

Confident of winning 11 of the 13 UP council seats going to polls: BJP

LUCKNOW, APRIL 15—/With filing of nominations for Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council elections coming to a close tomorrow, the ruling BJP today sounded confident of bagging 11 out of 13 seats going to polls on April 26, even as the saffron party released its list of candidates for the biennial elections. In a statement issued by the party's central office in Delhi, the BJP announced 10 candidates for the state council polls. The BJP candidates include UP ministers Mahendra Singh and Mohsin Raza. The party also named Sarojini Agarwal, Bukkal Nawab, Yashwant Singh, Jaiveer Singh, Vidya Sagar Sonkar, Vijay Bahadur Pathak, Ashok Kataria and Ashok

Dhawan as its other candidates. Ashok Kataria, Vidya Sagar Sonkar and Vijay Bahadur Pathak are general secretaries of the UP BJP, while Ashok Dhawan hail from Varanasi and is a former MLC. A senior party leader requesting anonymity said that the 11th seat is likely to be used to accommodate Ashish Singh Patel, who is a senior leader of the Apna Dal (Sonehal). The AD(S) is an ally of the BJP in the state and currently has nine MLAs in the Assembly. The BJP and its allies enjoy a brute strength of 324 out of the 402 seats in the Assembly. Arithmetically, they are likely to win 11 out of 13 seats comfortably and still be left with some additional votes.

Though the BJP and its allies have the majority in the Assembly, they may not get the required strength in the Upper House to get Bills passed even after winning 11 of the 13 seats by the dint of their strength. Even if they win the 11 seats, they will be far short of the half-way mark in the council. During the Winter Session of the state legislature last year, the state government had suffered an embarrassment when it failed to ensure the passage of the Uttar Pradesh Control of Organised Crime (UPCOC) Bill in the council. On the council elections, UP BJP vice president J P S Rathore said to ensure victory a candidate needs 29 first preference votes. The

notification for the council polls was issued on April 9. The last date for filing nominations is April 16. Scrutiny of nominations will be done on April 17, while the last date for withdrawal of the candidature is April 19. "We are sure of winning 11 out of the 13 seats in the council seats which are going to polls," state BJP spokesperson Navin Srivastava told PTI. For the remaining two seats, the Samajwadi Party has given up one seat for the Bahujan Samaj Party, taking the new-found bonhomie between the two parties a step forward. The SP, headed by Akhilesh Yadav, had fielded two candidates, but withdrew one of them, paving the way for Mayawati's party to contest one

seat as a quid pro quo for her support to the SP in the Lok Sabha polls to Gorakhpur and Phulpur Lok Sabha seats, which halted the saffron party's victory march in the bastion of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath (in Gorakhpur). In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had won the Phulpur parliamentary constituency for the first time. However, in the Rajya Sabha elections, it was a sweet revenge for the BJP, as it ensured victory of all its nine candidates, days after it lost two crucial seats in the Lok Sabha bypolls in the state. In the 100-member UP Legislative Council, the BJP has just 13 members. The Samajwadi Party has 61

members, the BSP nine, the Congress two, the RLD one and others 12. Two seats are vacant. SP spokesperson and MLC Sunil Singh Sajjan said the SP-BSP combine will comfortably win the two council seats. "The Samajwadi Party is contesting on one seat in the legislative council polls. Initially, we had decided to contest two seats, but later we decided to give one seat to the BSP to strengthen our electoral understanding," he said. According to the Election Commission, tenures of 13 MLCs, including SP national president Akhilesh Yadav, and two ministers in the Yogi Adityanath government - Mahendra Kumar Singh and Mohsin Raza - will end on May

5. Of the 13 seats falling vacant, seven were held by the SP, two each by the BJP and the BSP, and one by the RLD. The 13th seat was held by former SP minister Ravika Chaudhary. His seat fell vacant when he switched over from the SP to the BSP. Apart from the SP chief, six other MLCs from the party whose terms are coming to an end are state SP chief Naresh Chandra Uttam, senior party spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary, Umar Ali Khan, Madhu Gupta, Ramsakal Gurjar and Vijay Yadav. MLCs from other parties whose terms end on May 5 are Vijay Pratap and Sunil Kumar Chittu (both BSP) and Chaudhary Mushtaq - the lone RLD member. (PTI)

BJP,YSR Cong hit out at Naidu over proposed fast

AMARAVATI, APRIL 15—/The BJP and the YSR Congress today criticised Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's decision to observe a day-long fast on April 20, the Centre's stand towards the state's issues. In separate press conferences here, BJP State president Kamatoopati Haribabu and YSR political affairs committee member Ambati Rambabu wondered why the Chief Minister was seeking to go on the protest when he himself took exception to the fast observed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 12. Naidu had yesterday announced that he would observe a day-long fast on April 20, his birthday, on the state's problems and the Centre's stand towards the state. "The Prime Minister observed the fast while carrying out his duties. He visited Chennai to inaugurate the defence exposition) Naidu criticised this, but now he himself is getting ready for a fast. He owes an explanation to the people on this," Haribabu, a BJP MP, said. Modi and BJP MPs had observed the fast to protest against the disruption of Parliament proceedings by opposition parties during the recent budget session. Haribabu also took strong exception to the Chief Minister's criticism of the Prime Minister at an event in Singapore. "It is highly objectionable that a Chief Minister, while on foreign soil, choose to criticise his country's Prime Minister. We strongly condemn this," Haribabu said, referring to Naidu's remarks during the Mint Asia HT Leadership Summit in Singapore on April 13. "The YSR said Naidu's proposed fast was against the hoodwink the people. 'Naidu doesn't have any sincerity on the special category status issue.



Students display placards as they protest over government's alleged 'inaction' in Kathua and Unnao rape cases, in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

75 pc of those who skipped UP board exams were outsiders: Dy CM

LUCKNOW, APRIL 15—/About 75 per cent of the nearly 11 lakh students who skipped this year's Uttar Pradesh board examinations were from neighbouring states, and some of them were even from foreign countries like Nepal and Bangladesh, state's Deputy Chief Minister Dinesh Sharma has said. The startling fact came to the fore when details of those who skipped the examinations were analysed by the education department, Sharma, who also holds the education portfolio, told PTI in an interview. The state board exams were in news earlier this year as a large number of students did not turn up due to 'strictness' and effective use of a special task force and local intelligence by the government to keep a tab on the cheating mafia. "We have come to know that about 75 per cent of those who

skipped the examinations were from neighbouring states. Also candidates from countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were among them," Sharma said. He said the state government took the help of the Special Task Force (STF) and local intelligence to curb the activities of the copying mafia with an aim to "continue with our motto of ensuring sanctity of the examinations." "The copying mafia used to take contracts guaranteeing success in class 10 and 12 state board examinations. Impersonators were made to appear in the examination in place of real candidates and centres were earmarked where copying could be facilitated easily," he said. The government had also decided, Sharma said, to install CCTV cameras at all examination

centres to keep a hawk-eye vigil on the activities going on there. "However, installation of cameras in over 1000 schools would have cost over Rs 400 crore and the state did not have that budget. So, we decided that only schools having CCTV cameras, boundary walls and other relevant facilities will be used as exam centres," he said. "I personally monitored the examinations and as soon as I got any input, I shared it with the STF and immediate action was taken," he said. He said the government had studied all possible unfair ways and means that could be resorted to by students during the examination. "Those impersonating others or involved in replacing answer sheets before they reached evaluation centres were not able to do so due to these effective measures," said

Sharma. The UP board examination for class 10 and class 12 were held between February 6 and March 2. A total of 66,37,018 students had registered themselves for this year's exam. The board exams were held on 29.81,327 for class 12. In 2017, the overall pass percentage for class 10 was 81.18 and for Class 12 it was 82.62. The deputy chief minister said this year's results of both the classes will be declared by the end of this month. "We will be uploading the copies of toppers online so that students can see and follow them during their preparations," he said. About next year's exams, he said Aadhar card will be made compulsory for class 9 and class 11 students filling forms for the board examinations. It will help identify them and further check the menace of copying, he said. (PTI)

AIADMK ready to face any election: Jayakumar

CHENNAI, APRIL 15—/The ruling AIADMK in Tamil Nadu today exuded confidence that it would do well in the forthcoming elections, including the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Senior party leader and Fisheries Minister D Jayakumar told reporters here that the party was ready to face any election. He also said the AIADMK government was implementing all the schemes launched by former chief minister, late J Jayalalitha. "The people are the best judge. The results desired by the Amma (Jayalalitha) government have reached them. Since they will realise that at the time of the polls, whether local body or Parliamentary or the Assembly election, they will give their stamp of recognition to the AIADMK," Jayakumar said. The local body polls in Tamil Nadu are due since 2016. On the Cauvery issue, the minister expressed confidence that the Cauvery Management

Board (CMB) and the Cauvery Water Regulatory Committee (CWRC) will be constituted, in compliance with the Supreme court order on the water-sharing dispute involving the state and neighbouring Karnataka. Kerala and Puducherry are the other stakeholders in the dispute. Following the February 16 apex court verdict, Tamil Nadu has been insisting that the court's order to the Centre to formulate a "scheme" referred to the setting up of the CMB and the CWRC. The Tamil Nadu government has moved the top court, seeking contempt action against the Centre for its "failure" to frame the scheme for the constitution of the CMB and the CWRC within six weeks. The court had, last week, asked the Centre to frame a draft Cauvery management scheme and submit it to the Centre for implementation of its order on water distribution. Jayakumar expressed confidence of the government's ability to bring a verdict in the case. (PTI)

Church says St Thomas visited India

KOCHI, APRIL 15—/A mid controversy triggered by reported remarks of a senior priest questioning the belief that St Thomas visited India in AD 52, the Syro-Malabar Church today said the disciple of Jesus Christ did visit India. "The official stand of the Syro-Malabar Church is that St Thomas had visited India, the Church said in a statement here. The statement was issued after Fr Paul Thelakkat, a former spokesperson of the church, last week reportedly said there was no evidence to suggest that St Thomas had come to India. Some newspapers and TV news channels quoting former spokesperson of the Syro-Malabar Church had reported there is no evidence to prove St Thomas had come to India. Some media even said this is the official stand of Syro-Malabar Church. "This is baseless..." it said. The Syro-Malabar Church originated from the evangelisation works of St Thomas, said the statement issued by Bishop Sebastian Vaniyappraackal. "World famous historians have accepted it as a fact. Many historic documents are there to support this," he said. However, Fr Thelakkat today said he had never made a statement about the traditional belief that St Thomas had come to India. He clarified he had made certain remarks regarding prevailing caste feelings in the Church while joining a debate kick started by Bishop Geevarghese Mor Coorilos of the Niranam diocese of the Jacobite Syrian Church on the issue. "We should not rely on glory of a caste or tribe. That is dangerous," Thelakkat told PTI. The Jacobite priest had recently criticised some church members for conducting hollow family meetings. He had said in a Facebook post that some of the families believe in fake myths that their forefathers were members of the Brahmin community and St Thomas converted them to Christianity. These kinds of false beliefs should be broken, he had said. Notes of historian M G S Narayanan said there were no historic documents to suggest that St Thomas had come to India for evangelisation work. "There were no human habitations here at that time in Kerala. There was only forest here. How would he visit such a place? For what? he told a Malayalam TV channel. The Syrian Christian community in Kerala believes that St Thomas came to this part in AD 52 and established churches. The community considers St Thomas as the Father in Faith of Christians in India. The Syro-Malabar Church has over 30 dioceses in the country and four outside-in the U.S.A., Canada, Australia and Britain—serving over five million faithful. (PTI)

Unsure of implications, parties in Karnataka tread cautiously on Lingayat issue

BENGALURU, APRIL 15—/Wary of electoral implications, political parties in Karnataka seem to have toned down on the contentious issue of "religious minority" status to the dominant Lingayats and Veerashaiva Lingayats in the run-up to the May 12 Assembly polls. After having taken a huge gamble despite sharp divisions within the Siddaramaiah government in an apparent move to take away a significant slice of the Lingayat/Veerashaiva vote bank that has largely stayed with the BJP, the ruling party is now treading cautiously on the issue. Lingayats/Veerashaivas are said to form about 17 per cent of the population, wielding a decisive clout in about 100 constituencies, particularly in north Karnataka. Karnataka Assembly has 224 members. The Congress that heavily invested in the issue, with a few cabinet Ministers themselves spearheading the movement demanding a "separate religion" tag, is now cautious as it fears that the issue could swing either way for the party, as it has been accused of dividing the Hindu community. Opposition from influential 'pancha peethas' (five Veerashaiva mutts) and a sense of scepticism about the nature of benefit that the community may get on being granted religious minority status, has also raised the pitch politically. Interestingly, Congress Ministers and leaders belonging to Veerashaiva community like S h a m a n u r u Shivashankarappa, who have openly opposed the government decision, have also now gone silent on the issue. The state cabinet had on March 19 decided to recommend to the Centre grant of religious minority tag to Lingayats and Veerashaiva Lingayats. The state government's

decision was based on the report of an expert committee that had recommended considering grant of recognition as religious minority to the Lingayats and Veerashaiva Lingayats (Believers of Basava Tatva (philosophy). Basaveshwara was a 12th century social reformer. Subsequently, the Karnataka minorities welfare department notified the Veerashaiva Lingayats as a religious minority, but said it would come into effect after the Centre's approval to the state recommendation. Speaking to PTI recently, Karnataka Working President Dinesh Gundu Rao said the party has nothing to do on the issue of religious minority status to Lingayats and Veerashaiva Lingayats, and it will not make much impact in the polls. Terming it as a "community issue," Rao said the chief minister has

followed a procedure following the demand from the community. On the other hand, the principal opposition BJP, that sees the move to grant religious minority status as an attempt to exploit its vote share is yet come clearly with its stand. Keeping the cards very close to the chest, BJP national president Amit Shah has visited over 10 Lingayat mutts during his recent tours in the state, which is largely seen as an attempt to keep the community support intact. The third major political player in Karnataka, the JDS, too has largely remained non-committal on the issue, though, Basavaraj Horatti, one of the senior leaders of the party, hailing from Lingayat community was part of the movement demanding a separate religion tag. Narayana A. who teaches Political Philosophy and Indian Politics at Azim

Premji University said, parties may have toned down as they have realized it is a much more "complicated" issue. "Whatever little Congress would have gained, it may lose because of it, but finally how much impact the issue will have, depends upon constituency level dynamics," he said. One thing the issue has done to BJP is that Yeddyurappa's image as Lingayat strongman may have taken a beating, he observed. "What BJP will lose by not supporting the Lingayat cause will be confined only to Veerashaiva belt, but they may consolidate other votes," he said. However, political Analyst Narendran Pani feels the religious issue will have "some influence" on the May 12 assembly polls, and the clear picture will emerge only after the results are out. The demand for a separate religion tag to Veerashaiva/ Lingayat

faiths has surfaced from the numerically strong and politically-influential community, amid resentment from within over projecting the two communities as the same. One section led by Akhila Bharata Veerashaiva Mahasabha has demanded separate religion status, asserting that Veerashaivas and Lingayats are the same. The other group wants it only for Lingayats as they believe that Veerashaivas are one among the seven sects of Shaivas, which is part of Hinduism. Of late, some Lingayats have also stated that they were open to having the Veerashaivas under their umbrella, but the Lingayat nomenclature was non-negotiable. Parallels have also been drawn equating Lingayat movement to Patidar movement in Gujarat, and the demand for a separate religion tag to Veerashaiva/ Lingayat

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