

Will Modi's guarantee win over onion growers?

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS PUNE, MARCH 18

A DAY before Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nashik in January this year, Dipak Pagar, an onion grower from Baglan taluka of Nashik district, was put under virtual house arrest. Pagar, who belongs to the Rayat Kranti Sanghatna — the farmer outfit headed by former state minister Sadabhau Khot, was placed under house arrest for being one of the most vocal protesters against the Centre's decision to ban export of onion.

onion exports till March 31, 2024. The Centre's decision to allow export of 1 lakh tonne to UAE and Bangladesh through the National Cooperative Exports (NCEL) has failed to break the jinx of low realisation at the farmers' end.

Bharat Dighole, president of Onion Growers Association said the present wholesale rate, at Rs 1,000-1,300/quintal, is insufficient to cover production costs.

Politics over onion

With a central minister like Dr Bharati Patil, as well as state government minister Chhagan Bhujbal hailing from Nashik, onion and its issues can hardly be neglected. Infact BJP MP Dr Sujay Vikhe Patil and Dr Pawar had claimed that they had spoken to Home Minister Amit Shah to have the ban rescinded. However, after the final notification was issued and implications of the order became clear, farm groups and leaders criticised the decision on social media.

Nashik Sena MP Hemant Godse had to face the music from



The current wholesale rate, at Rs 1,000-1,300/quintal, is insufficient to cover production costs. Express file

onion growers who had protested the ban. Dighole on his part said his organisation would certainly want to make onion prices an issue during elections. "Our core group will be meeting this week and we will discuss the matter," he said. The growers association had so far stayed away from politics but the ban, Dighole said, has forced their hand.

Maharashtra is the largest onion producer in the country. Pune, Nashik, Ahmendnagar, parts of Marathwada and Dhule comprise the state's onion belt. Thus, the ban on exports and the subsequent price drop has affected farmers adversely. Last year, onion growers had suffered repeated vagaries of nature in the form of hailstorms and untimely rains which had led to crop loss. Also, the present

drought has sparked off fears of an inadequate yield. The ruling BJP and Sena had cornered most Lok Sabha seats in the onion belt, and are hoping to do the same this year, too.

Farmers versus consumers

Eknath Sanap, an onion grower from Nashik's Sinner taluka, spoke about the widespread anger over low prices of onion. But whether this would translate into a vote against the government, Sanap said, is anybody's guess.

Pagar, whose organisation is part of the ruling alliance in the state, offers more nuisance, when he compares the vote of growers versus the vote of consumers. "In rural areas you have beneficiaries who have benefited from free ration, free saree, and other freebies of the government. Their number is more than onion growers who have suffered losses. Even if we highlight our losses, the freebies, they feel, will compensate for it," he said.

BJP eyes Maval seat, objects to incumbent Shinde Sena MP Barne's 'style of functioning'

MANOJ MORE PUNE, MARCH 18

SITTING MAVAL MP Shrirang Barne, who belongs to the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, has found himself in trouble with the party's allies BJP and Ajit Pawar-led NCP not in agreement when it comes to fielding him again from the seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. While the NCP has demanded that it should be allowed to contest from the seat, the BJP has objected to Barne's style of functioning.

"We are mainly opposed to Barne's style of functioning," BJP Maval wing chief Nitin Marathe told The Indian Express. His reaction comes after two meetings held over the last two days by the Maval BJP unit. At the first meeting, BJP lead-



Shrirang Barne

ers argued that if Barne is fielded, he will be defeated. "Not a single BJP worker will campaign for Barne if he is fielded... This was the common argument made by leaders at Saturday's meeting," said Marathe.

"Most BJP leaders are upset with the MP as he never took us into confidence while implementing development projects or taking any initiatives or actions regarding the constituency," he added.

Ravindra Bhedge, BJP's Maval taluka campaign chief, said, "We have been demanding that the

BJP should get a chance to field its candidate from this seat... But whoever is fielded by the Mahayuti, we will work unitedly for his victory. As far as the views expressed by party leaders and workers are concerned, they did so in their individual capacity."

Shaken by the development, Shiv Sena leaders in Maval held a meeting with the BJP unit leaders on Sunday.

"The Sena leaders conceded that the MP has made some mistakes and promised us that such things won't happen in future. As of now, we have resolved to bury our differences but our objection to Barne's style of functioning will continue," Marathe said.

He added that they have conveyed their sentiments to top party leaders who have promised appropriate action.

Meanwhile, BJP's Pune district spokesperson Raju Durge

said, "We have been demanding that the Maval Lok Sabha seat should be given to the BJP. For three terms, the seat has been contested by the Shiv Sena candidate. We have worked hard for the Sena's victory. In 2029, the delimitation exercise will take place and the constituency may not remain in its present form. Therefore, we demand that the BJP should at least get one chance to contest the seat."

Durge said the saffron party has strong candidates like Shankar Jagtap, Bala Bhedge and Prashant Thakur.

Earlier, Maval MLA Sunil Shelke, who belongs to the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, had demanded that his party should get the seat.

Shelke said Barne has not made any contribution to the development of Maval constituency in his last two terms and hence the NCP should be given the chance to contest from the seat.

When 'Naxal' posters appeared across Pune city around Bhagat Singh's martyrdom day

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE PUNE, MARCH 18

OVER A decade ago, 'Naxal' posters came up in several areas of the city ahead of the martyrdom day of freedom fighters Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev (March 23), for two consecutive years — 2012 and 2013.

The posters bearing the name of banned Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist) were spotted on the walls of Patrakar Bhavan, a building in Navi Peth, that houses a prominent organisation of working journalists in Pune.

Similar posters were also seen at the district collectorate, some bus stops and inside a few buses of the Pune Mahanagar Parivahan Mahamandal (PMPML), calling for a 'bandh' in Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha from March 21 to March 23, 2012.

As stated on the posters, the Maharashtra state committee of CPI-Maoist demanded unconditional release of its "comrades Kobad Ghandy, Vijay, Vikram, Madanlal, Mahesh, Bhanu and Angela", calling them "revolutionaries", and denouncing the government as corrupt and unjust.

Police sources point out that the posters were put up at a time when a probe by Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) was underway against alleged CPI-Maoist operative Angela Santokke and others, including members of Pune-based Kabir Kala Manch who were arrested during April-May 2011 under sections of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), for allegedly spreading Naxal ideology of an armed struggle against the government in urban areas.

All accused in this case, including Angela, were later released on bail by the court. Angela's husband Milind Telumbde, a central committee member of CPI-Maoist, was

gunned down by police during an encounter with Naxals in Gadchiroli in November 2021.



A poster bearing the name of banned CPI-Maoist and Bhagat Singh's image was put up in Pune on March 23, 2013. Express

an encounter with Naxals in Gadchiroli in November 2021. A year later, posters reappear

Later, on March 23-2013, posters mentioning the CPI-Maoist were found again at prominent and strategic spots in the city like Patrakar Bhavan, Garware College, SP College, Shramik Bhavan, Swargate Junction, Shaniwar Wada, Balgandharva auditorium and Shivajinagar court.

The posters in 2013 carried freedom fighter Bhagat Singh's image, wherein the period between March 23 and 29 is called the "sangharsha saptah" in support of the movement demanding rights for "revolutionaries" lodged in jails.

Through the posters, CPI-Maoist also made six demands — grant political prisoners the status of 'revolutionaries' lodged in jail, those undergoing life terms should get all facilities as given to ordinary prisoners, rights should be given to meet inmates secretly, proper facilities be given to inmates as per the jail manual,

ban on literature given to revolutionaries be lifted, and special privacy be given to female prisoners when needed.

Case registered in 2013 While no case was registered in 2012 for putting up the alleged Maoist posters, in 2013, Pune city police booked unidentified persons under sections of Prevention of Defacement of Property Act.

Police obtained a video captured by a CCTV camera at Patrakar Bhavan, which allegedly showed three young men arriving on a motorcycle and putting up the posters on the night of March 23, 2013. Their faces or details of the motorcycle were not visible clearly in the video and investigation too yielded no leads.

Police said that such 'Maoist' posters never reappeared in the city after 2013, but they continued to act against the alleged Maoist operatives from Pune and other urban areas.

In September 2014, alleged CPI-Maoist members Arun Bhelke and Kanchan

Nanaware of Chandrapur were arrested by ATS from Pune. In January 2021, Kanchan succumbed to an illness in jail. Arun was convicted under UAPA sections and sentenced to eight-year jail term by a special court in Pune in December 2022. He was released in April 2023.

Meanwhile, several activists including three artists of Kabir Kala Manch were arrested for alleged Maoist links under UAPA sections in connection with the Elgaar Parishad-Koregaon Bhima case of 2018. Police have alleged that Elgaar Parishad was organised in Pune on December 31, 2017, as per the strategy of the banned CPI-Maoist, and using its funds. However, the accused in this case have denied all the allegations.



BRIEFLY

Hockey Mizoram in quarter finals

Pune: Hockey Mizoram stunned Hockey Punjab 4-2 to take the seventh spot in the quarterfinals of the 14th Hockey India Senior Women National Championship 2024 at the Major Dhyanchand Hockey Stadium Nehrunagar, Pimpri on Monday. ENS

Aswani Cricket Cup on April 23

Pune: The third season of the Aswani Cricket Cup (ACC) will start on April 23. The tournament will span for 28 days at the Mrunal Cricket Ground in Pimpri-Chinchwad. Total 16 teams will participate in the tournament which will be played in T-10 format. ENS

Advertisement for Container Corporation of India Ltd. (CONCOR) regarding tendering for HR Payroll, e-Office, GST, TMS Application & Operation System with Backup & Restore System and e-Filing Mobile Application Providing Digital Platform and Hardware and Software at CONCOR Central Site, TKD for period of three years.

Advertisement for Omkara Assets Reconstruction Private Limited regarding sale of immovable properties under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Advertisement for Mahindra Rural Housing Finance Ltd. regarding possession notice for immovable property under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Advertisement for India Shelter Home Loans and India Shelter Finance Corporation Ltd. regarding physical possession notice for immovable property.

Advertisement for Motilal Oswal Home Finance Limited regarding demand notice for immovable property.

Advertisement for Hinduja Housing Finance Limited regarding demand notice for immovable property.

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