

POLL PULSE AND PRIORITIES

No high-decibel canvassing to reach out to the electorate. No mudslinging. No hitting out at each other for petty political gains. With barely a few days left for the battle of ballot beginning October 21, Bihar is witnessing a unique campaign by various development agencies these days — a move for 'good governance' and an 'accountable' government that will root out corruption, ensure quality education, protect children's rights in schools and work towards making the state 'green', reports Pranava K Chaudhury

Governance And Accountability

Transparency International, India, the accredited India chapter of the Berlin-based Transparency International, has launched its pre-election campaign — Development Pact — in various assembly constituencies in Bihar. The aim is to put pressure on all those who make it to the *masjid* ensure good governance and fulfil the basic demands of the voters — fight corruption and ensure accountability.

"We are emphasizing on a common understanding between politicians and local people before finalisation of election manifestos. This can be adopted by all political parties, while district administrations have to be in the loop. There should be some clarity in the policies," says Vineeta Singh, project director of Transparency International, India.

"The pact will work closely with the people to fine-tune their demands from the candidates in the poll fray. We have invited all political parties to sign the deal that can be circulated to different media houses as a tool to ensure good governance," Singh said.

The post-election evaluation of the pact can be conducted from time to time to ensure that the measures have been taken up accordingly. "Transparency International is also keen on working out an integrated approach to ensure governance. The process will include candidates and a coalition of NGOs working at the constituency level and at the panchayat level," says Deepak Bharti, a Madhubani-based social



M. SHARMA

Rebel BJP leader Ranvir Nandan flashes the victory sign after filing his nomination papers from the Bankipore assembly constituency as an independent candidate activist.

Green Crusade

If Transparency International has launched a movement against corruption, Greenpeace has urged all political parties to include decentralized renewable energy in their respective election manifestos. The organization, which is working for green causes across the world, is monitoring the promises made by all political parties in Bihar. It hopes that renewable energy finds "a prominent place" in the manifestos of all these parties.

"For the development of the state and

TRACK TWO

its people, it's imperative to solve the energy crisis. No party can afford to ignore the importance of renewable energy for this," says Ramnagpat Kumar of Greenpeace India.

Bihar is reeling under an acute power crisis and there's a huge electricity deficit across the state. Greenpeace feels that Bihar can fulfil its energy needs in an equitable and sustainable manner by investing in decentralized renewable energy.

Recently, Greenpeace released a people's manifesto to highlight the energy needs of the state and the tremendous scope of decentralized renewable energy. "Politicians

cutting across party lines have acknowledged renewable energy as a solution to Bihar's energy requirements. They have agreed to include decentralized renewable energy in their manifestos," says Greenpeace media coordinator Shashwat.

"All these parties have pledged to make renewable energy a key component in their manifestos. They have also agreed to push for a new law and policy on renewable energy in Bihar. It's time for these parties to deliver. Anyway, we will monitor their activities carefully," says another NGO activist as parties begin to put final touches to their manifestos.

Quality Education

Bihar Election Watch, a website recently launched by a group of young professionals in the state, has already shifted into the poll mode. The objective is to keep a tab on all political parties and candidates in the run-up to the battle of ballots. And views from a cross section of society have started pouring in.

"Every political party should make their promises, plans and programmes clear in their manifestos. I wish for a change... why can't we have a single-point manifesto by all the parties?" asks Indra R Sharma, a technocrat. "Can providing quality education in the next five years be made a single point manifesto for Bihar by all? It's not impossible a task.

"Let all 243 MLAs establish at least a new model school (as defined by the Centre) up to Class XII or an ITI in their con-

sistency and take the responsibility of its sustained operation. When the candidates come for campaigning, can't the educated voters at least demand and make their commitment to work towards this direction?" Sharma asks.

"Whoever forms the next government should be quick to execute the Central plans for setting up educational institutes without creating any trouble. We have received a tremendous response from a cross section of society about their priorities for the assembly polls," says young "Bihar watcher" Ajay Kumar.

Spare The Schools

Human Rights Watch advocates authorities to protect schools and children's access to education during Bihar polls. Use of school buildings by police and paramilitary forces as their base during election campaign can disrupt students' access to education and may increase the chances of Maoist attacks on the institutes.

A new 243-seat Bihar assembly is to be elected in six phases from October 21. One of the prime reasons for the staggered election is to deploy security forces around the state to avert any subversive activities by the Maoists.

"We've seen time and again that the Maoists step up violence during national and local elections. And they mostly attack schools," says Bebe Sheppard, a senior children's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch.