

business, it is for the vested interests to bother about it." Chanan Ram, 60, a petrol station manager, underscored the general mood of apathy when he said: "Who is interested in elections except youngsters who want a joy ride in the jeeps and trucks or those who have an axe to grind at one point or another."

The expense ceiling of Rs 30,000 prescribed by the Election Commission is farcical. "This sum is not even peanuts," admit leaders like Tayal and Bhajan Lal. Though no one is prepared to hazard a guess on the final outcome of the polls, it is evident that Haryana's voters can make a significant impact on the popularity—or lack of it—of the ruling party of Mrs Gandhi.

—GOBIND THUKRAL in Chandigarh

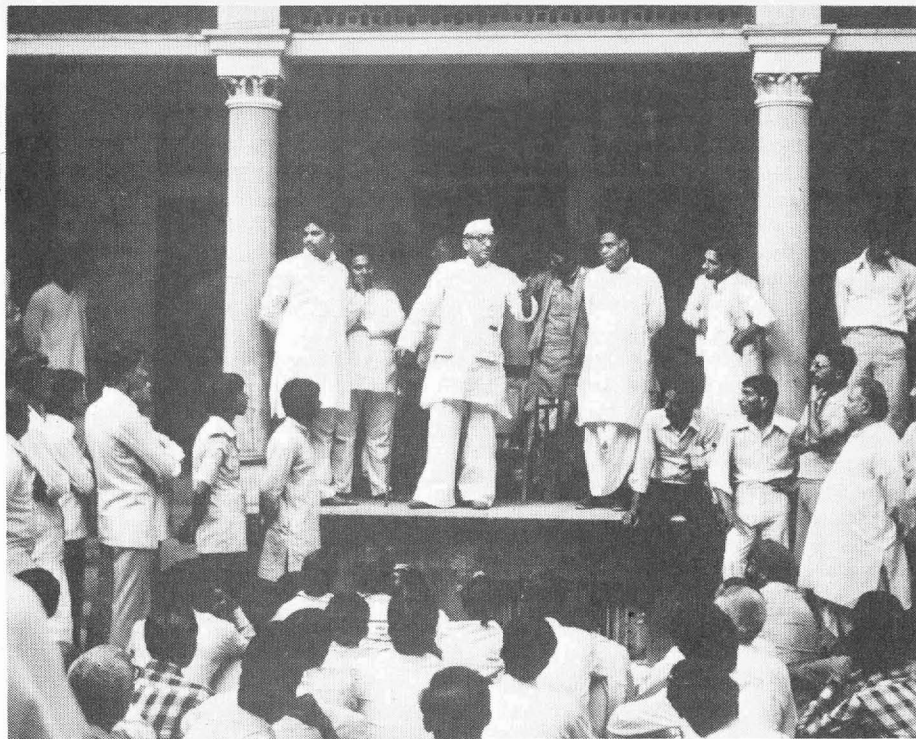
GARHWAL

Bahuguna's Blitz



IF POLITICS is the art of deception, the Congress(I) symbolises its highly developed state. After crying itself hoarse about its inability to conduct the Garhwal Lok Sabha by-election, the ruling party in Uttar Pradesh seems on the surface surprisingly resigned to the victory of its *bête noire*, Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, 63, president of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP). There is no show of strength of the kind witnessed when the by-election was first held on June 14 last year, with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the chief ministers of Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh pitching into the electioneering, and policemen from neighbouring Congress(I)-ruled states flooding the remote hill-bound constituency. The only VIP to make the trek to Garhwal last fortnight was Union Home Minister Giani Zail Singh who flew in and out in a one-day lightning visit. May 19, polling date, will fall exactly two years after Bahuguna resigned his Lok Sabha seat after quitting the Congress(I). In every way, the by-election has become his biggest political battle so far; his opponent Chandra Mohan Singh Negi, Uttar Pradesh's minister for hill development, is only a front for Bahuguna's real rival—Mrs Gandhi herself.

Well-organised: Yet Mrs Gandhi is tenacious when it comes to combating her political foes, and it seems inconceivable that she will let Garhwal go to Bahuguna without further ado. This time she is relying on her



Bahuguna harangues voters in Hardwar: rhetoric and ennui

party's youth brigades. Hundreds of young men of the Youth Congress(I) have stormed the towns in Pauri and Chamoli districts. Under the supervision of State Irrigation and Transport Minister Veer Bahadur Singh and party leader Dharam Vir in Lucknow, Youth Congress(I) chieftains Sanjay Singh and Suresh Ajmani have set up base in Dehra Dun, and the khadi-clad boys have been furiously plastering posters, yelling slogans, and literally painting the towns' walls red with their theme line: 'Jai Indira, Jai Garhwal'.

In addition, the state Government sent in 9,000 men of the police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). Just outside Rishikesh sprawls a huge PAC camp, the transit point for truck-loads of rifle-toting PAC jawans headed for the constituency's 871 polling stations. This time, the Government has obviously learnt the lessons of June 1981, when police from Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab were sent in without the knowledge of the Chief Election Commissioner Sham Lal Shakhder who delivered the ruling party a resounding if unexpected snub when he ordered a repoll. Shakhder found *prima facie* evidence to support Bahuguna's complaint that Haryana and Punjab police personnel had intimidated voters and even participated in booth-capturing. The irregularities were later confirmed by a 3-member team of the Citizens for Democracy (CFD) led by veteran journalists Ajit Bhattacharjea and B.G. Verghese.

Understandably, then, Bahuguna is inclined to endow his campaign liberally

with hyperbole. The Garhwal poll, he tells a late evening crowd in Rishikesh, is as historic as Jallianwalla Bagh or Champaran. "My symbol is the *tarazu*, the scales of justice, but Mrs Gandhi's symbol is the hand, with all five fingers unequal in length. From her, expect only injustice and imbalance." On a typical day, meetings become tedious and repetitive and the ennui in his entourage tends to grow.

Dull Campaign: Nor does Bahuguna's rhetoric liven up things much. His themes are almost calculated to dull his listeners. The root cause of the country's bad state, he says one day, is coal, and goes on to berate Mrs Gandhi for not spending even two days in a coal-mine. India is selling out to the (International Monetary Fund) IMF. It is exporting non-renewable resources like iron ore and bauxite. Taking leave of national issues, Bahuguna occasionally harangues the authorities for doing nothing to increase the milk yield of Garhwal's diminutive cows.

Bahuguna's electoral road show like his party, is a one-man affair. Bahuguna's leg has not fully healed from a fracture sustained in September last year, and the walking-stick he carries lends him a certain look of raffishness. Accompanied only by a valet and an armed bodyguard, the martyr of India's longest-ever electoral battle travels in a white Ambassador, a tin trunk and a holdall perched on its roof. Bahuguna travels heavy, and the dandy in him sees to it that he is liberally supplied with starched khadi clothes and caps.

Negi, who was elected to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly from Lansdowne consti-

tuency—which falls within Garhwal—is definitely not as charismatic as Bahuguna. But he has the Congress(I)'s entire machinery backing him. His posters and graffiti have literally drowned out Bahuguna's, and his strategy seems simply to be to plead that Bahuguna will never be able to give the voters what they need.

Bahuguna, in turn, tells the voters that Negi is like a son to him, and ought to be allowed to remain hill development minister—a post in which he could do more good for the Garhwalis, while Bahuguna could tackle “national and international” issues in Delhi. That the Negi camp is not averse to using official means to ferry people to meetings was evident when two buses belonging to Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) were requisitioned for a meeting at Chilla, near Hardwar, on May 5. Two days later, Bahuguna complained that he had been refused permission to address his largest meeting in Dehra Dun on May 16.

Uphill Task: In comparison with his opponent's resources, Bahuguna faced a task that was uphill not merely because of his constituency's terrain. The DSP is still a nebulous party: it has only 14 members in the 425-seat state Assembly and 11 members in the 542-seat Lok Sabha. Travel is tortuous and Bahuguna's men complain about a scarcity of posters, party flags and money.

Yet, it is clear that strategically the Congress(I) has cooked its own goose by repeatedly scuttling the by-election. This time around, the poll is expected to remain on schedule, because any disruption will have an immediate impact on elections to four state Assemblies and six other Lok Sabha by-elections. For this reason, say Bahuguna's men, if there is trouble it will come on polling day itself. If that happens, of course, the Congress(I)'s democratic credentials will be shattered once and for all.

The Congress(I) is relying heavily on the caste factor: 70 per cent of Garhwal's voters are Thakurs, the community to which Negi belongs, and Bahuguna's fellow Brahmins form less than 10 per cent. Moreover, Garhwal has nearly 40,000 ex-servicemen, who are mostly Thakurs and reportedly pro-Congress(I). But Bahuguna has many powerful Thakurs among his supporters.

Last fortnight, with all the logistics stacked against him, Bahuguna was still the odds-on favourite. “Mrs Gandhi loves having lap-dogs around her,” he said, “and I hate dogs of all kinds. That is why she is afraid of me.” The tide is currently in Bahuguna's favour, but the question that hangs over the Garhwal hills is not whether he will win—that seems fairly certain—but whether some last-minute ‘crisis’ will once again throw the by-election into jeopardy.

—CHAITANYA KALBAG

UDAIPUR

Personality Factor



A WEEK before polling date in this picturesque town of lakes, palaces and forts, Udaipur seemed unusually quiet for a Lok Sabha constituency in the midst of a fierce by-election campaign.

The Udaipur seat—one of the two in Rajasthan facing a by-election—has a mixed political history, with both the erstwhile Jan Sangh and Congress(I) retaining their hold alternately. In the Janata wave of 1977, Janata candidate Bhanu Kumar Shastri won the seat; three years later, Udaipur reverted to Congress(I) with Mrs Gandhi's landslide victory. But the thumping majority of 51,897



Bhandari: better known

votes had something to do with her candidate Mohanlal Sukhadia's personal charisma as well.

Sukhadia, former chief minister of Rajasthan and later governor of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, died in February this year, vacating a seat for which his party has been hard-pressed to find as eminent a successor. Their selection: a quiet, unassuming local-level politician called Deenabandhu Verma, 43, whose only claim of closeness to the power-centre is that he happens to be Rajasthan Chief Minister Shiv Charan Mathur's brother-in-law, may not cut much ice against a powerful Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate.

The BJP has fielded one of their longest-standing party functionaries, Sunder Singh Bhandari, who not only happens to be a native of the city, but was a Rajya Sabha member till he lost his seat last term. Confident of his public image in the city, the soft-spoken, bespectacled Bhandari said on election eve: “The personality factor which worked to Sukhadia's advantage in 1980 could prove the biggest thing in my favour.”

Crucial Factor: Though Bhandari is by far the best-known candidate in the city, Udaipur constituency covers a large tract of rural populace, covering some 3,000 villages and an electorate that approximates 7.5 lakh voters. Clearly if the vote among the Rajputs in the constituency, numbering some 19,000, is divided to the ultimate advantage of the Congress(I), it is because the two main opposition parties, the BJP and the Janata Party (JP) have been unable to resolve their differences and together combat the ruling party.

Earlier in the election it was rumoured that the JP candidate Kalyan Singh Kalvi would withdraw in favour of the BJP to ensure its lead. But the idea of such a reconciliation has come to nothing. Says a disgruntled Congress(I) worker of his party's prevailing chances: “It's still going to be a tough fight. Our party should have known better than picking the chief minister's brother-in-law. They should have picked a member of Sukhadia's family—that would have had much more effect.” Although former chief minister of the state Harideo Joshi is orchestrating the Congress(I) campaign, dissension in the ranks of the ruling party is in part provoked by other disgruntled leaders who were till not so long ago part of Jagannath Pahadia's outsize ministry. They have now washed their hands of the campaign. This has further weakened the Congress(I)'s chances—but the crucial factor the way Udaipur votes will depend on the swing among the majority of Rajputs.

—SUNIL SETHI in Udaipur

THANE

Samant's Folly



IT WAS probably the greatest miscalculation of his meteoric career. Pitting himself against the highly organised might of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the ruling Congress(I), labour militant Dr Datta Samant spent the past fortnight in a hectic campaign for the key Lok Sabha by-election in Thane near Bombay. The unionist's white Premier and Ambassador were familiar sights in the industrial belt and borrowed Matador vans and jeeps toured the constituency with pos-