



PM-KISAN: In UP last stretch, BJP finds some support among farmers

LALMANI VERMA

JAUNPUR, GHAZIPUR, PHULPUR & BALLIA, MAY 7

LAST MONTH, Raj Narayan Rajbhar, a resident of Saimalpur village in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur Lok Sabha constituency, had Rs 2,000 credited to his bank account under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN). "My relative has received the second instalment as well," he says. "I think the scheme will continue if the Narendra Modi government comes to power again," he adds. Ghazipur votes on May 19.

Launched in February after the BJP's defeat in three states in the Hindi heartland, the Prime Minister's ambitious scheme for farmers may help the party in its fight against the SP-BSP gathbandhan in Uttar Pradesh. In several districts in eastern UP which *The Indian Express* visited, and which go to polls in the last two phases, farmers who had received the first and second instalments of the PM-KISAN scheme favoured the BJP over other parties.

According to a March 7 statement by the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare, the first instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme (Rs 2,000) was released for about 1.01 crore farmers across the country, amounting to a total fund release of Rs 2,021 crore. In UP, 74 lakh farmers received the first instalment. In Tulsipur village, on the outskirts of Ghazipur Sadar, Jai Shankar Kushwaha says the money helped him purchase school books for his two children. "The academic session started in April and without the money I would have had to wait for the sale of my wheat crop to buy the books. The Rs 2,000 helped," says Kushwaha, who has received the first instalment.

In Bind Basti, in the Jaunpur Lok Sabha constituency that votes on May 12, residents are upset with sitting BJP MP K P Singh, and are looking at the SP-BSP candidate, Shyam Singh Yadav (BSP), as an alternative. "He (Singh) has crossed the adjoining highway



Many farmers in eastern Uttar Pradesh received the first and second instalments of the PM-KISAN scheme in April. Vishal Srivastav

EXPLAINED

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Will PM-KISAN placate farmers?

FARMERS' DISTRESS was one of the major reasons for the BJP's defeat in the Assembly polls in MP, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, and with the PM-KISAN scheme the Modi-led government hoped to remedy that. In UP, the scheme holds significance as farmers have been angry over the stray cattle menace. The Opposition has been raising the issue in its campaign too

several times in the past five years but has never visited the villages. Such attitude is not acceptable," says farmer Mevalal Bind.

However, he adds, despite the party fielding Singh again, he will still vote for the BJP. "I will vote for him (Singh) to make Narendra Modi the Prime Minister this time too. Because of him I have received Rs 4,000 in two instalments under the PM-KISAN scheme," says the 57-year-old, adding that he promptly withdrew the money. "Some of my neighbours said that if the government changes after elections, the money could get deducted."

In Jaunpur, the Bind belongs to the Nishad community, and the BJP's new alliance partner Sanjay Nishad (Nishad Party) has been campaigning for the party in the area.

In the Phulpur Lok Sabha constituency, 72 km away, where the BJP lost the bypoll to the SP-BSP alliance candidate last year, Mukesh Mishra admits that caste is a deciding factor while voting. However, he says, the PM-KISAN scheme could change that this time. "I voted for the SP's Kurmi candidate in

the 2014 elections. But on May 12, I will vote for the BJP. The PM-KISAN helped me purchase fertiliser for my crops," says the resident of Azad Nagar village.

In the Rajbhar-dominated Sipah village in the Ballia Lok Sabha constituency, Jagdish Rajbhar (37) says the scheme helped his family while he was away working as a labourer in Chennai. "Last month, my mother said a bank official told them about Rs 2,000 being deposited in their account. I returned last week and withdrew the money," says Rajbhar. "I am not a BJP supporter but I will vote for the party this time," he adds. Ballia polls on May 19.

In Sotipur village in the Macchlisahar Lok Sabha constituency, the verdict is not so clear. Rupendra Patel (53), a beneficiary of the PM-KISAN scheme says that while he voted for the BSP in 2014, the choice this time is between the Congress and BJP. "The BJP has given money to farmers while the Congress has promised Rs 72,000 under the NYAY scheme. I have not made up my mind yet," he says.

Not just Facebook or Twitter, regional parties join digital campaign with vernacular ShareChat

KARISHMA MEHROTRA

NEW DELHI, MAY 7

WHILE NATIONAL political parties continue to strategise on Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram, this Lok Sabha election has seen regional parties make digital inroads with a vernacular medium — ShareChat, where English is not even an option and Hindi doesn't fare in the top languages for political handles.

Aggregate numbers from March 10 to date on the platform show that parties such as Pawan Kalyan's JanaSena Party, the CPI(M) of Kerala, YSRCP of Jaganmohan Reddy, Telangana Rashtra Samithi and Biju Janata Dal overwhelmingly outshone the national BJP and Indian Youth Congress (IYC) handles. In addition, of the 14 available languages, Hindi is surpassed by Gujarati, Telugu, Malayalam and Bengali for the most viewed political handles.

The platform, much like a non-English, Indian version of Instagram, was launched in October 2015 by a Bengaluru-based start-up. It has since amassed over 100 million downloads, with 45 million monthly active users, the majority of whom are under 30, according to the company. Since last year, the start-up has made considerable effort in engaging with parties and politicians on the platform, expanding their public policy team and adding more than 400 official political handles.

Of these handles, among the ones that

have been consistently attracting the most views, likes, shares, favourites and comments are those of BJP Gujarat (with 30 million views for their posts since March 10), JanaSena Party (27 million), CPI(M) Kerala (25 million), YS Jaganmohan Reddy (23 million), YSRCP (22 million), and BJP West Bengal (21 million).

A state-wise breakup of the handles shows BJP's former Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan is the most popular with 19 million views, followed by TRS (18 million), BJD in Odisha (18 million), BJP's Rajyavardhan Rathore (13 million) and BJP's Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis (10 million).

"We were getting a million views per post and 4 lakh per video. That's when we realised the potential of ShareChat to reach out to rural audience," said Vinod Varma, who began the JanaSena party's account in November 2018. His team began publishing 30-second videos that supporters could upload as their WhatsApp status, including one of Pawan Kalyan sitting cross-legged and eating curd rice on a dirty path — that video received 1.3 million views.

The IT cell members of most of the top handles told *The Indian Express* that one of the main benefits of the platform was the ease with which they could forward to WhatsApp, and that most of them had found out about the platform through the messaging app.

Brahma Nanda, a member of the on-hire political consultancy company Indian



A ShareChat video by the JanaSena shows Pawan Kalyan eating curd rice

Political Action Committee (IPAC), that works with YSRCP, even created an "influencer network" of roughly 80 YSRCP-supporting accounts that agreed to distribute the party's content. Starting June last year, he created a WhatsApp group of these influencers, who had roughly 3,000 followers each, and sent them content through WhatsApp, which was then put up on ShareChat daily.

"On ShareChat, one has to create content that is very local — pop and movie cultures, local proverbs and memes. And as there is no option of promoting content or paid advertisement, everything is organic. The only

thing that matters is the quality of the content," he said.

Brahma's favourite content are memes referring to last year's Kannada blockbuster KGF. One, in Telugu, reads, "Gang to waste gangster" (Gangsters come with a gang) underneath images of PM Narendra Modi, Rahul Gandhi, Pawan Kalyan, Chandrababu Naidu, IPS officer JD Lakshminarayana, Andhra Pradesh Minister Nara Lokesh, and television channel director Vemuri Radhakrishna. Then the meme states, "Kani okkade vasthadu" (But he comes alone)," underneath a photo of Jaganmohan Reddy.

With the potential for messages on the platform to go viral comes the persistent issues of hate speech, spam and misinformation. Observing the voluntary code of ethics recently laid down by the Election Commission and social media firms, ShareChat took down almost half a million posts (13,000 from the news and politics section) and 55,000 accounts.

ShareChat's public policy head Berges Malu, however, said the platform still gives "opinion leaders the unique ability to reach audiences across tier-2 and tier-3 cities and towns".

"Instagram is mainly for urban youth. But when I was travelling in Bishnupur and Purulia, I found that the youth were on ShareChat," said Ujjwal Pareek of the BJP's West Bengal IT cell, adding, "We are one of the states that is not in the Hindi belt. On ShareChat, we get the accent of our language. That flavour of Bengali."

'I challenge Bengal BJP president to win his seat first...They are only making tall claims'

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA & SANTANU CHOWDHURY

What do you make of the BJP's allegation that the TMC has been indulging in appeasement politics and doing little for Hindus?

The BJP is the most anti-Bengali Hindu party in the country. Around 28,000 Durga pujas are held in West Bengal... When the Bengal government wants to give Rs 10,000 to each of the clubs organising these pujas, what does the BJP do? They take the West Bengal government to court. Of the 28,000, forty of the biggest Durga puja clubs were sent Enforcement Directorate notices. They were also sent IT notices. They were all harassed. Why did the BJP not appreciate the state government's effort to organise the Visarjan Carnival on Red Road? Twenty-two lakh Bengali Hindus are going to be affected by the National Register of Citizens which the TMC has opposed tooth and nail in the Standing Committee and Parliament. I challenge the BJP to put out the records of the Standing Committee. If you see those records, you will understand how anti-Bengali Hindu these people are. The Mamata Banerjee government can have the Visarjan Carnival on Red Road, the Eid prayers on Red Road and, a few months later, have the Christmas carnival on Park Street. We understand the Hinduism of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, but we do not understand the Hinduism of the terrible twins. If appeasement means working for all religions, then yes, we appease all people.

What are some of the issues that the TMC is focusing on?

We have asked the Prime Minister for a one-hour debate with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. He can choose any spot but he should not have a teleprompter before him. We will discuss six issues — jobs, the poor performance of the economy and agriculture, the demonetisation disaster, the Goods and Services Tax, and the idea of India. This election is not about party 'A' or 'B' winning. This is an election to define the idea of India.

But India-Pakistan relations and national security have dislodged most of these issues in the campaign.

This India-Pakistan hyphenation is sad. This is what they have brought our international policy to. Ten years ago or even seven years ago India and Pakistan were not discussed in the same breath. We are trying to remove this India-Pakistan hyphenation. We are not at Pakistan's level; we discuss India with China. Bringing in this hyphenation is the failure of Narendra Modi's foreign policy. It shows the desperation of the Modi government.

PM Modi has accused the West Bengal Chief Minister of being a "speed-breaker" in the way of the state's development. Your response?

I agree with him. For once he has said the correct thing because Mamata Banerjee is the biggest speed-breaker between Modi becoming Prime Minister and not becoming Prime Minister.

Several incidents of political violence have been reported in West Bengal in these elections, and the Opposition has accused the TMC of perpetrating it.

Has even one election been countermanded in Bengal? Who is running Tripura? You have two seats in Tripura and you cannot have an election in the second seat. (The



'If appeasement means working for all religions, then yes, we appease all people.' Ravik Bhattacharya

Election Commission had postponed voting in the Tripura [East] Lok Sabha seat from the second phase on April 18 to the third phase on April 23 citing law and order issues).

They are talking about violence in Bengal. Unfortunately, Bengal has a history of poll violence. In a parliamentary constituency with 2,000-plus booths, if there are incidents in four booths... even the Election Commission will throw (such a complaint) out. If the BJP cannot put a poll agent at a booth in West Bengal then what can we do?

The BJP has said that it will win 23 seats in West Bengal. How do you see their assessment?

Forget about the number. Will the BJP's state president win the election here? I challenge the state president to win his seat first. They have got two ministers from the state. Will both those ministers win their seats? They are only making tall claims.

How does the TMC see the Election Commission's role in the elections so far?

We respect the Election Commission as an institution but people are watching. I have heard that in six of the complaints against Modi-Shah, the EC had a split verdict of 2-1. We have criticised the EC, we will give them our complaints, but we respect it as an institution. We will maintain it.

What is the TMC's equation with the Congress?

The Congress, BJP and CPM are together fighting the TMC in Bengal. They have made adjustments. I have audio and video tapes where CPM leaders are saying don't vote for us if you are angry with us, vote for the BJP instead. This is here in Bengal. Once we take a two-hour flight to Delhi, we will all work together. It is not an issue of working with the Congress. It is a federal engine that will drive this. We will have a common agenda and there is enough leadership in this federal set-up. This is a collective leadership and coalitions have worked very well in India in the past.

The PM recently said that about 40 TMC MLAs were in touch with him and would defect to the BJP after May 23.

They have taken two of our expelled MPs and one sitting MLA. They are making loose statements.

SEAT WATCH GUNA, VOTING ON MAY 12

Scindia's wife seeks votes for 'Maharaj', BJP bets on local face, Modi's name

MILIND GHATWAI

GUNA, MAY 7

REPRESENTED BY Jyotiraditya Scindia since 2002, Guna was one of the two seats in Madhya Pradesh that the Congress retained in the 2014 general elections, though with a much reduced margin.

Taking on the former Union minister this time is the BJP's K P Yadav, who lost in the recent state elections from Mungaoli, one of the eight Assembly segments that make up the Guna-Shivpuri parliamentary constituency. Before Jyotiraditya, the Guna seat, which goes to polls on May 12, was represented by his father Madhav Rao Scindia and grandmother Vijaya Rajee Scindia.

Yadav, 43, was Jyotiraditya's aide till January 2018, but fell out with the Congress after he was denied a ticket in the Assembly bypoll for Mungaoli, and joined the BJP. In last year's Assembly elections, the BJP fielded him from the same constituency but he lost by a narrow margin of around 2,000 votes.

After a long time, the BJP has fielded a local candidate from the seat, with most of Scindia's previous challengers living outside the

Guna. In 2014, Scindia defeated former Bajarang Dal chief Jaibhan Singh Pavaiyya, a resident of Gwalior, and in 2009 Narottam Mishra, a resident of Datia. Yadav is a resident of Rusalla village in Ashoknagar district in Guna.

"The previous candidates were not local but they were MLAs elsewhere. They were eyeing minister's post in the state government and so did not contest the general election seriously. A win would have taken them away to Delhi," says BJP leader Gajendra Sikarwar, explaining why the party lost Guna despite a Narendra Modi wave. But, he says, "Everybody is putting in their best now."

With Scindia being appointed the Congress's general secretary in charge for western UP, the campaigning in Guna has been largely

left to his wife Priyadarshini Rajee. When the BJP announced Yadav's candidature, she took a dig at him saying, "Those who were taking selfies with Maharaj till recently are now going to challenge him." Rajee has been campaigning in the constituency's remote areas, occasionally even having lunch in fields.

"Maharaj toils to provide you amenities and spends most of his time working for you. Did anyone of you go to Mandsaur? He went to Mandsaur (where during the farmers' stir five protesters died in firing and one in police custody in June 2017)," she tells villagers. In some pockets, she also complains about some voters not backing the 'Maharaj' in the last polls.

Her style is similar to her 48-year-old husband's, who in his interactions with traders, doctors and lawyers earlier was seen publicly complaining about their lack of support to the Congress with thumbs down gestures.

In his campaign speeches, Scindia rarely targets his BJP rival, taking on PM Narendra Modi and former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Scindia has been campaigning in the constituency even before his name was officially announced, and the party believes he will sweep the polls this time as well.

The BJP, however, is trying to put up a



Jyotiraditya Scindia with wife Priyadarshini Rajee after filing his nomination. Express

fight. Chouhan, who campaigned near Kolaras on Monday, said, "The Maharaja has been given responsibility of western UP but he has not been able to leave Guna," adding, "Not

just him, his entire family is campaigning for him. Had he worked for five years he would have been spared the trouble of seeking votes in every lane and bylane," he said.

BJP candidate Yadav too asserted that Scindia is in "trouble". "He is hatching conspiracies to defeat me. Why else would so many ministers camp in the constituency for several weeks," he said.

But recent developments seem to be in the Congress's favour. Recently, K.L. Agrawal, who was a minister in the Shivraj Singh Chouhan government, openly backed Scindia. After being denied a ticket in last year's Assembly elections, Agrawal contested as an Independent from Bamori seat and got more than 27,000 votes. Also, the BSP candidate from Guna, Lokendra Singh Rajput, joined the Congress declaring support for Scindia. BSP chief Mayawati accused the Congress government of misusing official machinery to force Rajput to defect.

But the BJP believes that even though Yadav's name was announced late, the party's campaign in the Prime Minister's name since February will ensure a win. "Candidate is not important, the lotus (party symbol) and Modi are," is what local leaders are believed to have told cadres. However, going by the sparse crowd at Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh's recent rally for Yadav, that did not help.

7 DECISION 2019



In Bina, dirty water, wait for jobs — and Hindutva on ground

TABASSUM BARNAGARWALA
BINA (MP), MAY 7

ABOUT 160 km from Bhopal, Bina mushroomed on the industrial map with the Bharat Oman Refineries Ltd in 2011. A barbed-wire wall away, Guddi Bai Banjara (35) glances at the glass-and-steel facade from her hut in Agasode village, points to the reddish water in the local borewell. "They took away our land, our source of income, and left us here to die," she fumes.

Seven kilometres away, Bhakrai village awaits a water tanker every afternoon. The local well water has turned oily.

Central government data shows the refinery acquired land from 12 villages in Bina. Residents there say prices have escalated since then. In 2016, the 'International Journal of Environmental Sciences' published the results of a geochemical study in Agasode, which found that chemicals linked to crude oil were contaminating the soil and water. And yet, all of this has never been a poll issue in Bina — not in 2014, not now. In Elections 2019, the talk here is all about "Hindutva" and nationalism.

'Only BJP can secure this nation'

Bina is part of the Sagar Lok Sabha constituency, the strongest Bundelkhand seat for the BJP that managed to sweep seven of eight assembly segments despite a Congress win during the state elections late last year.

In town, Chandan Ahirwar's paan stall bears no BJP flags. But from 8 am till 10.30 pm, the RSS worker tells customers about the Balakot attack, the return of IAF pilot Abhinandan Varthaman, and the surgical strike of 2016. "I joined the RSS for yoga, but I started believing in their ideology," he says. There are several RSS workers who campaign in Bina as they go about their daily jobs, says Ahirwar.

On May 12, polling will decide what has largely been a two-cornered contest between Congress' senior minister Prabhuraj Singh Thakur and BJP's municipal corpora-



Cong's Prabhuraj Singh Thakur in Bina. *Tabassum Barnagarwala*

tor Raj Bahadur. It's a close fight with Bahadur facing rebels within party ranks over his candidature and Thakur banking on the recent assembly win. In 2014, BJP won by over 1.2 lakh votes.

"The Congress is trying hard to make inroads. Hostility against us has reduced," says Congress youth worker Narendra Yadav. Every shop in Bina that has a BJP flag, now has another shop where Congress is able to prop its own.

But even as Congress workers discuss local development, the Nyay scheme for the poor, and how their UPA government brought a thermal plant and oil refinery to the town, the voters are more keen to discuss national security and Hindutva.

When India struck in Pakistan's Balakot in February, about 1,500 km away in Dehri village, farmer Santosh Thakur says he was glued to television for two days. "Has any



other Indian Prime Minister had such guts. What did India do to Pakistan after the 2008 Mumbai attacks?" he asks.

Thakur is part of a group sitting outside a temple nearby. "Only BJP can secure this nation, build a Ram mandir," he says. "Bina never saw progress, nor will it see. But it is time we vote for national security," says Raghuraj Singh, Thakur's neighbour.

As more residents gather, the two talk of Pragy Singh Thakur, BJP candidate from Bhopal and an accused in the Malegaon blast case. "The

BJP would have never given her a ticket if she did not get a clean chit," Singh says. "A woman cannot be part of terrorism."

Given the mood on the ground, the Congress attempts to find relevance by questioning why the BJP did not build the Ram temple during its term. The BJP hits back by questioning the 10-day promise of farm loan

waivers in Madhya Pradesh.

A short walk away, at the town square, is the tea stall of Santosh Verma. "I voted for the Congress in the assembly election. But in the Centre, there is no alternative to Modi," he says. "People at the stall discuss the Kashmir issue, and how Modi is the only man who can resolve it. I want Modi in the Centre, even if I have to vote for Bahadur I'll do that," he says.

Bina has been demanding a separate district, but residents claim both BJP and Congress failed to deliver. In nearby Muroriya village, road construction work has been underway since a year. Farmer Ram Kumar, who commutes every day, is angry over the delay. But he says BJP, which held three terms in MP, cannot be blamed. "I need to think beyond myself. We need BJP. If Congress comes to power, our nation will be left unprotected," he says.

Refinery a 'local problem'

As for the refinery, campaigners admit it remains "a local problem". "It hasn't reduced unemployment, but that is not a poll issue," says Vasu Yadav, Congress youth president.

In the 22 villages on the refinery's periphery, many residents say they moved out to pursue higher education believing they would get hired there. "When the refinery acquired our two-acre land, the government promised us jobs," says Sachin Thakur, showing documents of his farm land in Bhakrai.

Thakur says he pursued mechanical engineering, then MBA. "I studied to work in the refinery. Since six months, I am waiting to be hired," he says.

East of the refinery, in Dehri village, farmer Raghuraj Singh makes another point. "A shave earlier cost Rs 5, now it is Rs 20." The influx of white-collar jobs in Bina lifted the prices of daily utilities, rent and land, he says. Singh also fumes over a 2009 Collector's order that declared a "no development zone" within 5 km of the refinery. "Many villages are unable to avail the PM Awas Yojana to construct pucca houses because of this," he says.

Congress candidate Thakur, meanwhile, promises more jobs, but does not elaborate on how he will ensure that. BJP's Bahadur has only one poll pitch: "Vote for Modi".

Critiqued over loan waiver, Cong sends 'proof' to Chouhan home

MILIND GHATWAI
BHOPAL, MAY 7

AFTER TWO rounds of polling in Madhya Pradesh, farm loan waiver has again taken centre stage in Madhya Pradesh, with the Congress government insisting that more than 21 lakh farmers have benefited from it and the BJP accusing the administration of cooking up figures.

On Tuesday, senior Congress leader Suresh Pachouri visited the home of former Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan with a vehicle-load of documents containing names of beneficiaries in different districts.

Over the last few weeks, Chouhan has dared Congress president Rahul Gandhi to sack Chief Minister Kamal Nath for failing to keep his promise of loan waiver. At each rally, Chouhan would raise the issue and asks the audience whether anyone has benefited from the scheme, indicating Rahul's promise at rallies before last year's Assembly elections that he would sack the chief minister within 10 days if farm loans were not waived.

On Tuesday, Congress leaders claimed to have sent proof of loan waivers to Chouhan's residence and said that some members of the BJP leader's extended family in his own village and home district have also benefited from the scheme, which promises to waive crop loans up to Rs 2 lakh. The party claims benefits had been passed on to more than 21 lakh farmers before the model code of conduct kicked in.

On Tuesday, the Election Commission permitted the government to extend benefits to farmers in 13 constituencies where voting has already taken place. The BJP had



Congress's Suresh Pachouri and other leaders display a list of names of farmers outside the residence of former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Bhopal. *PTI*

accused the government of using the model code as an excuse to stop the scheme because it does not have funds.

Chouhan, meanwhile, continued to raise the issue in rallies at many places in Bhind, Morena, Datia and Gwalior, among the constituencies that will go to the polls on May 12. "I don't know how farmers will benefit by handing over documents to me. They (government) should give money to banks," he said.

He claimed that the government has given only Rs 1,300 crore to banks against the total loan amount of Rs 48,000 crore. Chouhan also alleged that banks have started serving notices on farmers for default.

Chief Minister Nath told the media that the list of beneficiaries has already been uploaded on the Agriculture Department's

website and accused the BJP of spreading lies and misinformation. He said he had issued the administrative order within a couple of hours of taking oath of office on December 17 last year.

"After running the government for so long, the former chief minister (Chouhan) should have known that loan is waived after following certain procedures, which is time-consuming," Nath said. He said he had told scheduled banks that if they can waive loans of industrialists but not of farmers they should close their branches in rural areas.

Nath said after this scheduled banks agreed to waive 50 per cent amount as part of a one-time settlement. He said the government will recapitalise cooperative banks in proportion to their loan amounts.

Digvijaya campaign gets Computer Baba push

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BHOPAL, MAY 7

HUNDREDS OF saints from across Madhya Pradesh arrived in Bhopal to seek votes for Congress candidate for the Bhopal Lok Sabha seat, Digvijaya Singh, and to campaign against BJP's candidate, Pragya Singh Thakur.

Led by Computer Baba, the saints gathered at the Saifia College grounds and prayed for the victory of Singh, who was present at the grounds with his wife Amrita Singh.

Computer Baba, who enjoyed a minister of state status in the previous BJP government, accused former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan of doing little for the Narmada, and alleged that his family members were involved in illegal sand mining and transport.

"Ram Mandir nahi to Modi nahi," Computer Baba said, accusing the Narendra Modi government of failing to build a grand temple at Ayodhya. He said Singh is a Hindu but the BJP was questioning his religious credentials for political reasons, and called Singh a "Sanatani Hindu who respects all religions".



Computer Baba performs a puja for Congress's Bhopal Lok Sabha candidate Digvijaya Singh on Tuesday. *PTI*

Meanwhile, the BJP approached the Election Commission, alleging that Singh "brought" 1,500 saints to Bhopal and paid each of them a minimum of Rs 11,111, while those in-charge of mutts were paid Rs 1 lakh each in *dakshina*. A BJP delegation said Computer

Baba has accepted in media interviews that he and others have been invited to campaign for Singh. The BJP demanded that a complaint be registered against Computer Baba and Singh for carrying out an event for which permission was not taken from the EC.

In battleground UP, BJP banks on 48-hr booth management

Last-mile connectivity in two-day silence period to convert 'goodwill' for PM into votes is key: Leaders

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, MAY 7

IN A tight contest being fought inch by inch, the BJP is banking on its booth management capabilities to repeat its 2014 performance in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Fourteen and 13 seats in eastern UP go to the polls in the last two phases on May 12 and 19, respectively, and the BJP, along with ally Apna Dal, had won nearly all of them.

While admitting that the BSP-SP-RLD alliance has given it a "real fight" and posed a "big challenge" in the state, top BJP leaders said the party's "48-hour booth management", which gives last-mile connectivity to convert the "goodwill" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi into votes will be the crucial factor in the final phases.

The party looks at 48-hour booth management as a process in which party workers focus on polling during the two days between end of campaigning and the D-day.

As part of the programme, each party worker will be handed over a sheet of paper — called "parivar parchi" — with names of the head of families in his or her area, and the worker has to contact the families to remind them about voting on polling day. As part of this, the party worker will call up these people and also touch base with them on social media.

According to assessment of the BJP's top leadership, 60 per cent of ground support in the state lies with Modi and the party, and what would eventually matter would be "how to bring voters to the booth" to convert this support into votes.

A senior BJP leader said the leadership feels that in a scenario where the victory margins could be low, the party's organisational strength in converting ground support to votes matters the most.

The tightly contested election in UP has brought to the fore what this leader called is the "new" BJP. "This is not the BJP of Atal Bihari Vajpayee or LK Advani. Both Modi and Amit Shah have a very different approach to

elections — they fight every battle like a war; they do not spare anything and don't give up until the last moment," the leader, who has been active with electioneering in at least three states, said. "Both leaders have brought in a new attitude to BJP, and the new atmosphere is only to see success — every inch is going to be fought over."

A team of top party leaders, including Shah, monitors the situation in UP on an everyday basis, the leader said. "When the election campaign began, the party had started (by looking at certain victories) on 30 seats, as we were aware of challenges posed by the (SP-BSP) alliance. But things are improving every day. In the last assessment, the BJP will easily cross the 50-seat mark in UP," this leader claimed.

With strategies prepared for every constituency individually, the cards are played accordingly — be it caste equation, nationalism, or communal polarisation.

BJP leaders acknowledged that the SP and the BSP have been successful in backing each other and transferring votes to the other's candidates. "But booth-level management of the BJP is super-human. No other party does that level of booth management," one party leader said.

The booth committees, the sector committees and the mandal units, active on ground for months, are trying to ensure that every possible voter is listed, voter slips are distributed, and the party's message reaches as many voter as is possible, leaders said. "But the last-mile connectivity has become very important in UP now. We are ensuring man-to-man marking," a party leader who is working in the state said.

Exuding confidence about the results, the senior party leader attributed BJP's optimism to Hindu mythology. "In Hindu mythology, whoever does hard work is rewarded, irrespective of his or her character, deeds or background. Hindu Gods will provide the most dangerous weapons to even demons if he does *tapasya* and prayers. So the question is who works more intensely," the leader said.

Rahul in West Bengal: NYAY to act as surgical strike against poverty

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 7

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said his party's proposed minimum income guarantee scheme NYAY will act like a surgical strike against poverty in the country.

"We will implement NYAY scheme, which will help eliminate poverty from the country. The scheme will act as a surgical strike against poverty. Five crore poor families of the country will get Rs 72,000 annually through this scheme. Each family will get Rs 3.6 lakh in five years. This is our promise. We don't make false promises like the *chowkidar*, who failed to put Rs 15 lakh into the bank accounts of the people," Rahul said while addressing a public meeting at Kotshila in West Bengal's Purulia district.

He once again reiterated that only the Congress will be able to defeat the BJP in the country.

"Who has been fighting against BJP in the country? Who has defeated BJP in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh? Only the Congress has the potential to defeat the BJP-led government, headed by Narendra Modi, neither the Trinamool Congress nor any



Rahul Gandhi at a rally in Chaibasa, Jharkhand, on Tuesday. *PTI*

other party," he said.

The Congress president also accused the PM of being a *chowkidar* to those who have looted money. "Modi is the *chowkidar* of elites such as industrialists Anil Ambani, Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi and Vijay Mallya, and not of the common people in the country. Most of them have committed crimes, looted public money and left the country. When demonetisation happened did you see anyone of them standing in queues outside banks? It was the common people who had to face the consequences of demonetisation," he said.

Rahul also slammed Modi for spreading hatred across the country. "Wherever he (Modi) goes, he spreads hatred and vitiates the atmosphere. He divides the people along religious lines. But we don't hate anyone. We want to spread the message of love and we will defeat Modi with love," he said.

POST-POLL VIOLENCE IN BENGAL

BJP claims state party chief's convoy attacked by TMC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 5

A DAY after Phase 5 of Lok Sabha elections, the West Bengal unit of the BJP claimed that the convoy of its state president Dilip Ghosh was attacked at Khejuri in West Midnapore on Tuesday evening.

Himanta Biswa Sarma, a senior Assam minister who was also part of the convoy, tweeted videos and photos of the damaged cars. "TMC goons have blocked the roads on both sides, even as West Bengal Police personnel standing like mute spectator," he wrote.

BJP workers said two cars and 27 motorbikes were damaged and three BJP workers went missing. "A few cars have been damaged but the reason behind the clash is not clear," police said.

Incidents of violence were reported from

other parts of the state as well. In Sreerampore Lok Sabha constituency, a person, identified as Md Akbar, received bullet injury after being shot at on his leg by another person in Jhaubagan Monday night, police said. The accused is yet to be traced.

"We are examining the case. It's too early to say whether it is related to polls or personal," said an officer.

A five-year-old-boy sustained splinter injuries after a bomb exploded in Duttapukur's Babbur under Barasat police station area Monday night. No one has been arrested in connection with the incident.

On Monday, as soon as the polling got over, police got information on a bomb being found in Shiuli Telinipara in Titagrah. The crude bombs were recovered from the premises of a school and an investigation is on, police said. "We are investigating the CCTV footage. A case has been filed," they said.