

BJP announces 13 Rajya Sabha candidates

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Tuesday announced the names of 13 party members for the Rajya Sabha elections, including former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Shanta Kumar, and Balbir Punj, a close confidante of L.K. Advani.

The last date for nominations for the polls comes later this week.

Punj, former financial journalist, is a member of Advani's think tank. He also holds the post of secretary in the party. Hailing originally from Punjab, Punj recently retired from the Rajya Sabha as a member from Uttar Pradesh. The BJP has now nominated him to return from Orissa.

The party has also nominated former union minister C.P Thakur as its candidate from Bihar, said BJP general secretary Ananth Kumar, releasing the list of nominees after nearly four hours of hectic discussions.

He said: 'The meeting of the Central Election Committee (CEC), which decided the names, was presided over by party president Rajnath Singh and attended by Advani, Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Jaswant Singh and all other members of the CEC.'

Shanta Kumar, who was promised a Rajya Sabha seat if he did not queer the pitch for electing Prem Kumar Dhumal as the chief minister of Himachal Pradesh during the recently held assembly elections, has been duly rewarded with the nomination for the sole seat from the state.

From Gujarat, all three confidantes of Chief Minister Narendra Modi - namely state party president Purshottam Rupala, general secretary Bharat Singh Panwar and Nattuji Halaji Thakur - have been nominated.

In Madhya Pradesh too the party has given nominations to three candidates namely, sitting MP Maya Singh, Raghunandan Sharma and Prabhat Jha.

Party spokesman Prakash Javadekar has been nominated to contest from Maharashtra while Sheo Pratap Singh has been nominated from Chhattisgarh. Jai Prakash Narain Singh will be contesting the Jharkhand seat.

The BJP will be contesting two seats each in the Bihar and Maharashtra legislative councils. In Maharashtra, it has nominated state party president Pandurangrao Pundkar and Vinod Tawade and in Bihar the party has nominated Giriraj Singh and Kameshwar Chaupal.

Asked why film star Shatrughan Sinha failed to secure a re-nomination from Bihar, Kumar said: 'We are shortly heading towards Lok Sabha elections and it was felt that popular candidates should be considered for the Lok Sabha.'

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