

Campaigning gains momentum for remaining two phases of LS polls

Agency
New Delhi May 8,

Campaigning has gained momentum for the remaining two phases of Lok Sabha elections.

Polling in the sixth phase will be held on 12th May in 59 parliamentary constituencies spread across seven states. These seats are 14 in Uttar Pradesh, 10 in Haryana, 8 each in Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, seven in Delhi, and four in Jharkhand.

Leaders of different political parties are holding rallies to garner support for their candidates.

Senior BJP leader and Prime

Minister Narendra Modi will address two public meetings in Haryana today.

Campaigning in Delhi has also intensified as only three days are left to win the voters. In Madhya Pradesh, eight Lok Sabha seats - Bhopal, Gwalior, Guna, Vidisha, Sagar, Rajgadh, Bhind, and Morena will go to polls in the sixth phase.

BJP President Amit Shah will address a public meeting at Karkenda in Jharkhand.

In Bihar, leaders of various parties are making whirlwind tours to reach voters.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has suspended four police officials at Muzaffarpur in Bihar due to

dereliction of their duties during the fifth phase of polling on 6th May.

Some EVMS were found in a community Hall on polling day. Addition Chief Election Officer Pravin Kumar Gupta said, an explanation has been sought from Sector Magistrate in this regard.

In Uttar Pradesh, prominent leaders and star campaigners are holding rallies and road shows in the constituencies where polling will take place in sixth and seventh phase.

Polling for the seventh and the final phase will be held on 19th May. The counting of votes will be held on 23rd of this month.

8 killed, 25 hurt in blast outside Sufi shrine Data Durbar in Lahore

Agency
Lahore May 8,

Eight people were killed and 25 others injured in an explosion that targeted a police vehicle near the shrine of Data Darbar in Lahore on Wednesday morning.

The blast took place close to a police van near Gate 2 of the Data Darbar shrine, one of Lahore's most popular shrines. The shrine is located in a densely populated area of the city. The impact of the blast shattered glass of nearby vehicles and buildings. The local media reported that scared bystanders attempted to shield themselves from the



impact of the blast by lying down for cover. The nature of the blast is yet to be determined, but police suspect it was a carried out by a

suicide bomber. Punjab Inspector General of Police Arif Nawaz told reporters: "There is no doubt it was an attack targeting the

police." He explained that the police are posted near the shrine to provide security round-the-clock. The blast took place at 8:45am, he said. Three elite police force officials were killed in the blast. A civilian and a security guard also lost their lives in the attack.

Police officials said that eight of the people injured in the blast were in a critical condition. The wounded have been shifted to the Mayo Hospital. After the blast, entry to the Data Darbar has been restricted and devotees who were inside the shrine have been evacuated from a back door.

Sri Lanka appeals international community to lift travel warnings

Agency
New Delhi May 8,

Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena has appealed to the international community to lift travel warnings issued after the Easter Sunday attacks.

In a meeting with the diplomatic community in Colombo yesterday, the

President said that tourists are returning to Sri Lanka. He urged the foreign missions to eliminate hurdles preventing others from visiting the country.

India, United States, China, UK and Australia are among the countries which issued travel warnings after Easter attacks.

Sri Lanka's tourism board

earlier said that tourist arrivals have gone down by 60 per cent. India is the largest source of tourists for Sri Lanka as around 4 Lakh 50 thousand Indians visited the country last year.

Sri Lanka received 2.3 million tourists from around the world in 2018 and has set up a target of 3 million for this year.

Telangana govt extends support to cyclone Fani-hit Odisha

Agency
New Delhi May 8,

The Telangana Government has extended support in restoration of electricity in Odisha.

Supply of power was discontinued due to cyclone FANI.

Today 1000 employees from various power utilities of

Telangana State have left for Odisha.

Due to extreme severe cyclone FANI, a number of electricity poles fell down and power transmission lines were broke down crippling electricity supply.

In view of this, the government of Odisha requested the government of Telangana to extend support

in restoration of electricity in Odisha.

Chief Minister K Chandrababhai Rao, who is in Kerala now, has given instructions over telephone to the Chief Secretary SK Joshi to offer support to Odisha.

Accordingly, 1000 personnel of various power utilities were deputed.

1 in 10 attacks able to breach multi-layered defences

Agency
New Delhi May 8,

Nearly 10% of mock attacks launched during India's largest ever coastal security exercise in January were successful in breaching the multilayered defences, three officials with knowledge of the matter said on condition of anonymity.

"It is still possible to sneak in despite a massive infrastructure upgrade," said one of the officials. The two-day exercise - Operation Sea Vigil - was simultaneously undertaken on the eastern and western coast to check coastal safety measures put into place after the November 2008 Mumbai attacks. As many as 166 people were killed when 10 terrorists sailed from Pakistan by boat to Mumbai on November 26, 2008, and sprayed bullets and threw grenades across targets in the city over the next three days. The officials said small boats, which are less than 20 metres in length, and are yet to get Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) remain a primary cause of concern. An AIS automatically provides information about a vessel to other ships and to coastal authorities. India has about 250,000 such small boats, according to figures available with the Indian Navy. The potential threat from smaller rogue boats is likely to be addressed as a satellite-guided

friend or foe identification system of the Indian Space Research Organisation with a two-way messaging system in all local languages is finally ready for induction within the next three or four months. The system was successfully tested on about 1,100 smaller fishing boats in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry recently. "The transponders will be inducted soon," a second official said. The ill-equipped maritime police forces of coastal states are also a cause of concern for the Indian Navy, which is the lead agency for coastal security. "Serviceability [or availability of boats] is as low as 50%," said a third official. Only half the boats are available when required and policemen posted to the state maritime police wings get shifted after two to three years. "Sea training starts all over again," said the second official cited above. The Navy has suggested to state police forces to enlist sailors, who are about to retire, to man their maritime wings. "Instead of training a new batch of policemen every three years, superannuating sailors could be inducted into the state maritime police forces," the second official said. The third official, who is also involved in analysing Operation Sea Vigil, blamed lack of adequate training, motivation and non-availability of boats with state maritime police wings for the

success of mock attacks. The government is now considering doing away with state maritime police forces that are in place in the nine coastal states and four union territories, according to a senior official aware of the details. The Coast Guard, which comes under the defence ministry's jurisdiction, will now be placed under the Union home ministry and designated the National Maritime Police. The NMP or the Coast Guard will be under the operational control of the ministry of home affairs (MHA) and will function as a police force if the proposal is accepted. Operation Sea Vigil threw up some positives as well. Fishermen and coastal communities, which were involved in the exercise along with the Navy, Coast Guard and other agencies, turned out to be "extremely aware and vigilant." The second official said the number of alerts about the presence of unfamiliar boats and crew they provided were up to the mark. The fishermen and coastal communities spread across India's over 7,500 km coastline are considered as the "eyes and ears" of coastal security. "As a country, we must realise the centrality of training - both in terms of capacity building and psychological requirements - of the state

Agency
Tripura May 8,

The Election Commission of India has ordered re-polling in 168 polling stations in 26 assembly constituencies of Tripura West parliamentary constituency after the opposition parties in the state raised allegations of massive booth capturing and violence. Polling was held on April 11 in West Tripura constituency as part of the first phase of Lok Sabha election 2019.

"... polls taken on 11th April, 2019 (Thursday) at 168 polling stations ... to be void and appoints the 12th May, 2019 (Sunday) and fixes the hours from 7 AM to 5 PM for taking a fresh poll ..." the poll body said in a statement.

The Tripura West Lok Sabha seat had recorded a voter turnout of 83% when the constituency went to polls on April 11.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had demanded re-polling in 774 of the 1,679 booths, where voting was held

on April 11. The Congress, too, alleged violations by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in several booths, demanding the resignations of S Taranikanti, the state's chief electoral officer, and director general of police AK Shukla.

"A majority of voters could not exercise their franchise on April 11 and the Election Commission of India should take steps to allow them to enjoy their constitutional rights. We demand that the Election Commission issues instructions for re-polling in these booths. Moreover, if the Commission feels the need to conduct re-polls in the entire West Tripura constituency, we will surely welcome it," CPI(M)

secretary Goutam Das had said.

The CPI(M) also claimed that footage of CCTV cameras installed in the polling booths on April 11 was scrutinised without their presence on April 12 and 13 and demanded scrutiny should be done in the presence of all political parties. The Congress also brought similar allegations regarding scrutiny of the video footage and demanded that the commission should conduct fresh polls in the constituency. "Our party delegation met deputy Election Commissioner Sudip Jain and said none of our party representatives was present during the video footage's scrutiny by the chief electoral

officer of Tripura. We believe the report sent by the state election authority was submitted to ECI with the intention of suppressing the real fact of mass rigging. For this, we demand that a fresh poll in the West Tripura constituency should be done," Congress secretary Rahul Saha had said.

The BJP had accused both the CPI(M) and the Congress of being involved in a conspiracy to defer polling.

The Election Commission had deferred voting in the Tripura East Lok Sabha seat in the third phase to April 23 from April 18, saying the prevailing law-and-order situation was not conducive for holding a free and fair election.

Modi clocks nearly as many miles in 2019 as in 2014 polls

Agency
New Delhi May 8,

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2019 poll campaign mirrors his 2014 general election debut in terms of the ground he has covered through public meetings and rallies.

Though Modi conducted 425 rallies between September 2013 and May 10, 2014 (the last day of campaigning during the previous general election), this time around, he kick-started his rallies on March 28, addressing one in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.

However, the 68-year-old prime minister has still, on average, managed to hold two rallies a day - comparable to his 2014 poll campaign. Indeed, on some days, Modi has conducted as many as three in different states, such as on April 20, when the prime minister held rallies in Forbesganj in Bihar, South Dinajpur district in West Bengal and Etah in Uttar Pradesh.

By the time his campaign ends on May 17 (the last phase of polling in the multiphased 2019 Lok Sabha elections is on May 19), he is expected to have addressed 130-odd public meetings, according to senior leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Modi began holding public meetings within days of being declared the prime ministerial candidate on September 13, 2014. His first public outing took place in Rewari, Haryana.

"Modi has spoken at 107 rallies so far," a party leader

said of Modi's 2019 campaign trail.

This includes the prime minister's three public meetings in Bihar (at Valmiki Nagar) and Uttar Pradesh (Pratapgarh and Basti) on May 4, the last day of campaigning for the fifth round of polling that took place on Monday. "Two more rounds of polling (May 12 and 19) are left, and Modi will speak at about two dozen more rallies covering Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh," another senior party leader said.

Though he started towards the end of March, Modi has held rallies in almost all states, including in the Northeast, in West Bengal, and in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, among others.

While West Bengal's 42 seats, Bihar's 40 seats and Uttar Pradesh's 80 will see polling across all seven phases, Himachal Pradesh's four seats will go to polls in one go, on May 19.

The BJP won 282 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha in 2014, becoming the first political party in 30 years to win a majority on its own.

With limited time to campaign, the BJP formed a cluster of two or three parliamentary seats of a particular region in a state which Modi addressed, with candidates on the dais present with him, said the second party leader.

Narendra Modi is certainly the principal campaigner and the vote catcher for the BJP. In the last five years, as prime minister, his popularity has further skyrocketed making

him the most popular political leader of the country in a long time. Modi magic is evident all over the country and the present election campaign is built around the persona and performance of Narendra Modi," said BJP's Rajya Sabha MP GVL Narasimha Rao.

"Modi's energy keeps the BJP supporters engaged. There is no doubt he is BJP's most popular leader, and a campaigner who can draw more crowds than any other leader of the ruling party," said Sidharth Mishra, president of the New Delhi-based Centre for Reforms, Development and Justice.

"Modi of 2019 has to compete with Modi of 2014, who pulled off a spectacular victory for the BJP. Only results will tell if he remains as popular as he was in the last parliamentary election," Mishra said.

"India is a country which likes to see its heroes live in action. To be able to see them in flesh and blood, makes a world of a difference, be it an actor, a cricketer and even the prime minister. For the rural masses, who've mostly seen Modi on tv or in newspapers on a daily basis, these rallies allow him to come to the ground level," said Priti Nair, director at advertising agency Curry-Nation. "His aura and showmanship is evident even after he gave his vote in Gujarat and walked out, it felt like an event. Besides that he has spent a large part of his tenure travelling outside the country, so right now he's trying to stay connected to the people so they continue to believe in him."