



Himachal Votes 2012

4

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Construction of the building that today houses the Vidhan Sabha in Shimla cost Rs 10 lakh in 1925. Photo: Amit Kanwar

August assembly, since 1925

RAKESH LOHUMI

HIMACHAL PRADESH came into being on April 15, 1948, after merging 30 erstwhile princely states, and it was brought under a Lt Governor with a 36-member Legislative Assembly. The first election was held in 1952. The strength of its Assembly was raised to 41 after merger of Bilaspur in 1954.

The state managed to retain its separate identity despite majority recommendation of the States Reorganisation Commission for its merger with Punjab in 1956, but it was made a Union Territory, sans Legislative Assembly and instead provided with a Territorial Council with limited powers. It was only after a long-drawn struggle by the political leadership of the state that the Council was converted into a Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory in 1963. It had a strength of 43, including two nominated members.

The merger

With the merger of hill areas of Punjab into Himachal Pradesh in 1966, the strength of the House rose to 56, including two nominated members, and then



Photo: Kamaljeet

The Dharamsala complex

A second complex to house the state Assembly was built at Sidhbari in Dharamsala in December 2006, where the sittings are held during the winter move. The current Vidhan Sabha, the eleventh, completes its term in December.

further to 63 (three nominated). It was made a full-fledged state on January 25, 1971, after which delimitation of Assembly seats was carried out, raising the number to 68.

The building

The structure that houses the present Vidhan Sabha was originally raised for the Council Chamber in 1925. It stands

as a fine specimen of the architecture of the imperial era and is recognised for its beauty and grandeur.

The construction was started in 1920 and the edifice was completed and inaugurated by Lord Reading, the then Viceroy of India, on August 27, 1925. Having chosen Shimla as the summer capital, the British needed a comfortable accommodation for the Central

Assembly, for which this majestic structure was built. It came up close to the 'Kennedy House', which was built by the founder of Shimla, Major Kennedy, at a cost of about Rs 10 lakh, a huge amount at that time.

During Partition, the Punjab Government was shifted to Shimla, and it held the Assembly sittings in this building. The Assembly of Himachal had the pride of having its sittings in the Chamber after the Punjab Assembly was shifted to Chandigarh. Earlier, it used to hold meetings in the Vice-regal Lodge, which today housed the Indian Institute of Advanced Study.

New look

After the revival of Legislature on July 1, 1963, the first session of the Assembly was held in the Council Chamber from October 1, 1963. The entire furniture of the Chamber was replaced during the silver jubilee of the State Legislative Assembly in 1988 and the shape of the Hall has been changed from rectangular to a 'U', with seating capacity for 72.

Thus, it has the distinction of housing the Central Legislative Assembly, the Punjab Legislative Assembly, the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

SPEAKERS

■ **Jaiwant Ram** First Speaker

■ **Des Raj Mahajan**

Oct 4, 1963, to March 18, 1967

■ **Kulter Chand Rana**

March 28, 1972 to June 29, 1977

■ **Sarwan Kumar**

March 30, 1977, to April 18, 1979

■ **T.S. Negi**

May 8, 1979, to Sept 14, 1984

■ **Vidya Stokes**

March 11, 1985, to March 19, 1990

■ **Radha Raman Shastri**

March 21, 1990, to Aug 17, 1990

■ **T.S. Negi**

August 20, 1990, to Dec 14, 1993

■ **Kaul Singh Thakur**

Dec 15, 1993, to March 12, 1998

■ **Gulab Singh Thakur**

March 30, 1998, to March 7, 2003

■ **Gangu Ram Musafir**

March 12, 2003, to Jan 10, 2008

■ **Tulsi Ram**

January 11, 2008 to date

NADAUN 40 Voters: 80,482; MLA: Sukhwinder Singh (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Sukhwinder Singh (48)

Congress
MA, LLB
Assets: Rs 1,54,22,000
Sitting MLA.

Vijay Agnihotri (45)

BJP
MA, LLB
Assets: Rs 3,28,000
Lost 2007 election by 586 votes; former ABVP leader.

NAGROTA 15 Voters: 74,500; MLA: GS Bali (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

GS Bali (58)

Congress
Diploma in mechanical engg
Assets: Rs 24 crore
Former minister and leading businessman.

Mangal Chaudhary (52)

BJP
BA, BEd
Assets: Rs 20 lakh.
A junior party leader.

Arun Mehra Kukka (48)

Independent (Congress Rebel)
Matriculate
Assets: Rs 28 lakh.
Former loyalist of GS Bali, now backed by rebels.

NAHAN 56 Voters: 66,664; MLA: Kush Parmar (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Kush Parmar (68)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 2,35,40,00
Son of late Dr YS Parmar, founder of Himachal; five-time MLA.

Rajeev Bindal (57)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 6,42,99,02
Former health minister, forced to shift from Solan after delimitation.

Sadanand Chauhan (62)

Lok Jan Shakti Party
10+2
Assets: Rs 15,59,09,21
Won the seat in 2003, lost in 2007.

Shyama Sharma (63)

HLP
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 2,05,54,700
Former minister, contested all polls since 1977.

NALAGARH 51 Voters: 74,127; MLA: Lakhwinder Rana (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Lakhwinder Rana (44)

Congress
BA
Assets: Rs 12.82 crore
Sitting MLA, won seat for the first time in last year's byelection.

KL Thakur (51)

BJP
BTech
Assets: Rs 80.30 lakh
Recently joined the BJP to enter poll fray after seeking VRS from state government job.

NURPUR 06 Voters: 74,523; MLA: Rakesh Pathania (Ind)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Ajay Mahajan (54)

Congress
BA
Assets: Rs 2 crore

Ranvir Nikka (33)

BJP
Matriculate
Assets: Rs 9 crore

Rakesh Pathania (48)

Independent
10+2
Assets: Rs 2.25 crore

Main contest considered to be between BJP rebel Rakesh Pathania and Congress candidate Ajay Mahajan. BJP candidate Ranvir Nikka is weak as entire BJP cadre with Rakesh Pathania.

PACHHAD (SC) 55 Voters: 62,031; MLA: Gangu Ram Musafir (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Gangu Ram Musafir (67)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 92,17,275
Former Speaker and ex-minister; won the seat seven times in a row.

Suresh Kumar (41)

BJP
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 45,55,94
Contesting for the second time, lost in 2007.

PALAMPUR 19 Voters: 63,613; MLA: Praveen Sharma (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Praveen Sharma (46)

BJP
BA
Assets: Rs 42.38 lakh
Won for the first time in the 2007 polls from Palampur; a staunch Shanto loyalist.

Brij Bihari Lal Butail (71)

Congress
BA, LLB
Assets: Rs 169 crore
CPS in Virbhadra regime; won Assembly polls in 1985, 1993, 1998, 2003; richest politician.

PAONTA SAHIB 58 Voters: 64,532; MLA: Sukh Ram (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Sukh Ram (48)

BJP
10+2
Assets: Rs 1,84,79,741
Chief Parliamentary Secretary won the seat in 2003 and 2007.

Onkar Singh (66)

Congress
Under-matric
Assets: Rs 4,35,60,918
Newcomer and influential transporter.

Kirmesh Jung (55)

Independent
10+2
Assets: Rs 5,03,11,813
Lost to Sukh Ram in 2007 when he contested as Congress candidate.

RAMPUR (SC) 66 Voters: 66,440; MLA: Nand Lal (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Nand Lal (58)

Congress
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 94,54,454
Former police officer, won the seat in 2007.

Prem Singh (56)

BJP
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 1,40,00,482
Quit civil services to contest Assembly polls.

Ninju Ram (66)

HLP
10+2
Assets: Rs 58,08,849
Won as Janata Party MLA in 1977, left BJP to contest on HLP ticket.

ROHRU (SC) 67 Voters: 64,596; MLA: Khushi Ram Balaotah (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Mohan Lal (47)

Congress
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 59,55,000
Enjoys backing of Virbhadra Singh

Balak Ram Negi (58)

BJP
10+2
Assets: Rs 32,98,447
Retired official of irrigation and public health department.

SARKAGHAT 35 Voters: 74,570; MLA: Inder Singh Thakur (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Inder Singh Thakur (69)

BJP
Postgraduate
IIT, Delhi
Assets: Rs 63.78 lakh
Fought three elections; won in 2007.

Rangila Ram Rao (65)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 1.17 crore
Dominated Sarkaghat, erstwhile Gopalpur seat, seven times; became minister.

SERAJ 29 Voters: 67,549; MLA: Jai Ram Thakur (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Jai Ram Thakur (47)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 69.12 lakh
Winning since 1998, beat Cong's Shiv Lal in 2003, 2007; minister at present.

Tara Thakur (50)

Congress
Postgraduate, JBT teacher
Assets: Rs 1.18 crore
New comer, daughter of ex-Cong Seraj MLA late Moti Ram.

SHAHPUR 17 Voters: 72,475; MLA: Sarveen Chaudhary (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Vijai Singh Mankotia (72)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 36 lakh
Charismatic, but out of touch with the masses for long.

Sarveen Chaudhary (47)

BJP
MA
Assets: Rs 37 lakh
Minister for Social Justice
Hard working, will put up tough fight.

SHILLAI 59 Voters: 57,096; MLA: Harsh Wardhan (Cong)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Harsh Wardhan (48)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 79,44,072
Son of late Congress minister Guman Singh; won last four polls.

Baldev Singh (41)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 56,13,072
Contesting as BJP candidate, had lost security deposit in 2007.

SHIMLA 63 Voters: 51,746; MLA: Suresh Bhardwaj (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Suresh Bhardwaj (60)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 55,54,665
Former state BJP chief, ex-Rajya Sabha MP; won the seat in 1990.

Harish Janartha (47)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 3,28,57,708
Former Deputy Mayor of Shimla MC, making his debut.

Tikender Panwar (41)

CPM
Graduate
Assets: Rs 3,05,80,584
Effective youth leader and Deputy Mayor of Shimla MC

SHIMLA RURAL 64 Voters: 67,442; MLA: New constituency

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Virbhadra Singh (78)

Congress
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 33,65,64,971
Five-time Chief Minister.

Ishwar Rohal (62)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 2,60,30,931
Newcomer, currently chairman of block development committee.

SRI RENUKAJI (SC) 57 Voters: 57,096; MLA: Hardaya Ram (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Hardaya Ram (50)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 77,35,000
Former officer, won the seat during last year's byelection.

Vinay Kumar (34)

Congress
10+2
Assets: Rs 1,06,37,000
Son of late Prem Singh who won the seat six times.

SUJANPUR 37 Voters: 65,606; MLA: New constituency

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Anita Verma (59)

Congress
BSc
Assets: Rs 64,82,240
President of All-India Mahila Congress.

Urmil Thakur (53)

BJP
BA
Assets: Rs 51,32,918
Sitting MLA from Hamirpur.

Rajinder Singh Rana (46)

Independent
BA
Assets: Rs 11,17,50,000
New entrant, chairman of media advisory committee in present govt.

SULLAH 14 Voters: 88,971; MLA: Bipan Singh Parmar (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Bipan Singh Parmar (49)

BJP
BA, LLB
Assets: Rs 99,42 lakh
Won Assembly polls in 1998, 2007.

Jaggiwan Pal (58)

Congress
Pharmacy course
Assets: Rs 26.84 lakh
Won Assembly election in 2003 for the first time.

SUNDERNAGAR 27 Voters: 66,822; MLA: Roop Singh Thakur (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Sohanlal (54)

Congress
Law graduate
Assets: Rs 3.69 crore
Defeated Roop Singh in 2003; brother of late Sher Singh Thakur, Congress MLA.

Roop Singh (64)

Independent
Low graduate
Assets: Rs 1.37 crore
Six-time BJP MLA, two times minister; lost in 2003.

Rakesh Jamval (38)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 31 lakh
BYJM state president and ABVP activist.

THEOG 61 Voters: 73,500; MLA: Rakesh Verma (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Vidya Stokes (84)

Congress
Graduate
Assets: Rs 8,05,11,841
Leader of Opposition, returned to Theog after Kumarsain seat was scrapped.

Rakesh Verma (50)

BJP
Graduate
Assets: Rs 5,96,45,377
Won the seat thrice as Independent; contesting on BJP ticket.

Rakesh Singha (56)

CPM
Postgraduate
Assets: Rs 17,28,11,09
Senior CPM leader, won from Shimla seat in 1993; shifted to his native segment this time.

UNA 44 Voters: 71,672; MLA: Sat Pal Singh Satti (BJP)

MAIN CONTESTANTS

Sat Pal Singh Satti (48)

BJP
MPHIL
Assets: Rs 2,37,94,250
State president of BJP and CPS.

Sat Pal Singh Raizada (42)

Congress
Matriculate
Assets: Rs 1,94,37,600
New entrant; former NSUI leader