

Sonia, Advani, Mayawati campaign in north Karnataka

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L.K. Advani, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati Saturday campaigned for their party candidates in north Karnataka ahead of the third and final phase of assembly elections May 22.

The battle in Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri, Bidar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Bagalakot and Belgaum districts for 69 seats in the 224-member house is mainly between the Congress and BJP.

BSP has fielded candidates in 217 constituencies across the state in a bid to enter the state assembly for the first time.

Janata Dal-Secular (JD-S) headed by former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda is also contesting most of the seats in north Karnataka though it is perceived to have little mass base in the area.

Voting took place for 89 seats in 11 districts on May 16 in the first phase and for 66 seats in 10 in districts in the second phase Friday. Counting is on May 25.

Gandhi addressed meetings in Hubli, a busy commercial centre in Dharwad district and in Gulbarga from where state Congress chief Mallikharjun Kharge and former Congress chief minister N. Dharam Singh are seeking re-election for a record ninth time in a row.

Dharam Singh is contesting from his home constituency Jewargi for the ninth time while Kharge had to shift from his home constituency Gurmitakal to neighbouring Chitapur (reserved for Scheduled Castes) as Gurmitakal has been de-reserved.

Gandhi told people in Hubli and Gulbarga that the Congress, if voted to power, will ensure all-round development of north Karnataka which lags behind south Karnataka in several aspects.

While she accused BJP of dividing people on the basis of religion and caste, Advani in his speeches at Bidar said the Congress was soft on terrorism because of its 'vote-bank politics'.

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