

Did Sabarimala issue affect voter behaviour in Kerala?

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The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is hoping to make inroads into Kerala by exploiting popular sentiment against the Supreme Court order allowing women of menstruating age into the Sabarimala shrine. Voter turnout figures released by the Election Commission of India show that polling percentage in Kerala was 77.6%, highest in Lok Sabha elections since 1991. To be sure, voter turnout has increased in all Lok Sabha elections in Kerala since 1998. A parliamentary constituency (PC) wise analysis of voter turnout figures shows that Pathanamthitta, the PC where the Sabarimala shrine is located, registered the highest growth in voter turnout. This region has seen continuous protests against the court

verdict and the ruling Left Democratic Front government (LDF). Does this mean that the BJP stands to gain from this issue? Pathanamthitta PC is currently with the Congress, which defeated an independent candidate backed by the LDF in 2014 with a victory margin of 6.5% of total votes polled. The BJP finished third with a 16% vote share. The same candidate won the seat for the Congress in 2009 as well, with a vote share of 51%. The BJP's vote share in 2009 was 7%. This means that the BJP more than doubled its vote share between 2009 and 2014. However, its vote share figures at the PC level came down to 11% in the 2016 assembly election. Another important fact worth underlining is that the Pathanamthitta PC has been

closing its gap with the rest of Kerala in terms of voter turnout since 2009. A comparison of change in voter turnout and increase in BJP's vote share in Kerala between 2009 and 2014 Lok Sabha elections does not show a very strong correlation. BJP's 2014 vote share in Kerala was four percentage points more than that in 2009. (See Chart) This suggests that the BJP's gains are more from its ability to attract voters from other political parties in the state rather than appeal to a silent group which did not come out to vote for either the Left or the Congress, the two dominant players in the state. It remains to be seen whether the BJP can continue to usurp voters from the two dominant players in Kerala politics and maybe convert this gain into seats.

ISIS claims 3 militants blew themselves up in Sri Lanka raid that killed 15

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Sri Lanka's Catholics on Sunday awoke preparing to celebrate Mass in their homes by a televised broadcast as churches across the island nation shut over fears of militant attacks, a week after the Islamic State-claimed Easter suicide bombings killed over 250 people. Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the archbishop of Colombo, prepared for services that would be carried on TV, an extraordinary measure underlining the fear still gripping this nation of 21 million people. The U.S. Embassy in Colombo has warned against attending any service at a place of worship this weekend. The Mass was to be aired at 8 a.m. In the eastern district of Ampara on Sunday, where a gunfire and explosions left 15 people dead the previous day, soldiers guarded St. Mary Magdalene's Church, where a sign on the gate said the church and the school would be closed until May 6. A nearby mosque also had soldiers stationed outside. At the YMCA, a group of young girls held Sunday school near a portrait of Christ. Sajith Liyanage, a 51-year-old Catholic, said he remained

worried and would watch Mass on TV. "We can't understand what the situation is right now," Liyanage said. At Ampara's weekly Sunday market, police officers walked explosive-sniffing dogs past ripe-yellow bananas, pineapples and coconuts. Officers also searched women's bags. The Islamic State group, meanwhile, claimed three of the militants who blew themselves up during a bloody police raid in Ampara linked to the Easter bombings. In a statement carried by the extremists' Amaq news agency, IS identified the bombers by their noms du guerre as Abu Hammad, Abu Sufyan and Abu al-Qa'qa. It said they opened fire with automatic weapons and "after exhausting their ammunition, detonated ... their explosive belts." Sri Lanka's military said the gunfire Friday night near the town of Sammanthurai left 15 dead, including six children, when militants opened fire and set off explosives in suicide bombings as security forces closed in on their safe house. IS falsely claimed their militants killed 17 "disbelievers" in the attack. The militants often

exaggerate their claims. The IS report carried a photograph of two men before an IS flag, one carrying a Chinese variant of the Kalashnikov rifle like the one found at the scene, another smiling. A girl and a woman survived the explosion but were critically injured and being treated at a hospital, police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekara said. Photographs taken by The Associated Press show the charred remains of one child and the body of another wearing a green T-shirt with the words "good boy" written on the back. The bodies of an adult woman and man were found after the explosion with their clothes burned off. The military said security forces had recovered explosives, detonators, "suicide kits," military uniforms and IS flags during the raids in the area. Gunasekara said officers acting on information from intelligence officials also found 150 sticks of blasting gelatin and 100,000 small metal balls, as well as a van and clothing suspected of being used by those involved in the Easter attacks on three churches and three luxury hotels that left more than 250 people dead and

hundreds injured — the bloodies assault linked to the IS in South Asia. The government on Saturday formally banned two extremist groups purportedly connected to the attacks, allowing officials to confiscate their property, presidential spokesman Dharmasri Ekanayake said. The government, crippled from a long political crisis between the president and prime minister last year, promised swift action to capture militants still at large. President Maithripala Sirisena said about 140 people had been identified as having links to the Islamic State group. A "major search operation has been undertaken," Sirisena said. "Every household in the country will be checked." Police confirmed that the leader of the local militant group blamed for the attack, Mohamed Zahran, died in the suicide bombing at the Shangri-La Hotel, one of six hotels and churches attacked. Zahran appeared in an IS video claiming responsibility for the coordinated assault, and authorities in both Sri Lanka and Australia confirmed links between IS and the attack.

Woman tourist found murdered in Goa hotel room

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A 25-year-old woman tourist from Himachal Pradesh was found murdered in a room at a hotel in North Goa on Saturday, police sources said. The victim was identified as Alka Saini, from Himachal Pradesh who had checked into the hotel in the beach village of Arpora on April 20, along with her boyfriend, who could not be traced now, a police

source said. "Her body was found by hotel's maintenance staff after they entered the room for cleaning on Saturday. We have found stab marks on her neck," the source said, adding that the body has been sent to the Goa Medical College near Panaji for post mortem. While two police officials are tight-lipped and refused to comment, police sources also said that the hotel's CCTV camera showed two persons

entering the room sometime before the body was discovered by the hotel staff. "Police parties have been dispatched to look for the duo. We have also alerted police personnel posted at bus stations, railway stations, the Dabolim International Airport and border check points," the source said. A case of murder has been registered at the Anjuna police station.

AAP leader Cheema joins SAD

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Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Sajjan Singh Cheema, who had contested from Sultanpur Lodhi seat in the 2017 assembly polls, joined the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in the presence of party president Sukhbir Singh Badal here on Saturday. Cheema, Arjuna award-winner former basketball player, had lost the Vidhan Sabha polls to Congress candidate Navtej Singh Cheema with a margin of around 14,000. He belongs to Kapurthala and had represented India in the 1982 Asian Games held at Delhi. He won the Arjuna Award in 1999. Addressing a gathering on the occasion, Cheema, who was the Kapurthala district president of AAP, said, his family members were Akalis. "It is like a 'ghar wapsi' (homecoming) for me." On his decision to quit the AAP, he said, "The party leadership was trying to forge an alliance with the Congress in Delhi and some other states. Even in Punjab, they are giving tickets to former Congress leaders and approaching some others to join the AAP. They have divided the party for their personal interests." He added that the AAP has forgotten its ideology for which he had joined the party. Welcoming Cheema into the party, Sukhbir said, "I am happy that an honest person like him has joined the Akali Dal. We will give him due role and position in the party." SUKHBIR DUBS CM AS ATHEIST Playing the religious card, he termed chief minister Capt Amarinder Singh as an atheist.

"We like to pay obeisance whenever something good happens in our life. But Amarinder took three months to visit the Golden Temple after he took over as CM. Even

during his visit to Sultanpur Lodhi, he held a meeting with Congress leaders, but did not go to pay obeisance at the gurdwara here. He is an atheist."

Lok Sabha elections 2019- 'Felt rejected but still support BJP': Vinod Khanna's wife on ticket denial

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Upset over BJP's decision to field actor Sunny Deol from the Gurdaspur Lok Sabha constituency in Punjab, Kavita Khanna, wife of late Union minister and actor Vinod Khanna, on Saturday said she "felt abandoned and rejected" as she was denied a ticket at

the last moment. She also made it clear that she will not contest the polls as an independent candidate. Addressing a press conference here, Kavita indirectly hit out at the BJP for "betraying" her by not considering her candidature from Gurdaspur, which her late husband had represented four times in the Lok Sabha. "I felt abandoned and rejected. I was made to feel absolutely insignificant. Nobody from the party called me to say there is another candidate. I was in Delhi when he (Deol) joined. I would have gone had they called. I have been approached by many other parties," she said addressing the media at Press Club of India here. The BJP Tuesday evening named Deol as its candidate from Gurdaspur, a decision which is being seen as a setback to Kavita who was hopeful of getting nominated from the seat. Kavita, who had been meeting public and party workers in Gurdaspur, said she was ready to file nomination papers from

the seat after many assurances from the party, but she was denied the ticket at the last moment. "I felt hurt because I understand the party has the right to decide a candidate but there is a way of doing it. The way it was done, I felt abandoned and rejected," she said. Actor Vinod Khanna, who died in 2017 at the age of 70 after battling cancer for many years, had joined the BJP in 1997. He had won the the Gurdaspur seat four times — 1998, 1999, 2004 and 2014. On being asked if she would contest as an Independent candidate from Gurdaspur, Kavita said, "No. I will not contest independently. I still have faith in the BJP and will support (PM) Narendra Modi." On Wednesday, she had said, "I am weighing all my options. I have not decided anything yet (whether to contest polls independently). I have not taken any decision on any issue." She did not respond on whether she would campaign for Deol, but said she wishes that the Gurdaspur

seat falls in Modi's kitty. "The BJP has my support, my PM has my support. At the same time, I have to insist that this can't happen again, because I am making a personal sacrifice," she said. Kavita claimed that she has a massive support in Gurdaspur just as it was for her husband and the people of the constituency had encouraged her to fight the election. "My husband was popularly known as 'sardar of bridges' for connecting remote villages in his constituency. I have walked barefoot with him to work for the people. I'm confident that had I stood as an Independent, I would have won," she said. Currently, the Gurdaspur constituency is represented by Congress MP Sunil Jakhar who won the seat in the 2017 bypoll, which was necessitated after the death of Vinod Khanna in April that year. Jakhar had defeated BJP candidate Swaran Salaria by a whopping margin of 1,93,219 votes.

'Don't drag me into caste politics': PM Modi to UP oppn

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi took on Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader Mayawati on Saturday for her description of him as a "fake" Other Backward Class (OBC) leader and asked her party and its partner Samajwadi Party (SP) not to drag him into their caste politics, continuing a back-and-forth that has gone on for more than a week. Mayawati fired off a riposte hours later and accused the Modi government of using the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to hound her over alleged irregularities in the sale of state-run sugar mills in 2010-11, when she was chief minister. "Beheni is distributing my caste certificate; now that she has started it, I must tell you that I come from the most backward caste in Gujarat," Modi said at an election rally in Kannauj on Saturday. Beheni, which means sister, is how Mayawati is known in UP. "I was not aware of my caste till Beheni, Akhilesh Yadav and Congress began mentioning it. I am grateful to them, yet I am not in caste politics. I ask them to not drag me into caste politics," Modi said. "I am a backward but I want to take the country

forward; my caste gets a mention when these people realise they are losing the election." At an election rally in Mainpuri on April 19, Mayawati called SP patron Mulayam Singh Yadav, Akhilesh's father, a "real backward class leader," unlike Modi, whom she described as a fake one. And on April 21, in a statement, Mayawati questioned Modi's OBC credentials and said he got his community included in Gujarat's list of OBCs after he became chief minister of the state. On Thursday, at rally in Uttar Pradesh's Banda, Modi accused the SP and the BSP of engaging in caste politics and said they were "busy distributing my caste certificate". On Friday, Mayawati struck back, saying Modi doesn't belong to a backward class by birth. "When his government was formed in Gujarat, he got his caste included in the backward class list," she said, repeating her claim. "He just wants to votes of people from the backward classes; he is a fake," she added. BSP and SP are counting on the support of Dalits and OBCs in Uttar Pradesh to dent the BJP's strength in the Lok Sabha in the ongoing

elections. OBCs account for 41.1% of the voters in Uttar Pradesh and Dalits, the main support base of the BSP, 20.7%. On paper, in terms of arithmetic, the alliance is at least as strong as the BJP. In the 2014 general election, the BJP on its own won 71 of the 80 members that Uttar Pradesh sends to the Lok Sabha, more than any other state in India. The SP won five and BSP none, but they were not in an alliance then.

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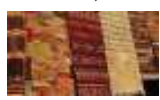
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