

India Polls To Be Held In 7 Phases In April, May

NEW DELHI: India's Election Commission announced Sunday that the upcoming national election will be held in seven phases in April and May, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party seeks a second term.

About 900 million people are eligible to vote in a staggered process that allows the government to deploy tens of thousands of troops to prevent outbreaks of violence and the capture of voting stations by party activists.

Chief election commissioner Sunil Arora said the election will be held April 11, 18, 23 and 29, and May 6, 12 and 19. The

votes will be counted May 23.

Modi's Bhartiya Janata Party, or BJP, hopes the government's recent tough stand against Pakistan will help it retain its popularity despite suffering a setback in December when it lost three key state elections to the opposition Congress party.

Indian aircraft crossed into Pakistan on Feb. 26, carrying out a pre-emptive strike against terrorists responsible for a Feb. 14 suicide bombing in Kashmir that killed 40 Indian troops.

Since then, Modi and BJP leaders have been projecting the party and its leaders as decisive and tough on national security.

Opposition parties, however, have accused Modi and his party of using national security matters to try to influence voters.

On Saturday, the Election Commission ordered political parties to tell their candidates and leaders not to display photographs of defence personnel in advertisements as part of their election campaigns.

The commission said armed forces are "apolitical and neutral stakeholders in a modern democracy." The order came after billboards featuring the BJP, including Modi and the party's president, Amit Shah, along with air force pilot Varthaman, appeared in parts of the country.

While it is too early to speculate on whether Modi's toughened stand will help the BJP, the December election setback is expected to revive the political fortunes of the Congress party, led by Rahul Gandhi, the 48-year-old scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family.

India's last national election, in 2014, was conducted in nine phases. The BJP achieved an absolute majority, with 282 parliamentary seats out of 543.

The then-ruling Congress party managed only 44 seats following bribery charges against several party leaders and poor governance.

Priyanka Vadra In Ahmedabad



India's main opposition Congress party General Secretary Priyanka Vadra, center, arrives to attend a prayer meeting at Sabarmati Ashram, which was home to Mahatma Gandhi, in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

Mamta Releases Trinamool List



West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) supremo Mamata Banerjee addresses a press conference where she released the party's list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, in Kolkata, on Tuesday. (Photo: IANS)

Candidates With Criminal Cases Have To Publicize Fact

NEW DELHI: For the first time in the Lok Sabha polls, candidates with criminal antecedents are required to publish information in this regard in newspapers and through television channels on three occasions during the campaign period, the Election

Commission said on Sunday.

A political party that sets up candidates with criminal antecedents is also required to publish information about their criminal background, both on its website and also in newspapers and television channels on three

different occasions, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sunil Arora said at a press briefing where he announced the schedule of the Lok Sabha polls.

"Instructions in this regard has been issued as October 10, 2018. This requirement is in pursuance

of the judgment of the Supreme Court in various writ petitions," he said.

The candidates were earlier required to give details of their criminal cases to the poll panel through an affidavit but were not required to make it public

themselves. It was then left to the press to find out details about their various cases. The Lok Sabha general elections are scheduled to be held in seven phases starting from April 11 and ending on May 19. The counting of votes will be done on May 23.



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Pakistani, Indian Troops Trade Fire On Border

MUZAFARABAD, Pakistan : A Pakistani police official says Indian troops from across the frontier in the disputed Kashmir region have shelled the Pakistani-controlled sector, killing a 70-year-old man.

Local police chief Arshad Naqvi said on Monday that the man was visiting his daughter the previous day in an attempt to try and take her to a safer area when he was killed.

An Indian army spokesman, Col. Rajesh Kalia, blamed Pakistani troops for initiating fire on Sunday, saying four villagers in Indian-controlled Kashmir were wounded.

Pak Anti-Graft Tribunal Indicts Former PM

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani anti-graft tribunal has indicted former Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf and six others over millions of dollars in losses because of delays to a power project.

Monday's indictments came years after the country's anti-graft body, called National Accountability Bureau, concluded in its findings that Ashraf and six other officials and politicians had caused the government severe losses over the Nandipur project. Ashraf served as prime minister in 2012.

One of the accused politicians, Babar Awan, is a senior leader of Prime Minister Imran Khan Pakistan's Tehreek-e-Insaf party.

Khan came into power in last year's parliamentary elections after campaigning on promises to route corruption from the government. His predecessor, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, was removed from office over corruption allegations. Sharif is currently in prison and facing multiple trials.

Death For 20 Gangsters

MULTAN: A Pakistani court has sentenced 20 members of a criminal gang to death after finding them guilty of killing several security officials and kidnappings in Punjab province.

In Tuesday's ruling, the court in the city of Multan also sentenced two men to life in prison over links to the gang. The Chotu gang remained active until 2016, when police backed by military helicopters raided its hideouts in the town of Rajanpur and arrested dozens of suspects.

