

Udhampur sees 65.08% turnout, all eyes now on Jammu Lok Sabha Seat

The first major electoral battle in Jammu and Kashmir since the 2019 abrogation of Article 370 commenced on a peaceful note with Udhampur-Doda Parliamentary constituency recording 68.27 percent turnout on April 19, in the first phase of Lok Sabha elections.

In the second phase, stage is set for polling in Jammu-Reasi Parliamentary constituency on April 26.

In Udhampur, 11,07,821 of the total 16,23,195 registered voters cast their ballot with Kathua (SC) Assembly segment recording highest 75.44 percent polling while Banihal accounted for lowest percentage of 58.78.

The polling was held at 2,637 polling stations across the constituency to seal the fate of 12 candidates in the fray, including union minister Jitendra Singh, who is eyeing a third term after winning the Udhampur seat for the BJP in 2014 and 2019, against Congress leader and former MP Choudhary Lal Singh and the DPAP's G M Saroori, besides six independents.

In the last general elections of 2019, Udhampur constituency had recorded 70.02 percent polling, even as the slight lower number this year could be attributed to adverse weather conditions with rains and winds.

The Udhampur Lok Sabha constituency encompasses an expansive area of 16,707 square kilometres and consists of 18 Assembly segments spanning five districts -- Kishtwar, Doda, Ramban, Udhampur and Kathua. Of these, Udhampur registered 70.76 percent turnout followed by Kathua with 70.06 percent, Kishtwar 67.75 percent, Doda 66.42 percent and Ramban 62.42 percent.

A break-up of Assembly Segments reveals that Kathua (SC) segment recorded a polling percentage of 75.44, Jasrota 73.68, Udhampur West 73.28, Udhampur East 73.26, Hiranagar 72.65, Padder Nagseni 70.06, Chenani 69.47, Doda West 69.36, Inderwal 68.99, Doda 68.14, Ramban 66.71, Ramnagar (SC) 66.61, Billawar 66.28, Kishtwar 65.44, Basohli 64.91, Baderwah 63.01, Bani 62.70 and Banihal 58.78.



17.81 lakh voters to decide fate of 22 candidates in Jammu seat

The stage is all set now for election to the Jammu Lok Sabha seat where over 17.81 lakh eligible voters will be out to exercise their franchise to decide the fate of 22 candidates in the fray, on April 26, when you will have this edition in your hands.

Jammu Lok Sabha seat recorded a turnout of 74 per cent in the 2019 parliamentary election and a similar situation is expected this time as well. Twenty-two candidates are in the fray from the constituency spread across 17 Assembly segments of Jammu, Sabma and Reasi districts and one assembly constituency in Rajouri district.

A direct contest is on the cards between sitting BJP MP Jugal Kishore Sharma and INDIA bloc candidate Ramban Bhalla, the working president of the J-K Congress unit. Jagdish Raj of the

Bahujan Samaj Party and advocate Ankur Sharma of the Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal are two other prominent faces contesting the seat.

On Wednesday, the last day of campaigning, Bhalla, accompanied by senior leaders, including state Congress president Vikar Rasool Wani, AICC in-charge for J-K Bharat Singh Solanki and the party's Udhampur nominee Choudhary Lal Singh held a mega roadshow in the city, starting from Satwari near the Jammu airport to the party headquarters on Residency Road.

Similarly, J&K BJP leaders, led by their president Ravinder Raina, also toured different parts of the city and held corner meetings and public rallies to push for a third term for sitting MP Jugal Kishore Sharma, who had defeated Bhalla by a margin of over three lakh votes in 2019. Sharma, who had won the seat in 2014 as well, is banking on what he calls

"historic decisions" taken by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government and the massive developmental push in the last 10 years.

Bhalla, on the other hand, having regional heavyweights National Conference and PDP backing him, is confident of wresting the seat from the BJP. There is "resentment" among the people over the wrong policies of the BJP-led government, he alleged.

In addition to the 11 Assembly constituencies of Jammu district, the Jammu Lok Sabha seat includes the Kalakote-Sunderbani constituency of Rajouri, Gulabgarh, Reasi and Shri Mata Vaishno Devi segments of Reasi district and Ramgarh, Samba and Vijaypur segments of Samba district.

As many as 2,416 polling stations, including 158 along the International Border and Line of Control (LoC), have been set up in the constituency.

Punjab resident Baldev Kumar has become the first person from outside Jammu and Kashmir to contest Lok Sabha polls in the Union Territory, as he has filed his nomination papers from Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha constituency, which will go to polls on May 7, along with 24 other candidates.

The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 paved the way for outsiders to contest polls in the Union Territory. Earlier, the Representation of The People Act 1957 barred people who were not permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir to contest polls in the erstwhile state.

Kumar (67), a resident of the Naya Gaon area of Mohali in Punjab, filed his nomination papers from the Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency as

Construction of Kashmir Bhawan in Punjab agenda of Baldev Kumar, first outsider to contest polls in J&K

an independent candidate and his nomination was confirmed after scrutiny of papers.

He is among 25 candidates who are in the fray from the constituency, which will go to polls on May 7.

Currently residing in Jammu, Kumar claimed that he decided to contest the polls on the insistence of a "large" number of local people whom he has "served for the last 20 years".



"I worked for the people during the 2014 floods, I have sponsored the education of a number of students, I have facilitated patients from Kashmir when they go to Punjab for medical check-ups and kept a kothi (house) for them where they can stay when they go there for treatment," Kumar told said.

The contestant said he has been requesting the administration to build a 'Kashmir Bhawan' in Punjab, especially

for the patients, but to no avail.

"(Activist) Medha Patkar got 20 acres of land for her NGO from the Gujarat government but I have not been allotted even two acres for a Kashmir Bhawan for the patients from J&K.

"The people have told me that I have to be in power and only then can I build a Kashmir Bhawan. So, I decided to contest the polls," he said.

Asked if he has Jammu and Kashmir's domicile certificate, he said, "I have no domicile as I have not stayed in one place". The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is presently run by the Lt Governor-led administration after the PDP-BJP government collapsed in June 2018 with the national party pulling out of the alliance. The last assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir were held in 2014.