

Indian General Elections Enter Key Phase



New Delhi, April 10 (Xinhua-ALJ) -- Voting for the third phase of India's parliamentary elections is under way in 91 constituencies, representing nearly a fifth of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament).

Nearly 110 million people are eligible to vote in the latest phase spread across 11 of India's 28 states and three federally administered union territories, including the capital, New Delhi, with the fate of ruling Congress and opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) greatly decided in the current round of polling in the capital Delhi and the biggest state Uttar Pradesh.

While opinion polls say the BJP has a good chance to win over the Congress in Delhi, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, south Bihar and eastern Maharashtra, the party could face stiff resistance in some major pockets there.

"A surge would be critical to BJP reaching its target of 200- plus Lok Sabha seats, which would require a 70-80 percent strike rate in this round," said Times of India online.

Braving the outlawed rebels, people in Maoist-hit areas spread across the states of Jharkhand, Odisha and Chhattisgarh came out to vote.

"We have come here to vote because we want an eligible leader to be elected who will work for our welfare and progress," said a voter in Gumla district of Jharkhand.

But villagers of Sameli, a small hamlet located in Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh abstained from voting after being intimidated by Maoist rebels, Reuters reported.

Polling started on April 7 in two small northeastern states and spread across four northeastern states amid tight security on Wednesday.

Security forces have stepped up safety measures to ensure a safe environment for voters. Residents of New Delhi started gathering at the poll stations in the early hours of Thursday under the watchful eye of thousands of police and election authorities.

"My vote today will be for a strong leader who will steer away the country from inflation and corruption," a BJP supporter said.

Hours before polling started, suspected Maoist rebels blew up a jeep carrying paramilitary soldiers, killing two and wounding three others hours before voting began in the eastern Bihar state, the police said.

The soldiers were patrolling a forest in a rebel stronghold in Munger district when their jeep hit a land mine, police officer Jitendra Rana told the AP news agency.

Maoist rebels have urged people to boycott the elections in the region. However, voting remained unaffected and started as scheduled on Thursday morning, Rana said.

The multi-phase elections will be spread over five weeks until May 12, and results are expected on May 16.

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