

An election sans issues

Electioneering in Madhya Pradesh, where polling will be held for 13 of its 29 parliamentary seats Thursday, came to an end before even gaining momentum. With the main parties - the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress - failing to address any important issue during the campaign, voters are less than enthused.

While the BJP is going to the hustings by harping on the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's alleged failures like on price rise and terrorism, it also hopes to garner votes by cashing in on the state government's much publicised achievements.

The Congress, which has nothing much to lose in the state as it has only four MPs, has been talking about corruption, irregularities in implementation of Centre-sponsored people's welfare schemes, and law and order failure - the same issues that it raised in the assembly polls six months ago and the electorate ignored.

Political analysts said both the parties have failed to find the pulse of the voters.

The Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) are hoping to attract some of the voters dissatisfied by the BJP and the Congress's poll promises.

The 13 constituencies going to the polls Thursday are Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa, Sidhi, Jabalpur, Balaghat, Chhindwara, Hoshangabad, Vidisha, Bhopal, Shahdol, Mandla and Betul. The last three are reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC) candidates.

While the BJP and the BSP have fielded candidates for all the 13 seats, the Congress and the Samajwadi Party are contesting 12 each.

In all, 198 politicians are testing their electoral fortunes.

Former union minister Sushma Swaraj, the BJP's election in-charge for Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, is fighting the polls from Vidisha.

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has emerged victorious four times from the same constituency and Swaraj claims her party will repeat its performance of 2004, when it bagged 12 of the 13 seats. The BJP now holds 11 seats since one MP left the party.

Swaraj seems to have already won her seat by default as the candidature of her main rival - Rajkumar Patel of the Congress - has been rejected by the Election Commission for technical reasons.

The Samajwadi Party had sought the Congress's support in Vidisha for its candidate Chaudhary Munawwar Salim to face the alleged 'communal forces' but so far there has been no understanding between the two.

All eyes are now set on Guna, where Congress candidate and union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia is facing a tough contest from BJP nominee Narottam Misra - a legislator and former state minister.

Another constituency to be watched with interest is Chhindwara, where Union Commerce and Industries Minister Kamal Nath is a candidate. The BJP has fielded Marutrai Khawbe against him.

The battle of the ballot is also tough in Sidhi. Union Human Resources Development Minister Arjun Singh's daughter Veena Singh is contesting as an independent candidate after being denied the Congress ticket.

Indrajeet Kumar, former minister and a staunch supporter of Arjun Singh, is the Congress nominee. The BJP has fielded Govind Mishra.

The other 16 Lok Sabha constituencies of the state will go to the polls April 30.

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