

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Former Jharkhand CM Hemant's wife Kalpana to contest bypoll from Gandey assembly seat

RANCHI, APR 25: The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) on Thursday announced that Kalpana Soren, wife of jailed former chief minister Hemant Soren, will contest the bypoll from Gandey assembly seat.

The seat in Giridih district fell vacant following the resignation of JMM MLA Sarfaraz Ahmad.

Bypoll to Gandey assembly seat is scheduled on May 20 along with the parliamentary elections in the state.

Kalpana, a homemaker with MTEch and MBA qualifications, completed her school education from Baripada in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district and obtained her engineering and MBA degrees from separate institutions in Bhubaneswar. Her political journey began at the 51st foundation day celebration of the JMM in Giridih district on March 4, when she claimed that a conspiracy had been orchestrated by opponents ever since the Hemant Soren-led coalition government came to power in 2019 and that Jharkhand will give a befitting reply to forces who put her husband behind the bars.

Her husband Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam on January 31.



Kalpana Soren speaking at a podium during a political event.

Her husband Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam on January 31.

EC seeks BJP's response on Opposition charge of PM Modi violating model code

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Taking cognisance for the first time of a model code violation allegation against a prime minister, the Election Commission on Thursday asked the BJP to respond to complaints filed by opposition parties wherein they have accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of delivering a divisive and defamatory speech in Rajasthan's Banswara.

At the same time, the poll panel also asked the Congress to respond to complaints filed by the BJP against the main opposition party's president Mallikarjun Kharge and its senior leader Rahul Gandhi regarding their respective remarks.

In its letter addressed to BJP President J P Nadda, the Election Commission asked him to respond by Monday to complaints filed by the Congress, CPI and CPI (ML) regarding the remarks made by Modi on April 21 in Banswara.

It also asked Nadda to bring to the notice of all star campaigners of the party to "set high standards of political discourse and observe provisions of model code of conduct in letter and spirit".

Officials said it is the first time that the panel has taken cognisance of a complaint against any prime minister. The Election Commission has invoked provisions of the Representation of the People Act to hold party presidents as the first step to rein in star campaigners.

It wrote a similarly-worded letter separately to the Congress president with regard to allegations levelled by the BJP against him and Gandhi.

The letters from the EC to the two-party presidents did not directly name either Modi, Gandhi or Kharge, but the representations received by it were attached to the respective letters and they contained details of allegations against the three leaders.

In its complaint to the EC, the Congress said that Modi in his speech had alleged that Congress wanted to redistribute the wealth of the people to Muslims and that the opposition party won't even spare the 'mangalsutra' of women.

The BJP, on the other hand, had written to EC that Gandhi levelled malafide and utterly sinister allegations against Modi during a speech in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

It also accused Kharge of violating the model code by claiming that he was not invited to the Ram temple consecration ceremony due to discrimination against SCs and STs.



Election Commission member speaking at a podium.

LS polls Phase 2: Rahul Gandhi, Shashi Tharoor in fray; Hema Malini, Om Birla seek hat-trick of wins

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Shashi Tharoor, and actor-turned-politician Arun Govil are among the key candidates in the fray for the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls with BJP's Hema Malini, Om Birla and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat seeking a hat-trick of wins from their respective constituencies.

Staggered over seven stages, the first phase of the elections held last Friday for 102 seats across 21 states and Union territories saw a voter turnout of around 65.5 per cent.

In the second phase of Lok Sabha polls on Friday, polling is scheduled in all 20 seats of Kerala, 14 of the 28 seats in Karnataka, 13 seats in Rajasthan, eight seats each in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, seven in Madhya Pradesh, five each in Assam and Bihar, three seats each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, and one seat each in Manipur, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir.

Gandhi is the sitting MP from Wayanad in Kerala and is seeking re-election. He is pitted against CPI's Annie Raja and BJP's K Surendran. In the 2019 election, Gandhi secured victory by a substantial margin of more than 7 lakh votes against his closest rival, CPI's P P Suneer.

Senior Congress leader



Rahul Gandhi and Shashi Tharoor standing together.

and former Union Minister Shashi Tharoor is hoping to retain the Thiruvananthapuram seat for the fourth time. He is pitted against Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar from the BJP and CPI's Pannyan Raveendran.

Malini, who has represented the Mathura constituency since 2014, is contesting against Congress' Mukesh Dhangar while Om Birla, a two-time MP from Kota, is facing Prahlad Gunjal from the Congress party.

Union minister Shekhawat is eyeing a third win from the Jodhpur seat while Congress candidate Karan Singh Uchiyada would look to put a spanner in the works of the BJP candidate. Tejasvi Surya, the sitting MP for Bangalore South and the national president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), will face

Congress' Sowmya Reddy.

Former chief minister of Chhattisgarh and Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel is contesting from Rajnandgaon, a stronghold of the BJP for over 30 years.

Baghel is pitted against BJP's Santosh Pandey, who won the 2019 Lok Sabha elections succeeding Abhishek Singh, the son of former Chief Minister Raman Singh, also from the BJP.

Replacing three-time MP Rajendra Agarwal, who has been holding the Meerut seat since 2004, Arun Govil, famous for portraying Lord Ram's character in Ramayan TV series, is making his electoral debut against BSP's Devvrat Kumar Tyagi and SP's Sunita Verma.

In Madhya Pradesh, BJP leader Virendra Kumar Khatik is eyeing a fourth win from Tikamgarh. The Congress has fielded a new face, Pankaj Ahirwar, from the constituency. In 2019, Khatik defeated Congress' Kiran Ahirwar by a margin of over 3.48 lakh votes.

The contest for the Alappuzha seat in Kerala has turned into a prestige battle for the Congress with All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary K C Venugopal's return to the Lok Sabha poll fray after 2014 as the party looks to wrest the only seat it lost to the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) in its landslide 19-1 victory in Kerala in the 2019 polls.

Venugopal has not lost any major election in his career. He won the Alappuzha Assembly seat three times in a row in 1996, 2001, and 2006 and was elected to the Lok Sabha from Alappuzha in 2009 and 2014. In 2019, he did not contest after the party elevated him to the post of the AICC general secretary.

Actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi is also in the fray from Thrissur against K Muraliedharan of Congress and VS Sunil Kumar of CPI(M).

Sukanta Majumdar, incumbent BJP MP from Balurghat in West Bengal is seeking re-election. He is pitted against Biplab Mitra of the Trinamool Congress and Joydeb Siddhanta of the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

Deeply biased: MEA on US report citing human rights violations in India

NEW DELHI, APR 25: India on Friday described a US State Department report citing alleged incidents of human rights violations including in Manipur as "deeply biased" and said it reflects a poor understanding of India and it attach no value to it.

The annual report of the State Department highlighted instances of human rights abuses in Manipur following the outbreak of ethnic conflict.

"This report is deeply biased and reflects a poor understanding of India," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"We attach no value to it and urge you to do the same," he said at his weekly media briefing.

The report also mentioned the raids by Indian tax au-



Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson speaking at a podium.

thorities on the office of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).

The India section of the report said local human rights organisations, minority political parties and affected communities criticised the country's government for the delayed action to stop violence and provide humanitarian assistance in Manipur.

According to the report, there were a number of press and civil society reports of representatives of political parties using disinformation tactics against civil society organisations, religious minorities, such as Sikhs and Muslims, and the political opposition, sometimes depicting them as security threats.

Referring to the tax raids on BBC offices, the report said although tax authorities described the searches as motivated by irregularities in the BBC's tax payments and ownership structure, officials also searched and seized equipment from journalists who were not involved in the organisation's financial processes.

"The government invoked emergency powers to ban screening of the documentary, forced media companies to remove links to the video, and detained student protesters who organised viewing parties," the State Department alleged, referring to a BBC documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots, the screening of which was banned in India.

LS polls: SP chief Akhilesh Yadav files nomination papers from Kannauj

KANNAUJ, APR 25: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday filed his nomination papers from Kannauj Lok Sabha constituency.

Yadav filed the nomination in the presence of party leaders, including Ram Gopal Yadav.

Talking to reporters Ram Gopal Yadav said that SP will win the seat with a huge margin. "The BJP candidate might lose his deposit in the seat," he said.

Akhilesh replaced his nephew Tej Pratap Yadav as the SP candidate from Kannauj. On Monday, the SP had declared his nephew Tej

Pratap as its candidate from Kannauj but changed its decision on Wednesday.

Tej Pratap was party's MP from Mainpuri between 2014-19.

Akhilesh had won the Kannauj Lok Sabha seat first in 2000 and later represented it in 2004 and 2009.

He vacated the seat after he became the Uttar Pradesh chief minister in 2012, and his wife Dimple Yadav won the by-election unopposed.

Dimple also won in 2014 but lost the seat to BJP's Subrat Pathak in 2019.

Akhilesh, an MLA from the Karhal assembly seat in Mainpuri, is the Leader of Opposition in the Uttar Pradesh assembly.

Voting will be held in Kannauj on May 13 in the fourth phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.



Akhilesh Yadav and other party members at a meeting.

'This election is to save democracy, Constitution': Rahul Gandhi's appeal to voters

NEW DELHI, APR 25: A day before the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday urged people to support his party and asserted this is an election to save democracy and the Constitution which he alleged the BJP-RSS are trying to "destroy".

Voting for the second phase of Lok Sabha polls will be held on Friday for 89 seats in 13 states.

Gandhi, who is seeking a second-straight term from Wayanad in Kerala, in a video appeal said this election is to save democracy and the Constitution.

"On one hand there is the BJP and the RSS that are trying to finish democracy and destroying the Constitution and on the other hand there is the Congress and the INDIA

alliance that is saving democracy and the Constitution," the former Congress chief said.

"We walked from Kanyakumari to Kashmir for over 4,000 km, we traversed from Manipur to Maharashtra and after speaking with you and listening to your issues we prepared our revolutionary manifesto. This is your manifesto. It is prepared by the Congress but this is your voice," Gandhi said in his appeal to the people.

"We have given five guarantees. Narendra Modi made 22-25 people billionaires and we are going to make crores of women and youth lakhpatis. We are giving a legal guarantee of MSP to farmers and waiving off their loans. We have promised to give a minimum wage of Rs 400 to labourers," he added.

Gandhi said this is a manifesto to change the country and it is revolutionary.

"Support the Congress, save the Constitution and press the 'hand button'," he said in the appeal.

All 20 seats of Kerala will go to polls besides 14 of the 28 seats in Karnataka, 13 seats in Rajasthan, eight seats each in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, seven seats in Madhya Pradesh, five seats each in Assam and Bihar, three seats each in Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, and one seat each in Manipur, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir.

A total of 1,206 candidates with four from Outer Manipur constituency will contest the elections in this phase, the campaigning for

which ended Wednesday evening.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar and actor-turned-politician Arun Govil, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh (Cong), and former Karnataka chief minister HD Kumaraswamy (JDS) are among the key candidates while BJP's Hema Malini, Om Birla and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat are seeking a hat-trick of wins from their respective constituencies.

In a post on X in Hindi along with the video appeal, Gandhi said, "In this election to protect the Constitution and democracy, to form the 'government of Indians', do your duty towards democracy."

Elections have slipped out of Modi's hands: Rahul

NEW DELHI, APR 25: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed the difference between his party's guarantees and 'Modi Ki Guarantee' is clear and added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi knows that the elections have "slipped out of his hands".

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said the Congress guarantees a "government of Indians".

Listing some promises made by the Congress, Gandhi said women will get Rs 8,500 per month, youth will get a job that pays Rs 1 lakh per year, recruitment will be carried out for 30 lakh vacancies and legal MSP will be provided to farmers.



Rahul Gandhi speaking at a podium.

clear!" the former Congress chief said.

"Congress will create crores of millionaires in India and Modi ji knows that the election has slipped out of his hands," he said.

Addressing a rally in Amravati, Gandhi on Wednesday had claimed that ten years of the Modi government saw only 22-25 persons becoming billionaires on the back of a Rs 16 lakh crore loan waiver, but if the INDIA bloc comes to power, it will make crores of people "lakhpatis".

Gandhi had also said no force in the world can change the Constitution of India. Congress leaders have accused the BJP of wanting to change the Constitution during a field visit in the area, the CBI has registered the first FIR in such allegations of land grab and assault on women handed over to it by the Calcutta High Court.

The High Court had also directed the CBI to file a comprehensive report on the alleged illegal conversion of agricultural land into water bodies for pisciculture after conducting a thorough inspection of revenue records and physical inspection of land alleged to have been converted.

The central agency has been tasked to investigate allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali and submit a comprehensive report to it at the next date of hearing on May 2.

CBI files first FIR in Sandeshkhali case

NEW DELHI, APR 25: The CBI has registered the first case in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali related to the land grab and sexual assault allegations against five influential people there, officials said on Thursday.

The case pertains to a land dispute where women of the victim's family had allegedly face sexual assault from influential people in the area, they said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has not yet disclosed the identity of the five accused and the victims.

The Calcutta High Court on April 10 had ordered a court-monitored CBI investigation into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, saying an



A group of women in colorful saris protesting.

"impartial inquiry" was required in the interest of justice and fair play.

The CBI had circulated an email ID for people to make complaints in such cases in which a large number of complaints were received.

The agency had dispatched a team to Sandeshkhali to ascertain allegations and proceed with the registration of cases where allegations could be prima facie verified.

After preliminary verification