



Congress president Rahul Gandhi addressing the 'Jan Aakrosh' rally at Ramleela Maidan in New Delhi on Sunday.

Kairana, Noorpur bypolls: Parties look to build momentum to 2019

LUCKNOW, APR 29/- With less than a month for the bypolls to the Kairana parliamentary and Noorpur assembly constituencies in western Uttar Pradesh, political parties in the state are making all out efforts to win the seats and carry the momentum to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The Kairana Lok Sabha seat fell vacant due to the death of BJP MP Hukam Singh in February, while the bypoll to the Noorpur Assembly seat was necessitated due to the death of sitting BJP MLA Lokendra Singh Chauhan in a road accident the same month. Both the bypolls are crucial for ruling BJP as well as opposition parties, as they may set the tone for the 2019 parliamentary elections.

The BJP will make extra effort to retain both the seats to try and send a message to voters, party cadres - as well as opposition parties - that the drubbing in the Gorakhpur and Phulpur by-

elections were a closed chapter now, and that it was still strong in western UP. Opposition parties - the Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party, Rashtriya Lok Dal and the Congress - are perceiving this as another opportunity to send a signal to the voters that the saffron fortress has been breached. Extending confidence that his party will win both the bye-elections, UP BJP spokesperson Rakesh Tripathi said, "Both the leaders who had represented the seats (Kairana parliamentary constituency and Noorpur assembly constituency) were immensely popular among the masses, and worked for the cause of the public. And, hence the people of the region have an emotional bond with them."

He added, "The massive improvement on the law and order front, especially in the western region of the state, where a number of encounters took place and criminals were arrested, has

ushered in a positive environment. Apart from this, the timely payment to sugarcane farmers will also go in the party's favour." Taking a dig at opposition parties, the spokesperson said, "There are doubts over the unity among them." The Congress rebutted the claims, with state unit spokesperson Ashok Singh saying, "The bypolls will act as a perfect occasion to defeat the BJP ahead of the crucial 2019 Lok Sabha elections, and send a strong signal across the country." Strategy in this regard is being worked out by the party's central leadership. And, I am confident that the BJP will be defeated and its fortress breached."

When contacted, SP spokesperson Sunil Singh Sajjan said his party has already done its poll preparations till the booth level. "We are ready to take on the BJP on both the seats. Whether it will be a SP candidate supported by other parties or any other party candidate supported by the SP will be decided

by party president Akhilesh Yadav." Voting in the bypolls for Kairana and Noorpur seats will be held on May 28. The counting of votes for both the constituencies will take place on May 31. The notification will be issued on May 3 and the last date for filing of nomination is May 10. Scrutiny will be taken up the next day, while the last date of withdrawal is May 14.

Kairana parliamentary constituency comprises five assembly segments - Shamli, Thanabhawan, Kairana (all in Shamli district) and Gangoh and Nakur (Saharanpur district). The Election Commission will set up 883 polling centres in these five assembly constituencies. More than 15 lakh voters (of Kairana) are likely to exercise their franchise in the bye-elections. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, BJP's Hukam Singh had bagged 5,65,909 votes as he defeated Nihad Hasan of the SP who got 3,29,081 votes.(PTI)

MP govt to soon release policy on bike taxis

BHOPAL, APR 29/- The tourists visiting Madhya Pradesh will soon have the option of hiring the services of motorbike taxis to easily ply through narrow lanes and traffic snarls. This kind of service was allowed during the Ujjain Simhastha Mela in 2016 to avoid traffic problems due to big vehicles, and the experiment was successful, prompting the state transport authorities to come up with a policy on it.

During Simhastha-2016, temporary permits for three months were issued for bike taxis. Later, the transport department had come up with a draft policy and invited objections and claims. "Madhya Pradesh transport commissioner Shalendra Shrivastava told PTI, "The policy is being finalised at the state government level and is likely to be released next month," he said. These taxi services would be app-based, he said.

At present, the state government has allowed only one company in Indore to operate such taxis. Once the policy comes into effect, it would be easier for other companies also to get a licence for bike taxis. Besides all the safety arrangements, it is proposed that bike riders will have to keep a spare helmet for the person who will hire the motorbike taxi, Shrivastava said.

"Permits would be granted only after thorough verification and checking of security features. At least 25 bike taxis should be available with the company or the operator for running such services." According to the draft policy, the photo and details of the bike driver would be available on the app when someone hires the service. The rate of these taxis would be fixed by the Regional Transport Authority. The draft policy also proposed that there should be a system to track the movement of these taxis through the GPS (global positioning system). These bike taxis would be charged Rs 1,000 per year as licence fee, besides ensuring the security verification of drivers/riders, another transport department officer said. Last year, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari had expressed confidence that bike taxis will offer solutions not only for wading through severe traffic congestions in metropolitan but could also provide an affordable transportation to people in far-flung rural areas. "We are planning to facilitate launch of bikes as taxis. We are going to introduce a cab aggregator platform where commuters could choose any mode of transportation that also includes a bike taxi," Gadkari had announced.

Punjab BJP mocks Cong resignations

ABOHAH (PB), APR 29/- Punjab BJP chief Shweta Malik today mocked at Congress MLAs who recently quit their party posts over ministerial berths, asking why they had not resigned when the state government "failed" to waive farm loans fully. Malik described the three resignations from Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) as "mere drama".

Surjit Singh Dhiman (Amargarh MLA), Nathu Ram (Ballhana) and Sangat Singh Gilzian (Urmur) had quit their PCC posts for being ignored in this month's expansion of the state Cabinet. Malik said the Bharatiya Janata Party will launch a Punjab

Bachao' (Save Punjab) campaign against the Amarinder Singh government, accusing the Congress of not honouring its poll promises. "Why didn't Congress MLAs tender resignations from their party posts when farmers ended their lives after the Congress government failed to fulfill its promise to waive farm debt completely," he asked. "Congress MLAs are greedy for chairs and when they didn't get the ministerial berths, they enacted a drama of quitting party posts," Malik said.

He said the ruling party had "fooled" farmers by making a "false" promise to waive Punjab farmers' loans, pegged at Rs 90,000 crore. "Farmers will never forgive the Congress," Malik, who is also a Rajya Sabha member, said. He urged party workers to prepare for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and ensure a BJP victory. Local BJP MLA Arun Narang accused the Congress government of stopping schemes like 'Atta Dal' and 'Shagun' run by the previous Shriromani Akali Dal-BJP government in the state. Narang alleged that SAD-BJP workers were being harassed by police at the behest of Congress MLAs. Punjab BJP state general secretary Dinesh Kumar, former Punjab BJP chief Kamal Sharma, former minister Surjit Jayani also attended the gathering.(PTI)

Siddaramaiah flays PM Modi govt for not fulfilling promises

BENGALURU, APR 29/- Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah today attacked the Modi-led government for "not fulfilling" its several poll promises and said the state Assembly elections among other things will also be about "broken promises" of the BJP. The Assembly elections in Karnataka are scheduled on May 12 while the counting of votes is to be taken up on May 15. "This election is also about broken promises of the @narendramodi Govt. 1. Black money didn't become white, 2. People didn't get Rs 15 lakh in their accounts, 3. People's money lost value due to demonetisation. They were made to stand in line to get their own money," he said in a series of tweets. "Modi also failed to provide employment and asked job aspirants to sell pakodas and check increase in fuel prices despite international crude oil prices plummeting," Siddaramaiah said.

The mission in this election is also to defeat anti-development and

communal BJP, besides opportunist JD(S), who are working together and also to protect the Indian Constitution from BJP who have plans to change it, the chief minister said. "This #KarnatakaElection2018 the mission is to defeat anti-Development & opportunist BJP & opportunist JDS, who are working together."

This election is also about protecting our Constitution from BJP whose declared intention it is to change the Constitution," he tweeted. Siddaramaiah said his government is fighting the election for 'your mandate' to continue its good work in the last five years and wants to make the state number one in all major sectors. "We are also fighting this Election for your mandate to continue our good work in the last 5 years. We have made Karnataka No1 in many sectors. We will now make Karnataka No1 in all major sectors. We will specially focus on sustainable Jobs & infrastructure," he tweeted.(PTI)

APMCC preparing report on migrant employees' living condition in JK

JAMMU, APR 29/- The All Parties Migrants Coordination Committee (APMCC) today expressed dismay over the living condition of migrant employees working in the Valley and said it would submit a detailed report to the government seeking immediate redressal of the issues faced by them. APMCC chair man Vinod Pandit visited the employees' colonies in Kashmir and a detailed report would be submitted to the government to highlight their demands and grievances, committee spokesperson King C Bharati said in a statement here. Hundreds of people are putting up in various colonies in different districts of the valley after they were provided government jobs under a special package. Claiming that the employees posted in the valley are facing "worsening condition of living standards", Bharati said the party chairman visited Vessu (Kulgam), Mattan (Anantnag) and Hall (Pulwama) in south and Veervan (Baramulla) and Nutnusa (Kupwara) in north Kashmir on Thursday and took stock of the infrastructure available there.

He said Pandit met employees living in the colonies to get first hand information about their problems. Bharati said Pandit expressed shock over the failure of the authorities to repair the residential quarters which were burnt during the July 2010 unrest triggered by the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani. Sharing accommodation is another big issue faced by the employees, he said, and demanded a time frame within which new quarters would be constructed and allotted. Other issues which were highlighted by the employees include lack of health checkup facilities, food and supply stores and absence of a primary school for the Veervan colony dwellers, he said.



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar visiting the shrine of Manersharif Dargah during Urs in Maner on Saturday.



Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president N Utam Kumar Reddy, addressing a press conference at Gandhi Bhavan, in Hyderabad on Saturday.

First time: CRPF gets SRE funds directly for works in Naxal areas, Kashmir

NEW DELHI, APR 29/- In order to better equip the CRPF for operations in LWE affected areas and in the Kashmir Valley, the government for the first time has allowed the force to directly utilise Centrally-sponsored SRE funds for building infrastructure facilities for its troops, officials said. Faced with tardy pace of creation of camps, barracks and other living facilities in its main operations theatres, the Union Home Ministry has allowed the paramilitary force to directly draw from the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) fund after seeking approval from respective states to whom this money is made available by the Centre. The SRE scheme is granted by the Union government to states where Wing Extremism (LWE) hit and insurgency affected states of the

country for the purpose of reimbursement of security-related expenditure like transportation, communication, hiring of vehicles, stipend to surrendered Maoists, construction of infrastructure for forces among others. Creating good living facilities and providing modern weapons and gadgets to forces is the most important measure when it comes to keeping high the morale of these men deployed in some of the toughest areas of operations, a senior official said. There was a considerable delay in getting work infrastructure done by way of getting the funds from states for accomplishing these tasks and hence it was decided that the SRE amount could be directly utilised by forces like the CRPF to get their job done, he said. The official added that the CRPF, designated as the lead

anti-Naxal operations force of the country, recently got constructed camps in Bihar district of Chhattisgarh from these funds while work is on to create these facilities in Sukma and Dantewada districts located in the worst-hit Bastar region of the state. Similarly, a good number of CRPF camps are being refurbished and fortified in Kashmir valley by directly utilising SRE funds, he said. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has deployed about a lakh of its personnel for LWE operations and given the remote and interior locations of their camps, the jawans have to render their duties by availing less number of facilities as compared to any other force. A good number of camps of the force in the Kashmir valley require upgradation and

enhancement of security features like creating tall perimeter walls and multi-layered physical obstacles to keep them secure and prepared against terrorist raids. The force has deployed about 60 battalions (about 60,000 personnel) in the valley for counter-terrorist and law and order tasks. While getting good and adequate number of weapons, vehicles and gadgets has not been a problem for the force, the official said, acute shortage of good living conditions has been a big challenge for the paramilitary to ensure. "A number of infrastructure creation works are expected to be accomplished by the end of this financial year in March next year with the help of this first-time measure," the official said. The CRPF is the country's largest internal security force with over 3 lakh personnel in its ranks.(PTI)