

Andhra Pradesh set for crucial by-elections

The stage is set for by-polls to four Lok Sabha and 18 assembly constituencies in Andhra Pradesh Thursday in an exercise seen as a semi-final before elections to the state assembly and the Lok Sabha due next year.

Four MPs and 16 state legislators of the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) resigned en masse in March to protest the delay in according separate statehood to Telangana region and to seek a fresh mandate on the issue, necessitating the by-elections.

In two assembly constituencies, the elections have been called after the deaths of one legislator each of the ruling Congress and the main opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

Election authorities have set up more than 9,000 polling stations for the by-polls and deployed over 63,000 policemen for security arrangements.

Director General of Police S.S.P. Yadav told a news conference Wednesday that the police personnel including those from paramilitary forces had already been deployed to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections.

Of the 4,965 villages going to by-polls, police have identified 965 as hyper-sensitive and 1,683 as sensitive.

Yadav said 1,025 villagers were identified as extremist-affected.

In all, 42 assembly segments are going to polls, in which 8.6 million people are eligible to vote. There are 174 candidates in the field.

For the Adilabad, Warangal, Hanamkonda and Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituencies, 29 candidates are in the fray. For the 16 assembly seats, 145 candidates are trying their luck.

Electioneering ended Tuesday evening with Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu and TRS chief K. Chandrasekhara Rao extensively touring the constituencies in a last-minute bid to woo the voters.

The TRS, Communist party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and Communist party of India (CPI), which fought the 2004 elections in alliance with the Congress, are this time pitted against the ruling party.

The CPI-M, which is contesting two assembly seats, has entered into an electoral understanding with the TDP.

The CPI, which has a tie-up with its Left ally but is maintaining equi-distance from both the Congress and TDP, has fielded candidates for two assembly seats.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is contesting one assembly seat.

The by-elections will also witness the entry of a new party into electoral politics. The Lok Satta, founded by former bureaucrat Jaiprakash Narayan, has fielded candidates in four assembly

constituencies, including three in the state capital.

Meanwhile, Rajasekhara Reddy exuded confidence that the Congress would win two Lok Sabha and nine assembly seats. Listing the major development and welfare programmes taken up during the last four years, he said there would be no anti-incumbency

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