

Will BJP's Shahnawaz break the jinx?

Will former central minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Shahnawaz Hussain break the jinx? Will he become the first of BJP's Muslim leaders to win a parliamentary election two times in running?

This is the question haunting the Bhagalpur parliamentary constituencies as it prepares for counting of votes for a by-election held Monday.

The election was necessitated following the resignation of BJP's Sushil Kumar Modi, who won from here in 2004 but moved to the Bihar legislature to be deputy chief minister.

If Shahnawaz, as people call him, wins, he will set a record of sorts. If he loses, he will join the list of BJP Muslim leaders who have failed to win parliamentary elections twice.

Only 37 percent of the electorate voted Monday, setting in uncertainty about possible winners.

The by-election turned into a four-cornered contest after former Madhya Pradesh chief minister and Bharatiya Jan Shakti leader Uma Bharati campaigned for independent candidate Pradeep Joshi, a Hinduvta advocate.

It was earlier a three-pronged contest primarily involving Shahnawaz Hussain, Rashtriya Janata Dal's (RJD) Shakuni Chowdhary and the Communist Party of India-Marxist's (CPI-M) Subodh Roy, who is supported by the Congress, Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP).

In the 2004 parliamentary elections, Hussain was defeated from Kishanganj parliamentary seat although Muslims make up more than 66 percent of the voters.

He was then the lone Muslim minister in Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government. He had won from there in 1999 by 8,648 votes.

Others Muslim BJP leaders like Arif Beg, Sikander Bakht and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi all bit the dust after winning just one Lok Sabha election each.

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