the party office in Pulwama. *Shuaib Masoodi*

legedly going up to over 400 in the week leading up to voting day. While parties fear the arrests would further dampen turnout, police officials say they are picking up "potential troublemakers who have a history".

Pulwama and Shopian districts of Anantnag that vote Monday have an estimated 100-plus active militants. Around 120 additional companies of Central armed forces have been deployed for election day, and all its 450 polling stations declared critical.

Defending the arrests, a senior police officer, who refused to be identified, said these were no different than elsewhere in the coun-

try. "The poll environment has to be maintained. Everywhere in the country, it is mandatory to execute warrants before elections. You have to also keep a check on miscreants."

However, calling it "*zulm*", a 65-year-old retired government employee says, "The oppression has reached its limit. Sometimes, I feel, it is worse than 1990 (the height of militancy). Since the attack, there is no accountability... Our children are being beaten up without a reason, our houses are being raided, every day some youth is picked up and there is no one to question this."

PDP Youth President Waheed Parra, who

belongs to Naira village in Pulwama, says the arrests are undermining their efforts. "I had a meeting with youth. I was trying to motivate them to vote. We dispersed at 12.30 in the night. A few hours later, I got a call that many of the boys I met have been picked up by police and the Army. In such a situation, how can you inspire somebody to vote?"

As Parra talks, a woman from Parigam village drops in. "My son has been picked up by police," she says, tears welling up in her eyes. "Please do something for his release."

NC Pulwama district president Ghulam Mohidin Mir too apprehends polling percentage will be very low. "We are not able to organise rallies. Our election campaign is limited to door-to-door visits."

While the Pulwama local market is buzzing, with milling customers, street vendors hawking goods and traffic snarls, any talk of elections quickly brings forth that anger.

They know all about it — from the BJP's Kashmir-specific campaign to Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's finally taking the political plunge. But from far.

"We have moved away from the (election) discourse," says a college student in Sirmoo village. "For many years, we were fooled about bijli, sadak and paani... Not anymore. It is now a contest between their democracy and our sentiments. Their idea of democracy is in direct conflict with our sentiments."

8 DECISION 2019



BALLOTIN



‘Cong will pay price for inducting BSP’s Guna candidate’

Morena (Madhya Pradesh): BSP chief Mayawati Saturday said the Congress will pay a “heavy price” for inducting her party’s Guna Lok Sabha candidate in the Congress.

Last week, the BSP’s Guna candidate Lokendra Singh had joined the Congress while extending support to the party’s sitting parliamentarian Jyotiraditya Scindia.

“The Congress will have to pay a heavy price for this when time comes. Due to similar acts, we brought down the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government,” the BSP supremo said.

She said the Congress government in the state had misused official machinery to pressurise Singh to withdraw in favour of Scindia.

Addressing a rally here, the former Uttar Pradesh CM dubbed both the BJP and Congress as “casteist and capitalist” and said the BSP would never enter into an alliance with either of them. “You (BSP workers) should be ready that we will never contest elections in alliance with the BJP and Congress, both of which are casteist, capitalist parties,” she said.

BJP’s Kirron Kher gets EC notice over children in campaign

Chandigarh: The Election Commission has issued a notice to BJP’s Chandigarh candidate Kirron Kher, seeking a reply after she shared a video on Twitter in which children were seen campaigning for her.

“You have shared a video on your Twitter account which shows that children are being used for election campaign in your favour through slogan ‘Vote for Kirron Kher’ and ‘Ab Ki Baar Modi Sarkar,’” the notice issued on May 3 said.

However, in her reply, Kher said it was done “unintentionally”, acknowledging that it was “wrong”.

The EC had subsequently instructed that it should be ensured by all political parties and election officials that children are not involved in any election-related activity, as per the notice. **PTI**

Police hunt for BSP candidate facing rape charges

Lucknow: BSP candidate from Ghosi Lok Sabha seat in Mau, Atul Rai, who is facing a rape case lodged on May 1, has been absconding since the police obtained non-bailable warrant (NBW) against him and formed four teams to arrest him. The teams have been conducting raids in his home district Ghazipur, Ballia, Gorakhpur and Mau.

The rape case against Rai was filed on May 1 in Lanka police station area of Varanasi by a woman who alleged that he had been sexually harassing her since March last year when she had gone to Rai’s apartment in Varanasi’s Lanka locality. She also alleged that Rai had made a video of the act and threatened to circulate it on social media, the FIR said.

BSP’s Mau district president, Rajeev Kumar, claimed that Rai was not absconding and that he was campaigning in the constituency. He, however, declined to comment on the rape case against Rai. **ENS**

CAMPAIGNING WINDS UP FOR FIFTH PHASE



Amit Shah campaigns for BJP candidate Smriti Irani in Amethi; (right) Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra during a Mahila Workers’ Meeting in Amethi. **AP, PTI**



Shah’s ‘nationalism’ vs Rahul’s ‘ideology’

Don’t play with security, or you’ll burn your fingers: Shah

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 4

ACCUSING THE Congress of encouraging activities of the Students’ Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) in Madhya Pradesh, BJP president Amit Shah on Saturday warned the Kamal Nath government in Madhya Pradesh to not play with national security — “or else,” he said, “you will burn your fingers.”

Shah said the previous Shivraj Singh Chouhan government had busted the network of the banned group in Malwa region of the state, forcing SIMI cadres to run away.

“They are (now) in different jails — in Ahmedabad, Delhi, Bhopal. But this (Congress-led) government is encouraging SIMI to further its vote-bank politics,” Shah said at an election rally in Rewa, MP, before campaigning for the fifth phase wound up on Saturday evening.

Hitting back, Nath said his government is strong enough and the BJP should stop dreaming about bringing it down. “The people have brought them down in the state and it’s central government’s turn,” he tweeted without naming BJP.

Speaking at a rally later in the evening at Rohini in Delhi, in support of candidates from Northwest Delhi and Chandni Chowk, Hans Raj Hans and Harsh Vardhan, respectively, Shah said 2019 Lok Sabha election is being fought on the issue of national security. “In Pulwama, when there was a terrorist strike, there was anger and helplessness in the country. Pakistan feared that Modi-ji might do surgical strike again and placed tanks on borders. But

Narendra Modi ordered the Air Force (to strike) — they went inside Pakistan and destroyed (terror camps).”

In Rewa, speaking on the same theme earlier in the day, Shah alleged that the Congress-led UPA did not respond to infiltration of terrorists from Pakistan and when Indian soldiers were beheaded. After Balakot strike, as the “nation was celebrating, there was mourning in Pakistan and at the offices of Rahul Gandhi and Kamal Nath. The shine on their faces was gone. They thought their vote bank will get angry,” Shah maintained.

Reiterating that the government will remove Article 370 (which gives special privileges to Jammu and Kashmir), Shah said Kashmir is an inseparable part of India. “While we want to remove Article 370, the Congress wants to abolish sedition law to ensure that people who raise slogans such as ‘Bharat tere tukde honge’ are not sent to jail. The Narendra Modi government will send such sloganeers to jail,” the BJP leader asserted.

Shah claimed that he has repeatedly asked Rahul Gandhi to take a stand on former J&K chief minister Omar Abdullah’s remark on two Prime Ministers. But the Congress president, he said, is silent on the issue, as he thinks “his vote bank will get depleted”. Addressing a poll rally in Bandipora, north Kashmir, on April 1, Omar had said that J&K, unlike other states that joined India at the time of Independence, “got certain things inserted into the Constitution to maintain our special identity.... We had also kept for ourselves a sadra-riyasat and a Prime Minister, which they took away. God willing, we will bring those (posts) back.”

WITH INPUTS FROM ABHINAV RAJPUT IN DELHI

SAKSHI DAYAL
GURGAON, MAY 4

CALLING THE General Election a “fight of ideology”, Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not “recognise” or “understand” the strength of the city and its people.

He was addressing a political meeting in Gurgaon, the millennium city next-door to the national capital.

Rahul took a dig at Modi for purportedly stating that little development had taken place before he took over as the Prime Minister in May 2014. “Modji, who made Gurgaon?” he asked. “This Gurgaon was not made by Narendra Modi. This Gurgaon was made by the people, the labourers, farmers, the youth...and it has become famous in the whole world.”

But, Rahul asked, “What have you (Modi) done here? What have you given to Gurgaon?...Did you make the Metro (Rail)? Did you give the right prices to farmers?”

He said, “When Narendra Modi says that no one did anything before he came, he insults your father and mother, your grandfather and grandmother — he insults you, because one person does not make this country.. Gurgaon is an example of people of all castes and religions living with love and in brotherhood. Before the BJP (government came in), people stayed with love all over India. Wherever Narendra Modi goes, he spreads hate and lies.”

Congress candidate from, Gurgaon, Ajay Singh Yadav also made this point in his address: “The BJP is only interested in dividing votes, making Hindus and Muslims fight...”

BJP releases ‘chargesheet’ against Kamal Nath govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
BHOPAL, MAY 4

THE MADHYA Pradesh BJP unit on Saturday released an “*aarop patra* (chargesheet)” against the Kamal Nath-led government in the state. The “chargesheet”, a 12-page booklet, lists the “unfulfilled promises” of the Congress, which formed the government in the state in December last year.

The booklet was released at the BJP’s state party office by former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, party’s national vice presidents Vinay Sahasrabuddhe and Prabhat Jha.

Chouhan said, “The farm loan waiver scheme of Congress, on the basis of which it came to power, has been a complete failure.... Although the Congress government issued an order of loan waiver, the debts of not a single farmer have been written off.... Farmers across the state are setting on fire the copies of false certificates, while Congress leaders... claim that the government has waived loan of up to Rs 2 lakh as promised, which is actually false.” State Congress media cell chairperson Shobha Oza said, “BJP’s charges are baseless.”

BJP MLA in UP: Ban burqa, it encourages terrorism

AMIT SHARMA
MEERUT, MAY 4

CLAIMING THAT the burqa was “encouraging terrorism”, BJP MLA from Uttar Pradesh’s Sardhana, Sangeet Som, has demanded a ban on the veil worn by Muslim women. In a 1.28 minute video uploaded on his Facebook page, Som also alleged that the burqa was now being used to sound a death knell to democracy in India.

“*Loktantra ko khatam karne ke liye jis tarah burqa ki aad me farzi voting ki ja rahi hai usse Bharat jaise desh ko khatra hai* (The manner in which fake voting is being done in the guise of the burqa, is dangerous for a country like India),” Som says in the clip.

Without naming lyricist Javed Akhtar, who during a programme in Bhopal on May 2 had said that he sees nothing wrong in banning the burqa in India provided that a similar ban be imposed on the ‘ghunghat’, Som claimed such people seek communism in everything.

“*Kya kabhi ghunghat me aatankwad hua hai? Aap logon ko har cheez me sampradiyakta dikhti hai. Aisa kar ke aap tukde tukde gang ke*



Sardhana MLA Sangeet Som

saath khade hote dikhai deta hai aur unke liye prachar karte hai (Has there ever been any incident of terrorism in the garb of the ghunghat? You are seen siding with the tukde tukde gang and you campaign for them),” said the two-time BJP legislator.

“The burqa is encouraging terrorism in the country and it should immediately be banned,” Som alleged in the video.

Som was unreachable for comment despite attempts to contact him.

The State Election Commission has sought a report from Meerut District Magistrate Anil Dhingra on Som’s statement. “We have yet not got anything in writing from the SEC in this regard. We will send report once we get the directives,” said Dhingra.

Sadhus to campaign for Digvijaya: Computer Baba

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 4

HUNDREDS OF sadhus will troop to the Madhya Pradesh capital on May 7 to seek votes for Congress candidate for Bhopal seat Digvijaya Singh and campaign against BJP candidate Pragya Singh Thakur.

Making an announcement to this effect, Computer Baba aka Namdev Tyagi on Saturday said the former CM was a true Narmada Bhakt. “We are with those who undertook Narmada Parikrama and not those who were on jail yatra,” he said, referring to the 3300-sq km circumambulation of the Narmada by Singh and the years spent in jail by the BJP candidate.

Computer Baba said more than 7,000 sadhus from across India will camp in Bhopal for three days and undertake Hat Yog on May 7 followed by a road show. He said the sadhus belong to 13 akharas.

He told *The Indian Express* that he won’t call Pragya a sadhvi because she was accused of unlawful activities like blasts and murder. “She has no virtues of



Digvijaya Singh, Pragya Singh Thakur

a saint. Also, she made an indecent comment against martyr Hemant Karkare,” he said, adding that the BJP fielded her because former BJP CMs Uma Bharati and Shivraj Singh Chouhan refused to contest.

Computer Baba was bestowed Minister of State status by the Chouhan government after appointing him on a panel to clean the Narmada and plant saplings along the river. Before Assembly elections, he had resigned calling Chouhan irreligious. He has been named on a panel by the Kamal Nath government.

the state) but I think we’ll get majority of the seats.

Congress’ campaign around Rafale and NYAY doesn’t seem to have worked to the same extent as BJP’s mention of air strikes and the martyrdom of the armed forces. How much will it affect the prospects of Congress party?

People judge a government’s performance by its five-year term. I don’t think speeches in election time make that much of a difference because they try to create a hype and propaganda. And the Congress party is looking at the long term future of this country: to kick start the rural economy, the NYAY Yojana is going to be a game changer. So our manifesto and our five-year track record in the Opposition has been constructive. We’ve raised the issues of Rafale, dilution of the Land Acquisition Act, mob lynching, mob violence... people will judge us in these elec-

tions based on what we will do and judge BJP on what it has not done in the last five years.

In your speeches you’ve said that BJP leaders talk of Hindu-Muslim and Mandir-Masjid. Do you think divisiveness gets one more votes?

Well, it gets more headlines. Whatever speeches you’ve heard (by) Sadhvi Pragya, Yogi Adityanath, Bajrang Dal leader Vinay Katiyar, Sakshi Maharaj... all these people, I think, are not doing it without a design by the leadership. So what earlier used to be the so-called fringe element... now these people are ministers, MPs, Chief Ministers. And they’re making these statements with full knowledge of the BJP leadership and the government of India. So if these people are allowed to make divisive comments and get away with it, it tells you that BJP is clutching at straws. They’re now falling back on the tried and tested formula



EXPRESS

INTERVIEW

WITH
SACHIN PILOT
RAJASTHAN DEPUTY CHIEF
MINISTER; STATE
CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Where do you see the Congress in the state?

There’s been a robust polling in the first phase (of polling in Rajasthan). I think, traditionally, any government that comes to power in Rajasthan (Assembly) gets a majority of (Lok Sabha) seats (in the state). Having said that, we’ve gone the extra mile in the last three months and announced about 21 pro-people decisions. So this election will be decided on our government’s performance and we hope to reverse what happened in 2014. So I’m very confident and young people, farmers, they’ve all seen what BJP stands for. So I’m quite hopeful about getting very positive results. Our mission is (all) 25 (seats in



Sachin Pilot addresses a press conference in Jaipur on Saturday. Rohit Jain Paras

of dividing this country on religious lines, on caste lines, because they’ve to hide their incompetence of their five-year performance.

How do you view the Election Commission giving a clean chit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on various counts?

The thing is, (the EC) is a constitutional body. I don’t want to pass judgements on what the EC or anybody else does. But all I can say is that whatever the EC does or doesn’t do, the people of India are watching it. I just think that they should be unbiased, they should be transparent and there should be equity in terms of how the EC reprimands or

lets go of individuals making comments which are being complained about.

How has the Congress countered BJP’s rhetoric around national security and the Balakot air strikes?

There is nothing to counter. Most Indians are patriotic, they have great regard and love and respect for their motherland. And all of us view our national security as of prime importance. It cannot be made a national issue just because the BJP failed to deliver on jobs and agrarian crisis.

So, I keep saying this, the soldiers, the armed forces, the men in uniform are the pride and honour of this country. And their valour and their sacrifice is not a question of debate at all. So this question doesn’t arise: about having a narrative or not having a narrative. The real question is what the BJP manifesto says today. If you compare it to five years ago, they are the same promises: Article 370, (Ram) mandir, uniform civil code... People are going to ask that if you had a full majority government in Delhi, why did you fail on your promises...