

BJP in poll mode, announces first Lok Sabha list

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) became the first off the block Thursday, announcing its first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha amid a deadlock between the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and its Left allies over the India-US nuclear deal.

'The central election committee (CEC) of the BJP held a meeting under the leadership of party president Rajnath Singh and announced the first list of candidates for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections,' senior BJP leader M. Venkaiah Naidu told reporters.

The list, comprising of just six names, put to rest any doubts about BJP prime ministerial candidate L.K. Advani's likely constituency.

'Advani will contest again from Gandhinagar in Gujarat,' BJP poll committee secretary Ananth Kumar said.

Though Gandhinagar continues to be a general category seat, some of its assembly constituents have seen a change in the status after the Delimitation Commission report, leading to rumours that Advani may shift to another constituency.

The announcement of the first list of candidates at this juncture when relations between the UPA and the Left parties that support the government have reached the lowest ebb was meant to send across a message that the BJP was ready for the polls, party sources said.

The Lok Sabha polls are due to be held by May 2009.

The other BJP leaders whose names were cleared were: cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu (Amritsar, Punjab), actor-turned-politician Vinod Khanna (Gurdaspur, Punjab), Sripad Naik (Panaji, Goa), Lt. Gen. (retired) T.P.S Rawat (Pauri, Uttarakhand) and Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhumal's son Anurag Thakur (Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh).

Rajnath Singh, Advani, Venkaiah Naidu, Ananth Kumar, Sushma Swaraj, Murli Manohar Joshi, Gopinath Munde and Vinay Katiyar attended the BJP central election committee meeting.

Arun Jaitley, BJP general secretary credited with the party's success in state elections in Gujarat and Karnataka, could not attend it as he is in Britain.

'It was decided that the BJP should start the poll preparation by following the well-tested formula, namely, declare the party's prime ministerial candidate, announce the candidate list early, activate all election-related committees, prepare the manifesto, and start the campaign,' Naidu said.

'We have already declared our PM candidate. The process of candidate selection started formally today and will be completed by end of August,' he added.

The party's core election committee sent a 30-point action plan, meant to serve as a guideline, to each state unit.

'The BJP will mainly focus on the 297 Lok Sabha seats that it has won at some or the other point

since the 1996 general elections. Public meetings will be held in each of these constituencies and the senior leaders will attend them,' Naidu said.

The BJP plans to announce the Lok Sabha candidates for the states going for assembly elections - Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra - towards the end of the candidate selection exercise.

(© IANS / India eNews)