

Axe on defectors, cap on govt size

Cabinet clears electoral reforms Bill

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 11

THE UNION Cabinet cleared two major proposals for electoral reforms late on Wednesday night. It approved a Bill to amend the Constitution that would disallow defectors from holding offices of profit till they are re-elected and impose a cap on ministry sizes.

The Bill, which will be tabled in the ongoing session of Parliament, puts the cap on ministries at 15 per cent of the size of the Lok Sabha or the lower Houses of state legislatures. For smaller states, the limit will be 12 per cent.

A 44-member parliamentary standing committee headed by Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee had submitted a report last week suggesting changes in the original Bill, which had proposed that ministries be limited to 10 per cent of the strength of both Houses of Parliament and legislatures.

In a Cabinet briefing on Thursday, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said the government had accepted the recommendations of the standing committee and finalised the 97th Constitution (Amendment) Bill on electoral reforms.

The Cabinet also cleared a clutch of other Bills. Reservations for women in cantonment boards were approved. A citizenship Bill will also be reintroduced in Parliament following recommendations on the status of

12/12/03 Rightsizing ministries

	House size	Ministry strength	Bill allows
Over the top			
Mizoram	40	14	4
Manipur	60	32	7
Bihar	243	63	36
Uttar Pradesh	403	97	60
On the edge			
Orissa	147	25	22
Maharashtra	288	48	43
West Bengal	294	46	44

persons of Indian origin made by the standing committee.

The Cabinet ratified the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The framework convention is expected to pave the way for the enactment of a comprehensive law to ban the advertisement of tobacco products.

DNA profiling also figured on the Cabinet's agenda. It cleared legislation to constitute a committee to advise the government on the issue. An extradition treaty between India and Kuwait was also approved.

SIRENS OF CHANGE

Women tempt. They do not just tempt men, they tempt speculation, classification, theory, in short, everything that pretends to be fascinated by the female mystery on the one hand and claims to understand it like an open book on the other. So when in the elections to assemblies in five states, three women bag the winner's prizes, the temptation to theorize is overwhelming. Only this time the old theories will not do. The lady from the Congress has beaten the anti-incumbency trend shown in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, and is to be chief minister of Delhi for another five years. In presence and personality, she is dramatically different from the other two winners, Ms Uma Bharti and Ms Vijaya Raje. Ms Sheila Dikshit has grown in stature as a no-nonsense politician, who saw to it that her electorate had cleaner air and faster routes, found the government accessible and daily life peaceful.

But Ms Bharti and Ms Raje share nothing in common either, except their party. Ms Bharti comes from the other backward classes. She has been for years the saffron-clad politician and demagogue who tends to go over the top and get away with it — her theatrical predilection for the well-aimed push is now a part of India's Babri Masjid lore — and who is not unnecessarily bothered by reason or truth-telling. But the Bharatiya Janata Party strategists projected her as a development guru in the making, whose down-to-earth passion was directed not against a religion but against the failed promises of Mr Digvijay Singh. As the *raja* fell in Madhya Pradesh, the *rajกุมari* rose in

Rajasthan, different from Ms Bharti in caste, background and demeanour, far from streetwise, almost unknown outside her own region. Again it was strategy that worked. The BJP backroom boys master-minded a *parivartan yatra*. As the princess sweated through villages across the length and breadth of Rajasthan, and advertisements, slogans and jokes burgeoned on newspaper pages, television screens and mobile windows, the exotic unfamiliar became more desirable than the plodding familiar.

Neither gender, nor caste, nor party, nor even strategy can explain this. Women lost too: Ms Sonia Gandhi, Ms Ambika Soni. To look elsewhere for explanations is to look at the direction that India's democracy seems to be taking. However indirectly, the people are demanding accountability and improvement. It is change they want: the *parivartan yatra* was symbolic. Anyone who seems to promise change, to represent it by his very presence, is worth a try. Ms Raje changed into

That three women have become chief ministers is a sign of the churning in Indian politics. The keynote of the elections was change

the clothes of each village she visited, sometimes in the helicopter that took her there. For a sheltered princess, this is change enough. Mr Ashok Gehlot, whose record on development is not bad at all, could not match this in dynamism. Ms Bharti's rhetoric shifted radically from religion to development. And as an active, vocal politician, she is very far from the *Hindutva*-patronized ideal of the woman-in-the-home. Ms Dikshit has already brought changes, at least in the people's perception. People are looking for difference, and maybe, in the process, India's democracy is growing up.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2003

A BRUTAL BLOW TO CONGRESS AMBITIONS

WHILE CONFOUNDING MOST poll pundits, the Bharatiya Janata Party has surprised itself by wresting three out of the four Hindi-belt States decisively from its chief adversary. Contrary to popular expectation, the BJP scored an emphatic win in Rajasthan, an unexpected performance for a party that bagged 33 out of 200 seats in the 1998 Assembly election. This is also the first time the party has won a simple majority in the State. In Chhattisgarh, which went to the polls for the first time, the BJP managed to overcome the embarrassment of the Judev tapes and Ajit Jogi's acclaimed election management skills to register a clear-cut victory. While the party's success in Madhya Pradesh was never in doubt, the huge margin of victory has shell-shocked a Congress that had initially hoped Digvijay Singh would be able to moderate the anti-incumbency trend. The exception to the strong trend was Delhi, where Sheila Dixit, having done commendable work as Chief Minister by focussing on basic issues of governance, was always sitting pretty. Overall, the election results, which must be read as a powerful verdict against Congress policies under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi, have dealt a brutal — possibly a fatal — blow to the ambitions of the Congress to form the next Government at the Centre.

The specific outcomes in this major round of contests foreshadowing the 2004 general elections were clearly shaped by multiple factors ranging from general issues relating to governance to specific political variables, such as caste mobilisation and special campaigning in tribal areas, which have made a significant difference at the local and regional levels. Most of all, the results reflect a mood that is increasingly shaping the outcome of India's elections — the sentiment of anti-incumbency. As the election campaign moved into high gear, it became clear that anti-incumbency and the desire for a change had joined forces to generate an irresistible wave in Madhya Pradesh. The BJP, after initially flirting with a Hindutva campaign plank in this State, dropped it in favour of highlighting — very successfully — the failures of governance in terms of

providing basic facilities such as electricity, roads, and water. In Rajasthan, Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's track record of prompt decision-making and prudent drought management was apparently not enough to dispel the sentiment for change, which was aided and abetted by a new kind of activism by caste-based organisations. While Mr. Jogi seemed initially to have the caste arithmetic and the social equations working in his favour, the masses of voters demonstrated they were tired of his manipulative ways. In all three States, the Congress has reason for special worry as its adversary has made serious inroads into tribal areas traditionally dominated by the Congress. What is notable is that the BJP studiously avoided playing the Hindutva card this time.

The BJP's triumphs in what was projected as a mini-general election will provide it with a certain comfort level in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election, due in late 2004. These gains will go a long way towards overturning the general impression that the party is losing ground in what used to be regarded as its core constituency — the 'Hindi heartland'. At a national level, the prospect of an unequal Atal Bihari Vajpayee vs Sonia Gandhi billing for the coming big contest is likely to spread nervousness and despondency among Congress supporters. An interesting question is how the latest election results will affect the shape of politics in the run-up to the big contest. The Congress' demoralising performance could prompt potential allies to rethink their strategies; in this connection, the attitude of Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party will be keenly watched. On the other hand, the results are likely to make BJP allies such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam think long and hard before leaving the National Democratic Alliance. Hopes of going with the swing could tempt the BJP to consider the idea of advancing the Lok Sabha election to early 2004. However, since the revised electoral rolls will be ready only in end-January and since the Election Commission has indicated it will not be rushed into polls, the choice is really between advancing the general election to summer and holding it when it is due. Nothing much hinges, it now seems, on the timing of this contest.

BJP sweeps Hindi heartland

● CONGRESS RETAINS DELHI ● ANTI-INCUMBENCY TREND IN THREE STATES

● TWO NEW WOMEN CHIEF MINISTERS ● HINDUTVA CARD NOT PLAYED



The victors, Sheela Dikshit in New Delhi, Vasundhara Raje in Jaipur, and Uma Bharti in Bhopal, after the election results were announced. In the last photograph, Raman Singh, BJP Chhattisgarh unit president, who could become chief minister.

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, DEC. 4. The Bharatiya Janata Party today scored a morale-boosting victory when it crushed the Congress in the Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh Assembly elections. Its juggernaut, however, halted in Delhi where the Congress comfortably retained its majority, defying the anti-incumbency pattern. These States had gone to the polls on December 1 and the counting of votes was taken up today.

The BJP's margin of victory in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan not only astounded the party's leadership but also revived the talk of an early Lok Sabha poll, at least among the second-rung leaders.

In Madhya Pradesh, with Uma Bharti as its chief ministerial candidate, the BJP cruised to a two-thirds majority, bringing to an end Digvijay Singh's decade-long inning as Chief Minister. The BJP inflicted a comprehensive defeat on its traditional rival, the Congress. Its "no roads, no electricity, no

votes" plank just managed to tap the public mood of disenchantment with the Digvijay Singh regime.

Similarly, in Rajasthan, with Vasundhara Raje as its chief ministerial mascot, the BJP bucked history and crossed the 100-seat mark. The party had made an issue of the Government's drought relief management in the last five years. The incumbent Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, and the Congress eventually paid the price for incessant factional fights, which even the "high command" could not tackle. The unsettled Jats versus Gehlot dispute en-

abled the BJP to poach on this traditional Congress vote bank.

But the BJP's most satisfying victory came in Chhattisgarh where it found itself pitted against its successful rival in the government.

The Prime Minister and other Central Ministers had tried to impress upon the Delhi voters that the National Capital Region would experience better "development" if they were to vote for the same party that ruled at the Centre. But the BJP's old war-horse, Madanlal Khurana, failed to excite the cadre and his politics of negativism did not cut much ice with the voters.

the voter's sullen mood.

However, in Delhi the BJP magic failed to dislodge the Sheila Dikshit Government, despite the electorate's physical proximity to the Central Government.

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ASSEMBLY ELECTION RESULTS



Delhi	
Total seats	70
Congress	47
BJP	20
Others	3

Chhattisgarh	
Total seats	90
BJP	50
Congress	36
Others	3

Rajasthan	
Total seats	200
BJP	120
Congress	56
Others	24

Madhya Pradesh	
Total seats	230
BJP	172
Congress	39
Others	19

Graphics by Varqhes Kalladi

The decisive victory notched up by the BJP on the "development" agenda (to the exclusion of what it calls its traditional emotive issues such as the electricity dispute) is already being hailed as a triumph of the politics of development preferred by the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The saleability of this "development" theme is likely to be picked up by the second-rung leaders in the BJP who are keen that the party should opt for an early election (sometime in March/April, 2004).

The Prime Minister, who left the afternoon for Nigeria to at-

for the airport, jubilant BJP leaders thronged his residence.

In particular, Mr. Vajpayee heard detailed reports from Prasad Mahajan, in-charge of Rajasthan, and Arun Jaitley, who had masterminded the party's campaign in Madhya Pradesh.

After a brief conclave of the party managers, the BJP president, M. Venkaiah Naidu, told reporters that there had been no discussion about an early Lok Sabha poll.

For the Congress, the loss of the three States, especially Rajasthan, has come as a total shock. Its leadership was at a loss to explain away the comprehensive defeats in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The victory in Delhi in no way compensates for the loss in the other three States.

The drubbing it received should start the process of realignment of the non-BJP/NDA forces.

The victory in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan has restored the BJP's national political sustainability, which had become suspect after the collapse of the Mayawati (BJP-supported) Government in Uttar Pradesh.

The BJP's victory is expected to cast its shadow on the precariously-held Congress-ruled States such as Punjab, Maharashtra and Karnataka, as also it will have considerable bearing on the Andhra Pradesh poll in 2004.

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Company for Jaya and Rabri

■ New Delhi (PTI): Women never had it so good in India with two more of them set to assume power in the states in addition to the three already at the helm of affairs.

With Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan and Uma Bharti in Madhya Pradesh set to become chief ministers, in addition to Sheila Dikshit in Delhi, Rabri Devi in Bihar and Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu, it will be the first time that five states would have women chief ministers while consensus is still elusive on 33 per cent reservation for women in state legislatures and Parliament.

Earlier, Uttar Pradesh had two women chief ministers in Sucheta Kriplani and Mayavati, Punjab in Rajinder Kumar Bhattal, Assam in Anwara Taimur, Goa in Shashikala Kakodkar, Tamil Nadu in Janki Ramachandran, Orissa in Nandini Satapathy and Delhi in Sushma Swaraj.

Margin master

■ New Delhi (PTI): Delhi education minister Raj Kumar Chauhan not only retained his Mangolpuri Assembly seat, but also secured the highest margin. Chauhan defeated nearest rival Megh Singh of the Bahujan Samaj Party by a record margin of 30,315 votes. The BJP came a poor third with its candidate Raju Balmiki polling 8,670 votes. The BJP candidate from Saket, Vijay Jolly, defeated the Congress' Rohit Manchanda by the lowest margin of 121 votes.

JUBILANT



Congress candidate from Delhi's Hauz Khas Kiran Walla celebrates on Thursday. (PTI)

RSS free hand

■ New Delhi (PTI): The RSS has remained non-committal about early Lok Sabha polls, saying it was for the BJP to decide. "It is for the BJP to decide. We have no opinion. The present position is favourable to the BJP and it is a good situation," RSS spokesperson Ram Madhav said. "If the time is conducive, they can go ahead." Congratulating the BJP, he said while in Madhya Pradesh it was a "direct fight" between Digvijay Singh and the Hindutva ideology, in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the victory could be attributed to both the BJP leadership and the Sangh parivar.

Bypoll balm

■ New Delhi (PTI): The saffron wave has failed to make any dent in Gujarat where the Congress romped home in Jamalpur. The Congress retained the Jamalpur Assembly seat for the second time by a huge margin. In Kerala, the United Democratic Front, led by Congress chief minister A.K. Antony, notched up a morale-boosting win in Thiruvalla, warding off stiff challenges from Opposition LDF and the Karunakaran faction in the party. Kerala Congress (M) candidate Elizabeth Mammen Mathai defeated Verghese George of the Janata Dal (S) by 4,669 votes.

Manager Mahajan's secret masala



SWEET AND SOUR: Atal Bihari Vajpayee gives M. Venkaiah Naidu a mouthful of laddoo and the taste of success while a somber Sonia Gandhi walks out of her residence after the results were announced. (Pictures by Rajesh Kumar, AFP)



Making of Raje, unmaking of Jogi

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Dec. 4: A high-voltage and focused campaign, cohesive teamwork, professional surveys, "meticulous" candidate selection and the ability to juggle social equations have seen the BJP come up trumps.

The party has recorded its best-ever showing in Rajasthan, a stronghold from the Jan Sangh era, and grabbed Chhattisgarh from Ajit Jogi, whom they regarded as the "wildest" opponent they had to contend with.

From the onset, the BJP thought Madhya Pradesh would be a "cakewalk" since its first internal survey showed it had the "highest degree of anti-incumbency". Similarly, the Congress-BJP gap in Delhi was shown to be "pretty much unbridgeable".

Thus, BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan, who was handed overall charge of the elections, decided to concentrate on Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, leaving Madhya Pradesh to law minister Arun Jaitley.

Party sources said Rajasthan appeared a tough call till a month ago until chief ministerial candidate Vasundhara Raje managed to overcome some initial disadvantages. Even though she is a five-time MP from Jhalawar

in southeastern Rajasthan, Vasundhara was not well-known in the state.

One of Mahajan's first moves was to organise a "parivar" (change) rally to familiarise the chief ministerial candidate with the terrain and people.

Vasundhara got a blueprint on each district with geographical, social and political data from a polling agency. Sources said the "familiarisation" trip helped her strike a rapport with the people, but still, she did not emerge a household name.

In the penultimate phase of polling, Vasundhara was asked to focus on 37 constituencies in which she was an "unknown".

In the absence of a central issue and given the over-riding importance of caste in the state, the BJP decided to project its candidate as a leader who did not represent any caste. "She is actually a Maratha married into a Jat family and her son is married into the only Gujar royal clan Rajasthan has," a source said.

The strategy to "de-casteise" Vasundhara sprang from the perception that chief minister Ashok Gehlot's backward caste origins had "antagonised" the upper castes, which are still powerful in Rajasthan unlike in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Also,

Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat's Rajput leanings had made the powerful Jats turn against the BJP. "In a sense, Shekhawat's departure (from the state) helped us consolidate the Jat support because there was no anti-Rajput feeling left in them," sources said.

The Jats, who have traditionally voted for the Congress, also veered towards the BJP because they viewed the Gehlot-Samajik Nyaya Manch grouping with suspicion.

The Manch had spearheaded a campaign for the upper-caste poor and challenged the inclusion of Jats in the Other Backward Classes category, saying this would deprive the genuinely backward classes of the benefits of reservation. As a result, the Jats regarded the Congress-Manch grouping to be a "conspiracy" to snatch away their new status.

The BJP cashed in on their disenchantment with the Congress by stepping in to help the four candidates fielded by the Jat Mahasabha and used celebrity Jats in its campaign. The BJP roped in *bona fide* Jats Sahib Singh Verma and Dara Singh as well as Hema Malini, who is married to a Jat, actor Dharmendra. Verma is a Union minister while Singh and Hema have re-

cently become Rajya Sabha members.

In Madhya Pradesh, the BJP managed to overcome the initial opposition to Uma Bharti's candidature by getting the RSS to endorse her and by winning over the old guard.

But in Rajasthan, party veterans refused to accept Vasundhara till the last. Some veterans were handed tickets to reduce their potential for damage, but others still tried to hurt her chances.

Faced with their intransigence, Mahajan roped in 175 BJP workers and MLAs from his home state, Maharashtra, and assigned each of them a constituency.

Aware that there had been a "youth upsurge" in the state, a quick poll was conducted among 1,000 young voters to gauge their preference. "Most of them were attracted to Vasundhara's sophisticated, non-nonsense image," sources said. On polling day, a special drive was undertaken to mobilise young voters.

If the RSS was non-existent during the Rajasthan campaign, the work put in by the Sangh's Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams in tribal Chhattisgarh helped swing tribal votes the BJP's way. The party won most of its seats from the tribal belt.

STAR POWER



Hema Malini, Dara Singh: Made a difference in the Jat belt

Sonia denied solo credit too

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 4: Sonia Gandhi must be feeling as shocked as she would had she been in the driver's seat and three tyres of her car burst simultaneously.

With the Congress gameplan going bust in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, questions are bound to be raised in the party about her share of responsibility in the debacle. In the run-up to the polls, the Congress chief had rejected the clamour for change of guard in the last two states.

Sonia stayed put at 10 Janpath during the day, showing up only briefly at the annual Navy Day function. She even skipped Parliament.

Sonia told reporters she was "deeply disappointed" and that the party needed to pull up its socks for the big challenge next year. Acknowledging the anti-incumbency wave, she said: "People expected much more from us. We could not perform to their expectations." She was particularly shocked at the Rajasthan outcome.

Congress chief spokesman Jaipal Reddy indicated the party might have totally failed to read the voters' minds in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh and to a lesser extent in Madhya Pradesh.

"In Madhya Pradesh, we have been in power for 10 long years. And in Rajasthan and Chhattis-

garh for five years. We see the results mostly as a product of the anti-incumbency factor," he said.

Reddy tried to downplay the debacle, saying the Congress had been losing and winning in these states in a cyclical manner over the last three decades.

But he took care to shield Sonia from responsibility for the defeats, and in the process deprived her of credit for the Delhi victory.

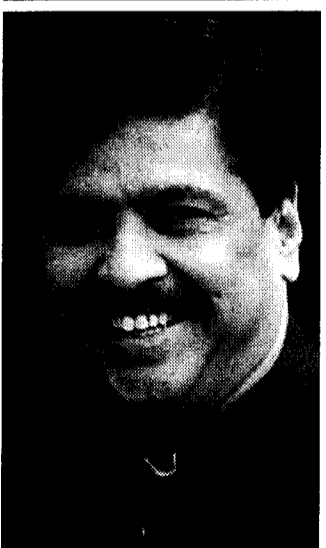
"We don't fault Sonia's leadership. We do not credit the victory of Delhi to her. Similarly, we don't debit the defeats in

her account," he said. "We hold none responsible for this outcome." Reddy hinted that Sonia may not convene a stocktaking session of the Congress working committee without deliberating with her aides. Leaders like Arjun Singh have not questioned her leadership but have made no secret of their grouse against AICC general secretary Ambika Soni.

Soni's problems are doubled because she was in charge of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. She had also made the Rajasthan polls a prestige issue.

Sonia's Kerala problems are likely to mount as rebel leader K. Karunakaran has been waiting to step up his campaign to oust chief minister A.K. Antony. Today's results could have given him that opening.

THE STRATEGISTS



Mahajan, Jaitley: Nut-and-bolt team

GeNext earns spurs, perfects a model

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 4: The celebrations haven't yet stopped, but calls for an encore have started pouring in.

As the trend became clear, leaders of the National Democratic Alliance and supporting parties began calling up Pramod Mahajan and Arun Jaitley to congratulate the two ace strategists and ask for a repeat performance for the bigger war ahead — next year's Lok Sabha polls.

Mahajan is credited with turning defeat into victory in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, two states where the BJP was not in the reckoning even a month ago. The former minister, who returned to the organisation as a general secretary, had been designated overall in-charge of the Assembly elections with special responsibility for these two states.

Jaitley, who was reintroduced into the cabinet after a short stint in the party organisation, was asked to look after Madhya Pradesh. Before he arrived on the scene, chief minister Digvijay Singh had his BJP rival Uma Bharti in knots over Hindutva-related controver-

sies. But once Jaitley was on the Bhopal battlefield, armed with facts and figures on the state's development, Digvijay was on the defensive.

Among those who called up the BJP duo today were Andhra Pradesh chief minister and Telugu Desam Party leader N. Chandrababu Naidu, defence minister George Fernandes and railway minister Nitish Kumar, both of the Samata Party, food minister Sharad Yadav of the Janata Dal (United), Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray and S.S. Dhindsa of the Akali Dal. BJP sources said Thackeray was the first to call Mahajan today.

The sources maintained that in these elections, the BJP Big Two — Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his deputy Lal Krishna Advani — had virtually no role to play in poll management except for ratifying the list of candidates. The nuts and bolts of electioneering were managed by Mahajan and Jaitley with their respective teams.

"It was the first polls conducted by GeNext. The success proves that the BJP is competent to run polls for the next 20 years," the sources said. With stiff resistance to the

projection of Vasundhara Raje and, to a lesser extent, Uma as chief ministerial candidates from the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh units, Mahajan and Jaitley created their own team of backroom boys for assistance.

The sources said Mahajan hopes to use the "Rajasthan model of poll management" for the Lok Sabha polls. Its features are careful selection of candidates, extensive use of poll data and inputs, including regular surveys of big samples, accommodating all social groups, "pumping" up rebels of rival parties and keeping the campaign focused.

The sources, however, stressed that the Mahajan-Jaitley success was unlikely to cause a churning in the BJP or upset the position of the party's president, M. Venkaiah Naidu, who will have to seek re-election this month.

Sources close to Mahajan maintained he was "very happy to continue in his present capacity". They said he is already working on a "grand strategy" for the 2004 parliamentary polls that would ensure an increase in the BJP's strength and involve seeking allies in places where the party is weak.

Core crumbles

► FROM PAGE 1

But, given that chief minister Ashok Gehlot counted the creation of 7 million labour days as a major achievement, it is a blow.

For the Sangh parivar, Madhya Pradesh was the key. The BJP ousted the Congress after a decade there. This was the only state mentioned at length in the Vijaya Dashami address of RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan. But Hindutva was at play in organisational terms mainly in Madhya Pradesh and also Chhattisgarh.

For the BJP this has been an election with a difference. It has beaten the Congress on grounds of the incumbent governments' non-performance, rather than on the emotive slogan of Hindutva. Unlike Uttar Pradesh in 1991 or Gujarat 2002, this was a campaign centred on governance-related issues. Whether the future will see a new kind of governance or not, the campaign was built around such promises.

On poll day, speaking to a journalist, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said there was no need for her to campaign as the "good work" of the Congress governments would see the party through. Since that has not happened, the pressure on the younger members of the clan to enter the ring will increase. But this has been a setback to the gameplan of the Congress — to capture and retain the states and then take the Centre.

As everyone gears up for the big battle for the Lok Sabha, it is the BJP that has a spring in its step.

Fallen Five

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Dec. 4: Ambika Soni, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Mukul Wasnik, Amarinder Singh, Motilal Vora — the list of heroes who plotted the Congress' return to power in Himachal Pradesh 10 months ago is long.

But in the face of the reverses in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh today, the star strategists are under the scanner. All of them and chief ministers Ashok Gehlot, Ajit Jogi and Digvijay Singh are likely to be examined by the rank and file on the debacle, especially with Lok Sabha elections due next year.

Down the line, there are several foot soldiers disappointed that their efforts came to naught. They were asked to keep an ear to the ground and provide feedback for the leadership to evolve effective poll strategies. Among them are AICC secretary B.K. Hariprasad and central observers Prithviraj Chavan, Hrishikesh Bahadur, Ashwini Kumar and P.K. Bansal.



Soni

Justhan were unanimous that at least a third of the 153 sitting MLAs ought to be changed. But this had no bearing on the candidates eventually picked.

The observers in Chhattisgarh had warned against converting the polls into a Jogi-versus-the-rest battle. "In Chhattisgarh, the Congress is a formidable force, far more formidable than Jogi the individual. But we ended up allowing the party identity to submerge in the identity of Jogi," rued one of them.

Saffron surges, Sonia singed

THREE WOMEN & A BOAST

he BJP's "generation next", two high-profile female politicians amongst them, today led the party to a thumping victory over its main contender for power, the Congress, in three of the four politically significant states in the heart of India for which elections were held a fortnight ago and votes counted on Thursday.

The results of the Assembly elections, widely touted as the "semi-finals" before the "final" or General Election scheduled for end-2004, surpassed, the Prime Minister admitted, even the most optimistic of the saffron camp's pre-poll projections. The outcome singed Mrs Sonia Gandhi who said the Congress would "have to pull up its socks" for the electoral battle ahead. (Mr Vajpayee, however, reiterated that the Lok Sabha poll "will not be advanced").

The BJP registered unprecedented wins in Madhya Pradesh where it obtained a three-fourth majority and looked on course for installing Ms Uma Bharati as chief minister. In Rajasthan, it pulled off a major upset under Ms Vasundhara Raje Scindia's leadership and crossed the 100-seat mark on its own in a House with a strength of 200. This is the BJP's best-ever performance in both states.

But, insiders said, the real twirling of the moustache — both literal and figurative — was caused by the win in Chhattisgarh where the BJP, Mr Dilip Singh Judeo in tow, was headed for a simple majority after besting the Jogi-led Congress in an acrimonious election. Mrs Sheila Dikshit was the only Congress chief minister to have survived the saffron onslaught as she was returned to power with a two-third majority despite losing a few seats to the BJP.

Of the factors that went into this remarkable comeback by a party that has been taunted over the past year by its principal rival for having "Modi as its only recognisable face" at the state-level, the role played by the hand-picked chief ministerial candidates ("principal campaigner", in Mr Judeo's case) was significant. But these "fresh faces" — picked for their relative youth, perceived charisma and as part of what Mr LK Advani has termed the project of transforming the BJP from a party that knows how to sustain an agitation to the "natural party of governance" — are nonetheless ideologically committed, if in a non-dogmatic sense, to Hindutva. The success these leaders had in keeping the traditional leadership in their respective states on-side was vital. Also, an effective — and very aggressive — campaign was run by the party's managers, their organisational ability, communication skills and ability to mix it up with the best in the dirty tricks department to the fore. And the BJP could depend on a party organisation that looks increasingly cohesive. Anti-incumbency, both against the state government and sitting MLAs was strong in all three states with Mr Digvijay Singh, Mr Ashok Gehlot and Mr Ajit Jogi all suffering but, crucially, there seems to have been no such sentiment against the Vajpayee-led Central government. A common Congress complaint was that unpopular MLAs weren't denied tickets and powerful leaders and their kin were allowed to pick and choose "safe" seats. — SNS



Uma Bharati: CM-in-waiting, MP



Vasundhara: CM-in-waiting, Rajasthan



Sheila Dikshit: CM again, Delhi



Dilip Singh Judeo: The man who gets to keep his moustache

An election for the books, this. One that's likely to result in three women politicians as chief ministers of states in 'conservative' north India and in an allegedly macho and very political incorrect politician called Dilip Singh Judeo — who boasted he'd shave off his luxuriant moustache if the BJP failed to wrest Chhattisgarh — keeping his hirsute upper-lip intact.

MADHYA PRADESH: Uma Bharati's star turn; Congress anti-incumbency; lack of power, roads a big issue
RAJASTHAN: Anti-incumbency especially at MLA level; unemployment an issue; Vasundhara Raje Scindia clicked
CHHATTISGARH: Anti-incumbency; Jogi's 'tainted' image
DELHI: BJP focussed on Sheila, not Congress; poor candidate selection by BJP; Khurana's 'know-all' attitude

Bloodletting after Congress blackout

CL Manoj in New Delhi

Dec. 4. — She didn't brush off the media today. But may be reporters' questions were less tough than those being asked by her own party colleagues. Mrs Sonia Gandhi was at the Navy Day reception in Delhi as results showed a huge Congress setback. Guests noted she kept her cool and, a rarity for her, interacted with journalists. Back home, the Congress president had to contend with a sharp change in her party's mood.

"Blackout in the northern power grid" is how one Congress leader described the results. Bloodletting may be the first political fallout. Although a challenge to Mrs Gandhi's leadership is now here in sight, muted questions are being asked in party circles whether the president, who led the campaign, has the "political will and acumen" to make the leadership and organisation "really pull up their socks".

The debacle in Rajasthan, where Mrs Gandhi "worked hard", is the rudest jolt, as Congress leaders see it. Her slogans of "good governance" and "model chief ministers" did not pay off. Worse, Congress strategists say, these victories have been for a "BJP minus overt Hindutva politics". "We are confused", a leader said.

Some Congress leaders also

feel cornered. Questions on Mrs Gandhi's style of political management are being asked softly. Louder are the doubts about some of her hand-picked aides. The scanner is on Ms Ambika Soni, Mrs Gandhi's closest aide, and the AICC in-charge for MP and Rajasthan. Mr Ahmed Patel, a Soni loyalist and the Congress chief's political secretary, is under fire as well.

Others likely to be handed parts of the blame are Mr Oscar Fernandes, Mr Vayalar Ravi, Mr Mukul Wasnik, Mr Naval Kishore Sharma and Mr Kamal Nath — the AICC secretariat team. Congress leaders and workers are asking why these politicians were "virtually invisible" in the states during the campaign when the BJP's second-rung leadership was "out in full force". "It looks as if only Mrs Gandhi and the four CMs led the campaign. Where were the bigwigs?" asked a dismayed party veteran.

Talking to The Statesman, Ms Soni ducked questions on whether she and her colleagues will offer to quit: "I am elected to a post. That (a resignation) is between me and my party president," she said. Not quite, say sidelined Congress leaders — "we need a clean up," one of them said emphatically. But will it extend to the top?

Full coverage of Assembly poll verdict 2003 on pages 5 & 6

Congress core crumbles

MAHESHRANGARAJAN

Barring Delhi, it was a saffron surge all the way. Not only did the Opposition BJP manage to wrest power from three Congress governments in a single day, an unprecedented event in its 23-year-old history, it went one better.

The mantra of the 21st century is new social combinations. But these have been played in a subtle manner in an election campaign dominated by issues of basic needs: power and water in Madhya Pradesh, jobs and industrial closures in Rajasthan. But in largely rural societies, the social engineering was critical to electoral success.

The Congress would have reason to be concerned with the results. Its share of states has fallen from 15 to 12, if Bihar is counted. But the BJP's list of state leaders shows a degree of social plurality. Two new incumbents are women: Uma Bharti and Vasundhara Raje. Bharti also increases the representation of other backward classes to two out of eight, Narendra Modi being the other. In addition, there are two adivasi chief ministers, one each in Arunachal Pradesh and Jharkhand. What is missing is more significant. None of the chief ministers is either a brahmin or a bania, the two communities traditionally the core of the party since the days of the Jan Sangh. In fact, in Delhi, the city where such groups were its backbone, it has been decisively defeated by the Congress.

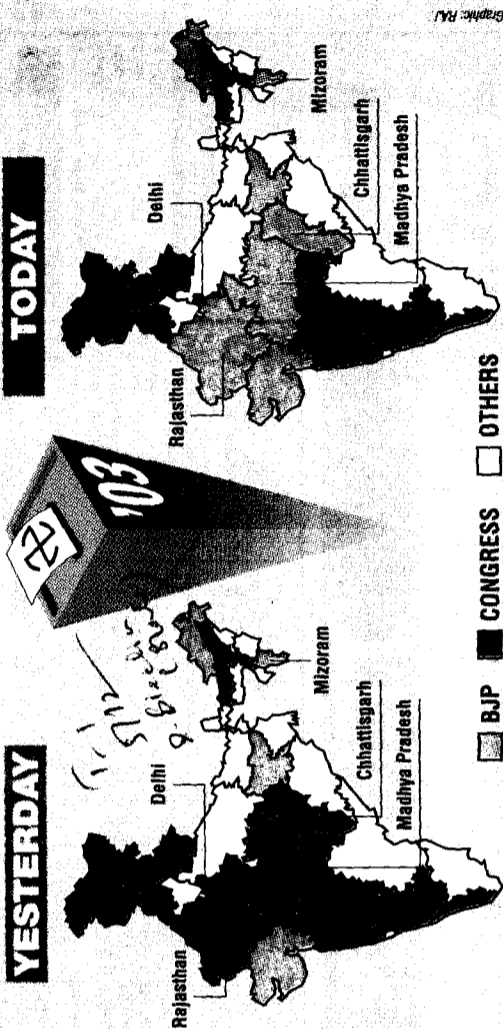
Detailed analysis indicates a major accretion for the BJP in core, traditional Congress bastions, including adivasi-dominated regions. In all, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan account for as many as 99 reserved scheduled tribe seats. The BJP took as many as 76 of them, leaving the Congress a paltry 16.

Chief minister Digvijay Singh in Bhopal had pinned hopes on adivasi voters sticking with the Congress. But the party suffered serious erosion. One factor may well have been the surge of the

THE BELLY CHANGES COLOUR

YESTERDAY

TODAY



Gondwana Gantantra Party of the numerically significant Gond tribe. The party won as many as eight seats, of which six were general constituencies. In the process, it provided tribal voters with an option to the BJP even as it ate into the Congress vote share.

In other pockets, the Hindutva factor may well have played a key role. In Jhabua, which abuts the Gujarat border of Madhya Pradesh, for instance, and even more so in Chhattisgarh. Contrary to Chhattisgarh's outgoing chief minister Ajit Jogi's hopes of cashing in on a tribal card, the promise of a cow and the long-term social work of the RSS-linked ashrams worked wonders. The BJP walked away with all but eight of the 34 reserved seats.

Dalits have a longer history of association with the BJP. But few had expected that in Rajasthan it would win as many as 26 of the 33 scheduled caste seats. The results here are less indicative of a surge of Dalit support. Unlike STs, the Dalits form a smaller proportion in the villages they live in.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

CONGRESS GAINS, BJP HUMBLLED IN MIZORAM

Mizo National Front back in power

By Barun Das Gupta

GUWAHATI, DEC. 2. The Mizo National Front (MNF) is back in power for the second time in Mizoram.

The results of 39 of the 40 seats, for which elections were held on November 20, are out: election was countermanded in one constituency — Suangpuilawn.

The MNF has retained not only power but also the 21 seats that it had in the outgoing Assembly.

The Chief Minister, Zoramthanga, said it "is the victory for peace, development and our party's policies."

The only consolation for the Congress, which hoped to come to power after cooling its heels for five years, is that it has been able to double its tally — from six to 12.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, which fielded eight candidates and hoped to win "at least" four seats and become a "deciding factor in Ministry-making," failed to open its account.

Another notable result of the election is that the Mizo People's Conference (MPC), which had 11 seats in the outgoing Assembly, has been reduced to three.

The Congress gained at the



The Mizoram Chief Minister and Mizo National Front leader, Zoramthanga.

PARTY POSITION

Total seats: 40
Result declared: 39
Mizo National Front: 21
(21 in the outgoing House);
Congress: 12 (6)
Zoram Nationalist
Party: 2
Mizoram People's Confer-
ence: 3 (11); and
Mara Democratic
Front: 1.

cost of the MPC. Also, there are no Independents. Earlier, there were two.

The former Chief Minister, Lalthanhawla, speaking to *The*

Hindu over the phone from Aizawl, said the Congress was defeated because "all our strongholds in the south were wrested from us by money power."

Mr. Lalthanhawla who contested from two constituencies — Champai and Serchip — lost to the Chief Minister at Champai but won from Serchip. Mr. Zoramthanga won the Kolasib seat too.

Mr. Lalthanhawla attributed his own defeat at Champai to the "use of rebels from Manipur and Myanmar who had terrorised the voters" into voting for the ruling party.

Mr. Zoramthanga called a joint meeting of the MNF executive and the newly-elected party MLAs at his residence at night and said that he would stake his claim to form the new Ministry in 24 hours.

Mr. Zoramthanga is also playing a catalytic role in bringing other militants groups of the northeastern region to the negotiation table.

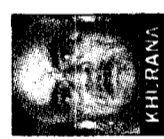
He has been a strong supporter of the Centre's peace negotiations with the NSCN (I-M) and he had held a few rounds of talks with the Naga outfit's top leadership in Bangkok.

MAIN SHEILA DIKSHIT BANNA CHAHTA HOON, WISH ALL THE OTHER THREE

DELHI

Handwritten notes:
 2003
 18-19
 2003

BJP	CONG
11	50
12-20	44-52
10-20	50-60
25	40

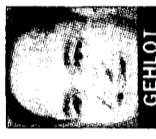


STAR NEWS
 ZEE NEWS
 AAJ TAK
 SAHARA SAMAY
 TOTAL SEATS

70
 Voter turnout: 48-50%

RAJASTHAN

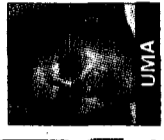
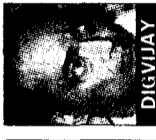
BJP	CONG
89	91
86-102	91-107
85-95	70-80
88	87



200
 Voter turnout: 60%

MADHYA PRADESH

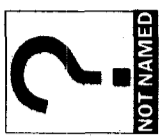
BJP	CONG
121	71
109-125	79-95
140-150	55-65
140	64



230
 Voter turnout: 60%

CHHATTISGARH

BJP	CONG
46	38
36-44	39-47
35-45	35-45
39*	40*



90
 * In %age
 Voter turnout: 60%

MADHYA PRADESH



STAR AAJ TAK ZEE

CONG 71 55-65 79-95 NA
OTHERS 38 15-25

Total seats: 230

RAJASTHAN



STAR AAJ TAK ZEE

91 70-80 91-107 NA
20 15-25

Total seats: 200

CHHATTISGARH



STAR AAJ TAK ZEE

38 35-45 39-47 NA
6 2-10

Total seats: 90

DELHI



Sheila Dikshit

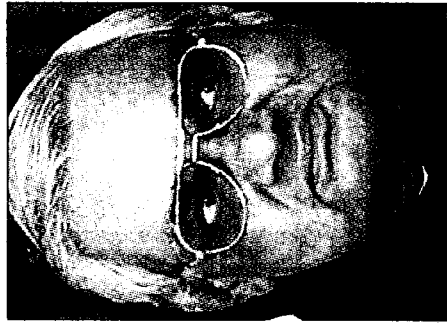
STAR AAJ TAK ZEE

50 50-60 44-52 NA
9 2-6

Total seats: 70

Graphic: RAJ

1-1 and into tie-breaker in two



Whoever laughs the last, laughs the most

— BJP

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 1: Exit polls conducted by TV news channels during voting today showed the BJP taking Madhya Pradesh and the Congress retaining Delhi while Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh were too close to call.

The exit polls brought cheer to the BJP and jolted the Congress because the opinion surveys that preceded them had predicted a three-one result in favour of the Congress, which was expected to lose only Madhya Pradesh.

Most of the polling was conducted five to three hours before voting ended, and all four channels — STAR News, Aaj Tak, Zee and Sahara Samay — agreed on two outcomes: a sweeping return to power by the BJP under Uma

Bharti in Madhya Pradesh and a landslide victory for the Congress under ruling chief minister Sheila Dikshit in Delhi. Rajasthan sprang the biggest surprise. Belying the opinion surveys which projected a comfortable win for the Congress under Ashok Gehlot's stewardship, the party was locked in a keen contest with the BJP which, led by Vasundhara Raje, seemed to have recovered substantial ground in the last few days.

Likewise, Ajit Jogi, who was expected to have a cakewalk in Chhattisgarh, which had its first election after it was carved out of Madhya Pradesh, finds himself biting his nails off despite his BJP rival Dilip Singh Judeo getting sucked into a last-minute cash-on-camera scandal.

Although the four states have traditionally seen straight fights

between the Congress and the BJP, this time all the exit polls have highlighted the role of the "others" — a loose collection of Independents, caste-based parties and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). Not only have the "others" polled a relatively high percentage but were also projected to pick up seats everywhere.

Reacting to the exit results, BJP spokesman Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said: "Why only three states? We will win all four with a clear majority?"

His Congress counterpart Anand Sharma said: "We did not believe the earlier opinion polls and neither do we take the exit polls seriously. We know what their record was like in the past. Let us wait for the actual results."

Exit polls have gone wrong in the past — as have opinion sur-

veys. The tally of seats for each party varies in the STAR News-AC Nielsen, Aaj Tak-ORG-MARG, Zee News-C.Voter and Sahara Samay-DRS polls, but they all agree on the outcome in Madhya Pradesh and Delhi.

According to STAR News, the BJP is set to form the government in Madhya Pradesh with a vote share of 40 per cent with the corresponding figure for the Congress being 34. Aaj Tak showed a 10 per cent difference between the vote shares in a state where a 1 per cent variation is enough to ensure a win or a defeat.

In 1998, the Congress belied all surveys and exit polls and retained power with a 1 per cent swing.

Apparently, the anti-incumbency sentiment, manifest throughout Madhya Pradesh against erratic power supply

and bad roads, caught up with Digvijay Singh, though his supporters claimed there was a "last minute surge" in his favour because of his "achievements" in the social sector.

In Delhi, the BJP's strategy of countering Dikshit by projecting Madan Lal Khurana as its alter-native appeared to have come a cropper.

Even party sources admitted that Khurana, a Punjabi from the post-Partition era, was not their best bet to cope with the demographic shifts that have taken place in the capital over the last decade because of the large influx from Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The *poorvanchalis*, or easterners, as they are labelled, constitute a much bigger vote bank than the Punjabis.

Initial reports from Rajasthan indicated that Gehlot would

sail to another term on the strength of his effective drought management and the reported unacceptability of Raje as the BJP's chief ministerial candidate.

But the decision of the Jats — a make-or-mar caste grouping — to vote en bloc for the BJP, rebellion in the Congress and the role of smaller parties like the BSP may have made the going a lot tougher for the ruling party.

In Chhattisgarh, an aggressive response to the Judeo scam from the BJP may have dented the edge the Congress hoped to derive from the sting operation.

Reports from the state suggested that instead of being perceived as a villain, Judeo, who was seen accepting cash on a CD, actually earned sympathy in BJP strongholds.

Other poll-related reports on Pages 7, 8



The party is certain to be voted back to power in all four states

— Congress

STRAY INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE, BOOTH-CAPTURING

Moderate turnout in Assembly polls

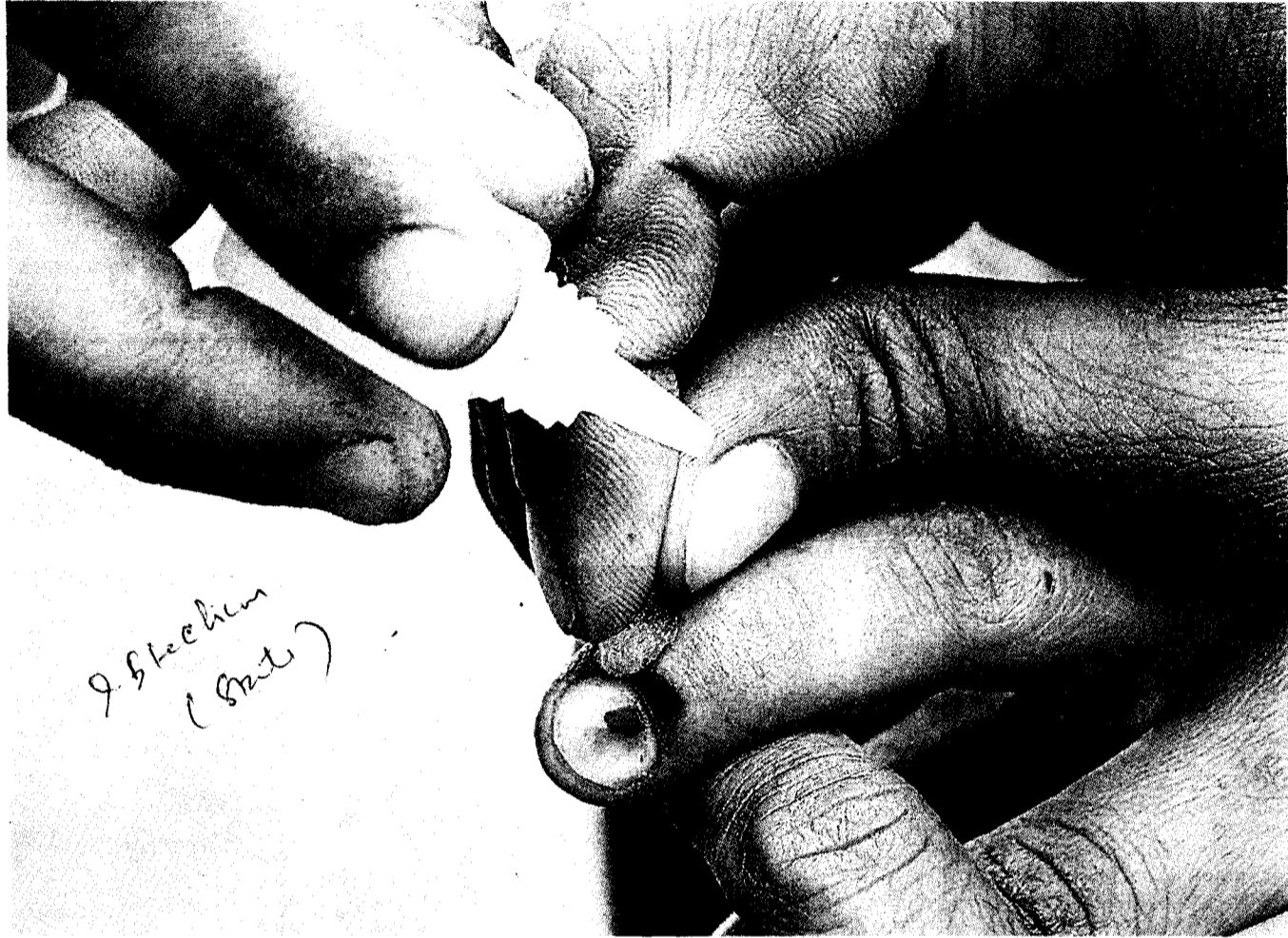
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 1. The Assembly elections in Delhi, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh concluded today with a moderate to low turnout and "stray incidents of violence and booth-capturing." According to the Election Commission, an estimated 60 per cent of the voters cast their ballot in Rajasthan, while in Delhi between 48 and 50 per cent exercised their choice. In both Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the estimated voter turnout was between 55 and 58 per cent.

Of the four States, only Delhi saw no serious election-related violence and, despite some "group clashes," there was no disruption of the polling process. The Election Commission said that according to its reports from the other three States until this evening, there would have to be re-polling in 56 places in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This figure, the Deputy Election Commissioner, A.N. Jha told the media might go up. Re-polling would be conducted on December 3.

Mr. Jha said that in Chhattisgarh naxalites tried to snatch or had damaged the electronic voting machines at 13 places in Dantewara district. A total of 23 incidents took place in the State.

In Madhya Pradesh, there were 23 cases of disruption — attempted booth-capturing and/or damage to the voting machines. These were spread over Morena, Sagar, Dhar, Tikamgarh and Satna districts. One EVM was broken in Bhopal and a poll boycott observed in some stations in the Balaghat constituency, Mr. Jha said. In



An attempt is being made to remove the ink mark from a voter's finger outside a polling booth in old Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, on Monday. — Photo: A.M. Faruqui

Rajasthan, there were eight instances of attempted booth-capturing or disruption "due to damage to the EVMs by unruly mobs". In the Lunkaran constituency, polling was disrupted due to the flooding caused by a breach in a canal. Mr. Jha dis-

counted television reports of large-scale failure of the EVMs. He said that about 25 to 30 of a total of 1.02 lakh EVMs malfunctioned, mostly due to "human error".

They had been replaced and had caused no major delays in

polling. Although the media had reported deaths in election-related violence in Indore and Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Jha said that at the time of the press conference the Commission did not have any reports of deaths in election-related vio-

lence. Mr. Jha said the incident in the Lahar constituency in Bhopal, in which two persons were shot, had occurred outside the polling station and had not disrupted voting.

More reports on Page 11, Photo feature on Page 22

Delhi for Congress, M.P. for BJP, say exit polls

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, DEC. 1. Four separate exit polls conducted by television channels tonight agreed on one point: the ruling Congress will retain power in the 70-member Delhi Assembly and the BJP will regain majority in the 230-member Madhya Pradesh Assembly. With the electoral fortunes of the candidates now firmly locked inside the electronic voting machines this evening, the exit polls by Aaj Tak, Sahara, Star and Zee were divided on the possible verdict in the 200-member Rajasthan Assembly and the 90-member Chhattisgarh Assembly.

In Madhya Pradesh, the Aaj Tak-ORG predicted that the BJP would regain power by winning 140 to 150 seats (with

46 per cent vote share) and gave the Congress 55 to 65 seats (35 per cent). The Sahara-DRS survey showed the BJP getting an overwhelming 168 seats (47 per cent) and the Congress reduced to a mere 44 seats (33 per cent). The network gave eight seats to the Bahujan Samaj Party. The STAR-AC Neilson gave the BJP 121 seats (40 per cent) and the Congress 71 seats (34 per cent), while ZEE-C-Vote said the BJP would garner 109-125 seats and the Congress between 79 and 95 seats.

In Delhi, Aaj Tak gave the Shiela Dikshit Government anywhere between 50 and 60 seats (49 per cent) and the BJP between 10 and 20 seats (41 per cent). The Sahara exit results gave the Congress a simple majority of 38 seats (42

per cent) and the BJP, an improved showing of 25 seats (34 per cent). The STAR predicted the Congress winning 50 seats (49.8 per cent) and the BJP ending with a distant 11 seats (33 per cent), while ZEE showed the Congress winning between 44 and 52 seats and the BJP between 12 and 20 seats.

Variation in exit polls swing in the two other States, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, with Aaj Tak predicting a photo finish in Chhattisgarh giving both the Congress and the BJP between 35 and 45 seats, with a mere one per cent vote share difference and Sahara showing a 39 per cent vote share each for both the parties. The STAR poll shows the BJP in a strong position with 46 seats (41.5 per cent) as against 38 seats for the Congress

(39.5 per cent). Others get 19 per cent of the vote share. ZEE survey indicated that the Congress could get between 39 and 47 seats and the BJP between 36 and 44 seats. The battle for Rajasthan may also appear to be a close contest with Aaj Tak giving the BJP 85 to 95 seats (40 per cent) and the Congress, 70 to 80 seats (36 per cent). Sahara was close to it predicting 89 seats (39 per cent) to the BJP and 84 seats (38 per cent) to the Congress.

The STAR and ZEE exit polls threw up a different scenario, with the former predicting 91 seats (41 per cent) for the Congress and the latter giving between 91 and 107 seats to the ruling party. As for the BJP, STAR gave the party 89 seats (41 per cent) and ZEE between 86 and 95 seats.

Four States go to polls today

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, NOV. 30. With polling in the four States — Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — due to begin at 8 a.m. on Monday morning, the two major political parties, the BJP and the Congress, are on the edge. Their fate in these States will be sealed by 5 p.m. when polling will come to an end. Since electronic voting machines are being used in all the four States, a clear picture will emerge by the afternoon of December 4 when counting of ballots will be taken up.

Both parties were today making last-minute preparations to ensure that no polling booth is left unmanned by their agents. With 1,02,056 booths spread over practically the entire central and northwestern belt of the country, the two parties, contesting almost all the seats, have undertaken a huge deployment exercise.

The election campaigns have been heated, even bordering on the abusive, but, by and large, they have been peaceful. This was, however, marred to an extent today when reports from Bilaspur in Madhya Pradesh said that a Congress worker, Mustaq Khan, was shot dead by unidentified assailants as he was coming out of the Dayal Bandh election office. The Congress candidate from the area, Anil Tah, immediately blamed the rival party. In Chhattisgarh, the big news of the day was the arrest of Yudhveer Judev, the son of the BJP's star campaigner, Dilip Singh Judev, the hero of the now infamous and controversial videotape. Reports from Jashpur — Dilip Singh Judev belongs to this area — said that the police have charged Yudhveer and about 20 of his supporters with disturbing the peace in the area by not allowing rival political parties to display their flags, deflating the tyres of vehicles

and breaking their windshields.

In all the four States, the Congress is the ruling party and, to that extent, its job is all the more difficult. The BJP, on the other hand, has everything to gain, but party leaders admit that if it fails to win the elections in at least two States, its image will take a severe beating. With the Lok Sabha polls due in 10 months, the stakes are high for both the parties.

The elections are also significant as the two parties are directly pitched in battle against each other. The regional forces — the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Samajwadi Party, the Janata Dal (United) and the Indian National Lok Dal — are contesting only a few seats and their role is marginal. However, the BSP could play a role in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh where it is expected to win some seats in the event of neither the BJP nor the Congress getting a clear majority.

The political atmosphere is expected to get fairly heated once the results are out, irrespective of who wins where.

Seven killed in naxal attack

PTI reports from Raipur:

Six policemen, including an Assistant Platoon Commander, and a civilian were killed when naxalites set off a landmine targeting a convoy of the Congress candidate from the Bijapur Assembly constituency in Chhattisgarh, who escaped unhurt, last evening.

The outlawed People's War naxalites carried out the attack in Kungupalli village in the Bastar district when the Congress nominee, Rajendra Pambhoi, was returning after electioneering, the Bijapur Superintendent of Police, J.S. Watti, said today.

The security personnel jeep, which was following Mr. Pambhoi's car, was blown to pieces.

Editorial on Page 12

Cong distributes Judeo bribe disks while Sangh outfit dubs Jogi 'servant of Madam'

Crowd for copters, not leaders

ASHISH SINHA

Bagicha (Chhattisgarh), Nov. 29: They came down from the sky in a swirl of dust. The two "star campaigners" landed 40 km apart, but both got what they wanted — awe-struck crowds.

Helicopters are a big draw for the villagers and the number of people gathered around the flying machines easily exceeded those who had come to listen.

"I have driven your car for three years at a speed of 200 km per hour. I promise to drive it well for the next five as well. You have already lived your life in poverty, but please, for the sake of the next generation, support Anand Kujur, our candidate," Ajit Jogi told the crowd at Mahadeo Dand. But people around the chopper were unmoved.

"I am a *jogi*. A *jogi* is one who comes to every house, asking for a handful of rice. Please give me that much. Do not be carried away by the Bharatiya Jhooth Party or the Bharatiya Danga Party," the Congress chief minister pleaded. This time the crowd burst into laughter.

A little distance away in Ranpur, Dilip Singh Judeo got senti-

mental. "My ancestors have lived with you, cared for you. Then a person called Jogi came. He broke my house, he broke my family. He took away our MLAs. He is after my life. I will not give up whatever the consequences. You can give it back to him by voting for the BJP candidate," he told the gathering. The human circle around the helicopter broke into shouts of "Jai Judeo".

He then changed tack. "I do see some Christian brothers here. I am not against Christians. I am against religious conversions. *Dharmantaran, rashtrantaran hai* (Change of religion is change of nationality). I am at your service. I am not bothered about a wooden chair; I have left a golden chair in my palace," he said.

Bagicha, 500 km north of the capital Raipur, has become a prestige fight. It would test Judeo's anti-conversion posturings. As for Kujur, he is the only Christian tribal candidate the Congress has put up in Chhattisgarh. Bagicha is said to be dominated by Christian tribals. So Jogi, too, is bent on defeating the BJP's Ganesh Ram Bhagat.

Back in Mahadeo Dand — separated from Ranpur by a



Jogi with Sonia Gandhi at Raipur. PTI file picture

bumpy road through perhaps the most underdeveloped part of the state — Jogi's wordplay was on in full swing.

"*Kamal ka phool paani mein hota hai aur pani mein current marta hai. Panja chhune se current nahi lagta* (Lotus grows in water which can induce electric shock. But when you touch a hand, you do not get an electric shock). I have given you electricity but the BJP will give you shocks," he said. Chhattisgarh is an electricity-surplus state.

"I have to fly to Tapkara next which is a long distance," Jogi went on. "How will people know

that I have finished my meeting here? You will have to shout '*panja chhap zindabad*' with me so that the people there can listen to you." He then made the crowd shout with him thrice.

In Ranpur, Judeo again travelled back in history. "I can see people here who have let me play in their laps as a child. This is a prestige battle for us. You have no option but to support me," he said.

An elderly man, who was at both the meetings, said: "The Congress says it is winning. Judeo says the BJP is winning. If both are winning, then who is losing? Do they think we are fools?"

Curtains ring down with slander show

UTTAMSENGUPTA

Raipur, Nov. 29: One of the most vicious election campaigns drew to a close in Chhattisgarh today, but not before the Election Commission issued a warning to all political parties and asked them to behave.

The warning came a little late in the day with chief electoral officer K.K. Chakravarty calling a meeting of all political parties and asking them to desist from defamatory, communal and slanderous campaigning.

The Congress was pulled up for allegedly distributing compact disks showing BJP leader and former central minister Dilip Singh Judeo accepting money from strangers.

The party is also being accused of distributing audio cassettes containing salacious conversation between a prominent leader of the Opposition and an unidentified lady. Similar posters and pamphlets, the

Opposition alleged, were distributed in large numbers by the ruling party.

But, while it will be difficult for the Opposition to attribute the disks and the cassettes to the Congress, the BJP was rapped by the Election Commission for issuing advertisements in poor taste and containing communal innuendoes and unsubstantiated charges against chief minister Ajit Jogi and his son.

In one of the more blatant advertisements, issued by an affiliate body of the Sangh parivar, Jogi has been described as an agent of the Pope and a "servant of Madam".

In another advertisement, Jogi and his son have been described as "captains of 420" giving a bad name to Chhattisgarh.

In one advertisement, Jogi has been described as "*dhongi* (pretender)" and shown crawl-

ing under a table with his son in braces wielding the stick.

Both the Congress and the BJP appear guilty of violating the model code of conduct.

The Election Commission has received several complaints alleging misuse of government facilities and public servants by the Congress for campaigning. Both the parties are suspected to have spent much more than the permissible limit.

The Election Commission has been hamstrung by the shortage of personnel and logistics. Till the election was notified, the chief electoral officer, an additional chief secretary-level officer, was looking after half a dozen additional departments.

The election office itself came up barely a month ago. And, though the Election Com-

mission has pressed into service more than 62 poll observers as well as a dozen helicopters and satellite phones, the task of monitoring the expenditure and campaigns in the state — in which 367 polling stations can be reached only by walking between 5 and 55 km — was uphill from the outset.

Election Commission observers point out that while the law lays down that a candidate cannot spend more than Rs 10 lakh on his campaign, there is no such limit on the party. And, though expenditure by political parties is to be apportioned to different candidates, the exercise is not just complicated but also time-consuming and cumbersome.

Political parties are expected to submit an expenditure certificate every third day and the candidates expected to file expenditure returns within one month of polling.

But verifying the claims is a problem that the Election Commission has not been able to resolve, admit observers.

ELECTIONS 2003
CHHATTISGARH

Rajasthan bigwigs gear up for battle

'Cong will rule again'

RAJASTHAN CHIEF minister Ashok Gehlot says his government's track record has been excellent. In an interview to Vipul Mudgal, he talks about his perception of the people's response.

Do you feel that the level of political debates has fallen over the years?

Standards have definitely fallen. The BJP is using names of little known organisations to attack my government. They are even using press clippings in a selective way to malign me. We in the Congress take full responsibility of what we say.

Haven't you attacked BJP president and chief ministerial candidate Vasundhara Raje?

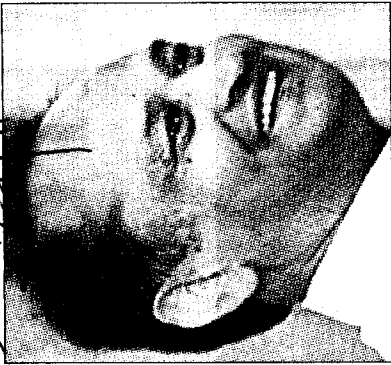
I never take her name in my speeches. Have I ever made a personal charge? Her chief minister-ship is hypothetical. The Congress is going to form the next government.

How will you counter anti-incumbency factor?

We have rebels despite accommodating most sitting MLAs. We have also got many new faces. This should work. Elections are a test of performance. We go to the people on the basis of development and drought management. Our track record has been excellent.

Aren't there charges of corruption and mismanagement against the government?

Jo kam karega vo hi kuchh



'People are with us'

RAJASTHAN BJP president and chief ministerial candidate Vasundhara Raje says her constituency is her family. Exuding confidence as she spoke to Rajesh Sinha in between poll meetings, Vasundhara talks about her campaign experience.

There are allegations of indecent language and personal issues being used. Do you agree that the level of debate has fallen?

We should keep politics above such cheapness. If one starts talking dirty and hits below the belt ... such things should have no place in politics.

Any specific instances?

It is only the Jain TV (which telecast five questions about her alleged links with cocaine smugglers) which has stooped to this level. Otherwise, it has not happened. And we know why Jain is doing it. He is occupying our property.

CM Ashok Gehlot has said the BJP is using crude language, which is not in keeping with Rajasthan's culture. What do you say?

What have I said? Is he referring to the term *dhokha* (cheating)? That is not unparliamentary if he is reacting to my saying "*nani yad dila denge*", I would like to remind him that it was Rajiv Gandhi who used this very expression first.

What kind of response are you getting? I have never seen such enthusias-



tic response. And, mind you, this is all over the state. I have not seen a single constituency where there was lack of response. It cannot all be pretence.

What assures you of victory?

I have been saying since November 2002 that those who have played with the people's sentiments and expectations will now get it back. I saw it in the by-elections, then during the parivartan yatra and again at the Prime Minister's rally when farmers came and stood in the rain for hours.

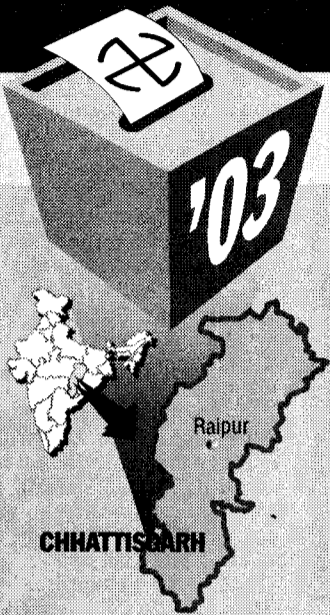
How serious do you think is the challenge to you from Mrs Rama Pilot in your constituency?

I have given just a day to my constituency so far... that's the challenge from her. For me this is family. Had it been a local, I would have given it a thought. But Congress could not find any local candidate. My family would take care of it.

Jogi faces test on 'dream' turf

CHHATTISGARH: FIRST FRANCHISE

KEY CONTENDERS



TOTAL SEATS: 90

Assembly elections 1998

Party	Seats	Votes
Congress	48	39.61
BJP	36	39.02
BSP	3	5.06
Others	3	16.31

These seats were part of Madhya Pradesh during the 1998 polls as Chhattisgarh was carved out of the state on November 1, 2000

Lok Sabha seats (Total: 11)

Party	Seats
Congress	3
BJP	8



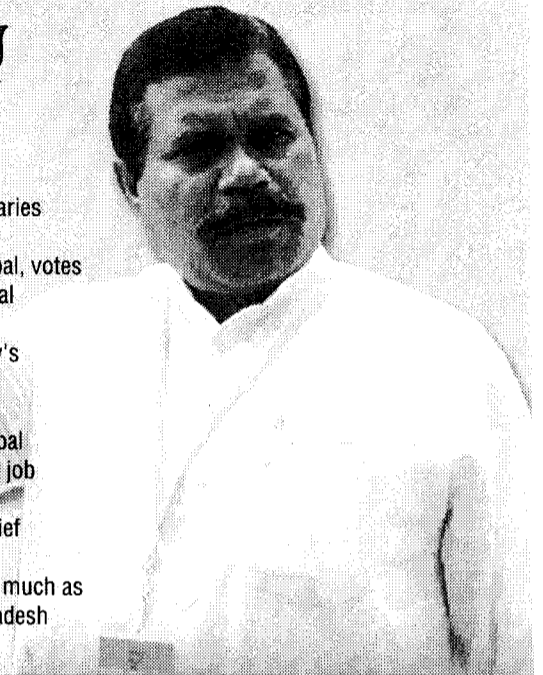
AJIT JOGI

- Party: Congress
- Age: 55
- Assets: Rs 70 lakh
- Main slogan: Keep corrupt Bangaru Judeo Party out of the state
- Main plank: Development and empowerment of tribals
- Can bank on: Tribal votes
- Must counter: Charges of being a fake tribal
- Vote base: Tribals, backward castes
- Hurdles within party: Friends of former minister V.C. Shukla
- Claim to fame: Quit IAS to join Congress
- Most likely to say: Vote for development
- Most unlikely to say: I am facing criminal charges



NAND KUMAR SAI

- Party: BJP
- Age: 52
- Assets: Rs 5 lakh
- Main slogan: Jogi is a fake tribal
- Main plank: Oust foreign missionaries from state
- Can bank on: Hindu, including tribal, votes
- Must counter: Loose organisational set-up
- Vote base: Hindu tribals and party's traditional upper caste votes
- Hurdles within party: Rebels
- Claim to fame: One of the first tribal postgraduates to quit a government job and join politics
- Most likely to say: I should be chief ministerial candidate
- Most unlikely to say: I did not do much as party chief in undivided Madhya Pradesh



PRIZE FIGHTS

AJIT JOGI	RAJENDRA PRASAD SHUKLA	NAND KUMAR PATEL	TARUN CHATTERJEE	SATYANARAYAN SHARMA
Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress	Congress
versus	versus	versus	versus	versus
NAND KUMAR SAI	BHUPINDER SINGH	LAKSHMI PATEL	RAJESH MOONAT	SHOVARAM YADAV
BJP	BJP	BJP	BJP	BJP
in Marwahi	in Kota	in Kharsia	in Raipur Rural	in Mandirhasaud

Regional strongholds

Region	Seats	Stronghold of
East	16	BJP has an edge
West	24	Congress
North	20	Congress
South	15	Congress
Central	15	Congress

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Marwahi, Nov. 26: The road cuts a narrow swathe through the Achanakmarh reserve forest towards Marwahi, nearly 200 km from Bilaspur. Dense vegetation spills on to the path and sunrays filter in through the towering trees.

Just on the fringe of the forest, lies the scattered but neat tehsil town — chief minister Ajit Jogi's pocket borough — nurtured with care for the last three years.

In true Congress tradition of turf building, it is another Chhindwara in the making, modelled on the lines of Kamal Nath's picturesque constituency in Madhya Pradesh.

The semi-urban settlement is

at the centre of all attention in state politics. The map of Chhattisgarh does not list Marwahi and the place was unheard of till three years ago. Now it is drawing visitors by the hordes and journalists from across the country.

Marwahi, a constituency reserved for Scheduled Tribes, is the battleground for two heavyweights — Jogi and leader of Opposition Nand Kumar Sai.

The contest would have been a straight fight had not the widow of a former tribal legislator managed a Nationalist Congress Party ticket from Vidya Charan Shukla.

At stake here is Jogi's political identity as well as his rival's because the chief minister's doubtful ethnic origin has be-

come an issue and the villagers are debating whether Sai, a tribal, is an outsider or one of their own.

The pitch has become slippery for both with the flowing tears of a widow, Hemvant Porte, who has come pleading for votes from her Gond brethren after 15 years.

Porte, a Congress deserter, is asking for votes in the name of her late husband Bhamar Singh Porte, who had retained the constituency for over two decades.

Jogi is leaving nothing to chance despite his supporters' belief that he would easily retain the seat he won in 2000. His chief campaign manager here is his son Amit, a law student. Indifferent to politics till recently, Amit has formed a team of young

party workers to do the rounds of the constituency.

Accompanied by his mother, Renu, Amit and his team are peddling Jogi's *sapna* (dream) in the far-flung villages. "*Marwahi Jogi ka ek sapna* (Marwahi is one of Jogi's dreams)," reads a huge archway as you enter the town.

"People often wonder why I have chosen Marwahi. For me, it is a return to my roots, to work among my own people and improve their lot, a dream I cherished since I became chief minister," says Jogi.

Parts of his dream have been translated into reality. The road from Achanakmarh spanning three forest ranges is smooth and the ones linking Marwahi to the rest of the hinterland are al-

most a "miracle" in wilderness.

All the seven villages in and around the place have metalled roads and power.

"We never thought our homes would be lighted. Now, we even draw water with hand pumps and the harvest has been good this year," says Man Singh, a young Gond tribal from Pandripad village in Kumhar panchayat on the outskirts of the town. A new power substation along the approach road to the constituency ensures round-the-clock supply.

The local primary health centre has been upgraded to a 30-bed hospital and the college has been affiliated to the Bilaspur University.

The war, however, is not one of sops but of "identity". Jogi is

being challenged on his turf by a BJP veteran, also a tribal. "*Jaali jaati ke adivasi jaali sapna bhi dikhate hain* (A man of doubtful tribal origin spins dubious dreams)," says Sai.

Both Sai and Jogi have set their sights on tribal votes. Porte, who is from the area, is also eyeing the tribals, especially the Gonds, who account for 60 per cent of the tribal electorate.

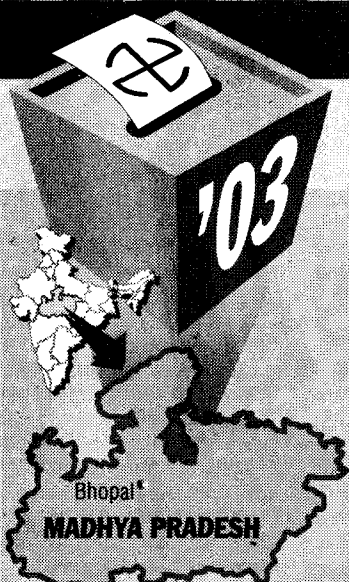
The constituency also has 15 per cent backward and Dalit voters, who are sharply polarised. Some backward voters are not favourably disposed to Jogi.

"We are not sure whether he is a tribal or a Dalit," says Sunderlal Rajak, a voter in Chanadungri village. Rajak and his neighbours will probably root for Sai.

BJP shifts to development track

MADHYA PRADESH: ALTERED ARENA

KEY CONTENDERS



TOTAL SEATS: 230

Assembly elections 1998

Party	Seats	Votes
Congress	172	40.59
BJP	119	39.28
BSP	11	6.15
Others	18	14.01

Madhya Pradesh had 320 seats during the 1998 Assembly elections as Chhattisgarh was carved out of the state on November 1, 2000, constituting 90 Assembly segments

Lok Sabha seats (Total: 29)

Party	Seats
Congress	8
BJP	21



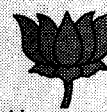
DIGVIJAY SINGH

- Party: Congress
- Age: 57
- Assets: Rs 5.25 crore
- Main slogan: Whatever I promised, I did
- Main plank: Stability, riot-free state
- Can bank on: Track record, personal reach
- Must counter: Anti-incumbency
- Vote base: Dalits, Muslims, Thakurs and tribals
- Hurdles within party: Seen as a potential threat to leadership. If he wins a third time, could be pitted against Sonia Gandhi
- Claim to fame: Ten years of unbroken rule — rare in Congress
- Most likely to say: I will not hold public office for 10 years if I fail to win
- Most unlikely to say: I want to be Prime Minister



UMA BHARTI

- Party: BJP
- Age: 43
- Assets: Rs 53 lakh
- Main slogan: The CM has power, but people have to use candles
- Main plank: Shortage of power and lack of development
- Can bank on: Sadhvi image and RSS support
- Must counter: Lack of administrative experience
- Vote base: OBCs and Brahmins
- Hurdles within party: Factionalism. She is viewed by state veterans as a hot-headed, temperamental and unpredictable outsider
- Claim to fame: Ayodhya movement and firebrand image
- Most likely to say: Sorry!
- Most unlikely to say: I regret the Babri demolition



PRIZE FIGHTS

DIGVIJAY SINGH
Congress
versus
SHIVRAJ SINGH CHAUHAN
BJP
in Raghogarh

UMA BHARTI
BJP
versus
JAGDISH SHUKLA
Congress
in Bada Malera

YASHODHARA RAJE
BJP
versus
GANESH GAUTAM
Congress
in Shivpuri

SRINIWAS TIWARI
Congress
versus
GIRISH GAUTAM
BJP
in Manganwa

RAHUL SINGH
Congress
versus
GOVIND PRASAD
BJP
in Churhat

Regional strongholds

Region	Seats	Stronghold of
Malwa	65	Congress
Mahakaushal	45	Congress
Bundelkhand	24	BJP
Madhya Bharat	68	BJP
Vindhyas	28	Congress

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

Bhopal/Jabalpur, Nov. 23: His credibility is under strain, his caste equations have not gelled and his communication skills have faltered. Things have not panned out the way Digvijay Singh would have liked them to. But as opinion polls place the BJP ahead of the Congress, the chief minister's party workers are hoping he will pull a rabbit out of his sleeve on polling day, December 1.

"He (Digvijay) is a pious person and has not done anything outrageous or immoral. We hope god will be merciful to him," says Ramamurti Mishra, chief of the Jabalpur Congress, as he watches the chief minister tackle his toughest test yet.

Congressmen admit that Digvijay's troubles began when the BJP followed Arun Jaitley's advice to focus on "bijli, sadak, pani (power, roads and water)" and not allow his "soft" Hindutva to undermine their campaign.

Until then, the chief minister had been "able to counter the BJP on everything it raised like (the) Bhojshala (dispute) and cow slaughter. But Jaitley proved more than a match for him", a Digvijay aide said.

Union commerce minister Jaitley, aware that development or the lack of it would be a very effective poll plank in Madhya Pradesh, has made sure that BJP chief ministerial candidate Uma Bharti focuses on little else during campaigning.

"On the economic front, there was total non-performance. Digvijay misled himself to believe that it was an either/or situation, that is either perform in the social sector or economic sector.

Jaitley mantra woes for Digvijay

There is no either/or," Jaitley said. "The social sector can progress only if things happen on the economic front because economic activities generate the funds for infrastructure and social development," he added.

Digvijay's aides say three of his "major" achievements could still see the Congress through in rural areas, which record a higher voter turnout than cities and towns. These achievements include an enhanced devolution of grassroots power from the sarpanches and pradhans to elected samitis which have the final say on critical matters concerning expenditure, irrigation, health and education.

Another accomplishment is the waiver of electricity dues worth Rs 800 crore from farmers and dues amounting to Rs 175 crore from shanty dwellers. The third achievement is the conferring of ownership rights to grazing land on Dalits and tribals.

But the BJP has rubbished them. State party chief Kailash Joshi said: "The 73rd constitutional amendment to the panchayati raj act already listed 29 powers for panchayats. Digvijay implemented only 17 and that too, halfheartedly. He packed the samitis with his men and, in any case,

these exist only in tribal areas."

During the last Assembly elections, the Congress derived full advantage from Digvijay's move to make local elected leaders more powerful than district officials. "Now that the sarpanches and pradhans form a formidable network, they resent giving power to the samitis. Since they are the power-brokers in an election, the chief minister's latest step could in fact go against him," a government official said.

Even an objective assessment has it that "it is a case of too little, too late. No doubt farmers and jhuggi-jhopdi dwellers benefited from the power dues' waiver, but even they are sceptical of his intention because they see it as a knee-jerk response to the BJP's campaign".

As for land rights, Joshi said: "Only those who already possessed land gained from it. The majority of the landless did not."

Congress critics say the party's explanation that it lost most of its operating thermal power plants to Chhattisgarh and could not make up the shortfall because of "non-cooperation" from the National Thermal Power Corporation and "bad quality" coal do not wash. A former Madhya Pradesh electricity board official said Digvijay's "greatest" blunder was to allow a "well-connected outsider" to run the board for 10 years because "he obliged the whims and fancies of his political masters in Bhopal and Delhi and left an empty coffer".

Digvijay resorted to belated damage control by sacking the head, but this left the board directionless. The chief secretary doubles up as its chairman currently, but has little time to resolve the power crisis.

RASHEED KIDWAI

Bhopal, Nov. 23: Meet Uma Bharti, the visionary. Sniffing victory in the poll surveys, the BJP's chief ministerial nominee in Madhya Pradesh is seeking a change of image — from Ayodhya rabble-rouser to a woman who means business. And her thrust areas are infrastructure development and information technology.

Bharti and her associates have chalked out a plan of action and a vision document. If voted to power, her government would take the initiative to develop a universal Hindi keyboard and, if possible, for other Indian languages, too.

Her spin doctors are busy circulating an old write-up Bharti published in *Sunday* magazine that enlisted "indigenous methods" of enhancing agricultural productivity. Similarly, an old interview has been dusted to claim that way back in 1993, the sadhvi had said Muslims were an inseparable part of the country and she was against inflicting any sort of hardship on them.

In a booklet titled *Meri Didi* (My Sister), her supporters have tried to hold up Bharti's "other side". It says she travelled to 55 countries, earning adulation in many as a religious preacher, read Marx, Lenin, Mao, Rama Tirath, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Tagore, Gorky, Tolstoy and all other major thinkers and writers of 20th century.

Bharti is presented as a woman of exceptional intellect, intelligence and memory. At five, she memorised the entire *Gita* and *Ramayana*; by the

Uma projects infotech vision

time she reached Class VIII, teachers and well-wishers decided that formal education was not needed as the sadhvi had the faculties to learn everything informally.

The vision document, which her associates say is her brainchild, states "the universal keyboard is one area which prevents the expansion of infor-

ELECTIONS 2003 MADHYA PRADESH

mation technology in the country, particularly the Hindi belt". Bharti said she wanted to assure people that if she came to power, the Madhya Pradesh government would take up the cudgels for standardising the Hindi keyboard and universalising language software.

Bharti's associates said her seriousness to develop the state as an "information technology hub" could be gauged from the fact that information and technology minister Arun Shourie has vetted the vision document and action plan.

"We must appreciate that

the manpower in the state, however talented, is not so well conversant with English that it could act as vendor for outsourcing by foreign companies. But, it has got such a vast and skilful manpower in Hindi that it could rule the world if given the right direction and right opportunities," said the document on the information technology strategy in Madhya Pradesh.

Bharti has sought to counter the impression that if the BJP comes to power, technology would be the first casualty because her party lacks the vision to tap the potential of infotech. Quoting Shourie, the paper said: "In fact, the brightest period of IT in India is during the years of the NDA government at the Centre. In spite of recession in principal markets, export in Indian IT industry have grown by 24 per cent this year."

Asked if she would accord any credit to the Digvijay Singh government for promoting information technology, she said: "What credit? This government, in fact, has proved to be the real culprit. It did not pay any attention to the development of software or setting up hardware industries in the state."

About Microsoft getting its Hindi software made in Madhya Pradesh, she said: "That's precisely the point. It proves the state has a great potential for development of Hindi software. But for the development of Hindi software of Microsoft, you cannot give credit to the government. It was a purely private initiative. In fact, the state government needs to be castigated for not capturing the initiative."

75% polling in Mizoram

By Barun Das Gupta

NO-1 2/4 9. Election - (State)

AIZAWL, NOV. 20. Seventy five per cent of the 5.28 lakh voters in Mizoram today exercised their franchise in the elections to the 40-member Assembly.

According to the Chief Electoral Officer, Lalmalsawma, the voting percentage was lower than the previous (1998) election's 75.04 per cent.

The election passed off peacefully, barring some incidents of violence in the Suangpuilawn constituency, where no voter turned up at one booth (Phulen). Repoll was ordered in another booth (Suangpuilawn), where voters damaged the electronic voting machine and tore up the poll material in protest against the kidnap of three candidates.

Aizawl town wore a festive

look as Mizo women in their bright traditional costumes turned out in large numbers.

In one constituency in the outskirts of Aizawl, a 90-year-old man created an embarrassing situation for the presiding officer when he not only wanted to be told how to use the EVM but also to whom he should vote.

As all the polling agents watched and laughed, the non-agenarian cast his vote. For whom, only he and the presiding officer know.

Candidates 'rescued'

The State Home Minister, Tlanghminghthanga, today confirmed the "abduction" and subsequent "rescue" of three candidates of the Congress, MNF and MPC contesting from the Suangpuilawn seat.

EC showcauses Sonia for flying Jogi plane

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 18 NOVEMBER

THE Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday censured Congress chief Ms Sonia Gandhi for violating the Model Code of Conduct by hopping a ride on Chhattisgarh government's election craft for electioneering.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Ajit Jogi has also been hauled up for placing the state government aircraft at Ms Gandhi's disposal. The poll watchdog has show-caused the Congress, asking why its recognition as a national party should not be "suspended or withdrawn" for the violation, which threatens to undercut the party's attempt to capture the high moral ground in the lead-up

to the state polls.

The order, issued after a full Election Commission meeting chaired by the Chief Election Commissioner, J.M. Lyngdoh, said it is "prima facie of the view that the provisions of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, are squarely attracted in the present case of the use of the aircraft by the leaders of the Congress in violation of the model code of conduct and the lawful directions and instructions of the Commission."

The Congress has been given seven days' time to respond to the showcause failing which, the order said, "it will be presumed that the party has nothing to say in the matter and the Election Commission will take appropriate action or decision without



SONIA: PLANE-TIFF

further reference to the party."

Though a personal embarrassment for Ms Gandhi — who has repeatedly chided the NDA government for not abiding by norms — it capped a series of "violations"

of the Model Code of Conduct by the Congress governments in Chhattisgarh and neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. The EC has repeatedly hauled up the two governments for shielding officials guilty of breaches ranging from tampering with electoral rolls to violations of the Code.

The day also saw the EC ordering the transfer of the district magistrate of Badwani in Chhattisgarh and the Inspector General of Police at Rewa in Madhya Pradesh for "failing to implement the Model Code of Conduct."

The two governments acquiesced in the Commission's instruction to take action against the errant officials only after putting up stout resistance. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh openly questioned the ju-

risdiction of the Commission when asked by it to punish the district magistrates who inflated the number of voters allegedly to suit Congress' purpose. The Commission's order for similar action against some Chhattisgarh officials also drew loud protests from Mr Jogi.

Congress denies charges: On Tuesday night, the Congress asserted that Sonia Gandhi had "definitely not used" any of the Chhattisgarh government aircrafts ever since the Model Code of Conduct for the upcoming Assembly elections came into force, reported agencies.

AICC media secretary Tom Vadakkan said on the contrary Ms Gandhi has been "absolutely correct" in her travel itinerary after the code came into force.

9 NOV 2003

9. Election (8/24)

EC puts 'code-violator' Sonia on notice

(2) CMC



Mrs Sonia Gandhi with Chhattisgarh chief minister Mr Ajit Jogi on her arrival at the Raipur airport on Tuesday — PTI

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov. 18. — In a major setback to the Congress, the Election Commission tonight issued notice to the party president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, for having "violated" the model of conduct by using the Chhattisgarh government-owned helicopter and aircraft when the code of conduct was already in effect.

Taking serious note of the alleged violation, the EC in its show-cause notice asked the party to explain as to why its recognition as a national party should not be "suspended or withdrawn".

Apparently in one of the routine official visits to the state after the model code of conduct came to effect, the EC team received a number of complaints

of misuse of state government's helicopter and aircraft by leaders of the ruling party in the state for election campaign purposes.

On cross-checking the complaints, it was found that a Beechcraft BA 200 aircraft VT-MPG and EC-135 helicopter VT -CGH, both owned by the government of Chhattisgarh, had been used on and after 6 October till 12 November, the notice stated. The model code of conduct came into effect on 6 October, the day the EC announced the poll dates.

During this period, Mrs Sonia Gandhi apparently used the chopper on 10 October during her visits to Raipur, Dhantewara, Hyderabad, Cuddapah, Chennai, Sriperumbudur and back to Chennai. Some of the stopovers may have been for re-

Congress denial

NEW DELHI, Nov. 18. — The Congress tonight asserted that Mrs Sonia Gandhi had "definitely not used" any of the Chhattisgarh government aircraft after the model code of conduct for the coming Assembly elections went into force. On the notice against Chhattisgarh chief minister Mr Ajit Jogi, the media secretary of the Congress said: "We have just received the notice from EC and we are cross-checking it." — PTI

fuelling. The EC in its notice asked the Congress president to explain the position within seven days. The notice also cited violation of the lawful directions of the EC for ensuring conduct of free and fair elections by party leaders.

The state government aircraft has not only been used by the Congress president but also by the chief minister, Mr Ajit Jogi, and the Speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, Mr Shrinivas Tiwari, in violation of the code.

The notice said in the event of the party failing to respond within the time stipulated, it would be presumed that it has nothing to say in the matter and the EC would take appropriate action or a decision without further reference to the party.

The BJP welcomed the step. It said: "Violation of the norms and code of conduct by the Congress is nothing new. They have always been known to do so."

Uma, Raje to contest only one seat

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND PTI

New Delhi: Going back on its earlier decision, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday decided to field its chief ministerial candidates, Vasundhara Raje (Rajasthan) and Uma Bharti (Madhya Pradesh), from only one constituency each.

Earlier, the party had announced that Ms Raje would stand from two constituencies. It had also narrowed down the search for a second constituency for Ms Bharti to two seats.

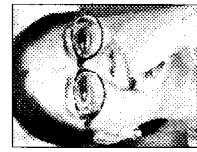
On Friday, as nominations closed for the December 1 elections, the BJP dismissed as media speculation party spokesperson Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi's announcement on Thursday that Ms Raje would contest from both Jhalrapatan and Piplawa, both in her Lok Sabha constituency of Jhalawar. He had said this decision had been taken as the state unit felt that it would have a "positive impact in

the neighbouring assembly segments".

But on Friday, BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu said the party had decided that none of its candidates would contest from more than one assembly seat and for this reason, even senior BJP leader and leader of the Opposition in



U. Bharti



V. Raje



S. Dikshit

the BJP had said it would field Ms Uma Bharti, Ms Raje and Mir Sai from two seats to confuse the Congress. But in the case of Ms Raje, the Congress sprang a last-minute surprise by announcing that its candidate against her would be Rama Pilot, MP from Dausa and the late Rajesh Pilot's wife.

Meanwhile, beating the deadline, aspirants, accompanied by their supporters, thronged election offices in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan to submit their papers.

In a move that rattled the BJP, Rama Pilot, an MP and widow of Rajesh Pilot, filed her nomination from Jhalrapatan constituency where the saffron party has fielded its chief ministerial candidate Ms

Raje. In a play-safe strategy, the BJP had on Thursday announced that Ms Raje would contest the Piplawa seat also.

BJP leaders, including Pramod Mahajan, went into a huddle soon after Ms Pilot entered the race to chalk out poll strategies.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh filed nomination from his traditional stronghold Raghogarh constituency. He is pitted against BJP's Shivraj Singh Chauhan. Accompanied by hundreds of supporters, Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit filed her papers from Gole Market constituency where she is facing Poonam Azad, wife of cricketer-turned-politician Kirti Azad.

Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot filed four sets of nominations from Sardarpur assembly constituency.

Scrutiny of nominations will take place on Saturday and the last date for withdrawals is November 17.

AFP

EC urges Governor to get key officials replaced

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Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov. 17. — The Election Commission has requested the Chhattisgarh Governor to direct the state government to propose a panel of names of IAS officers to replace the District Collectors whose presence, the commission felt, would hamper free and fair polls in Chhattisgarh. The EC has also directed transfer of the Bilaspur SP and Collector of Targuja to ensure free and fair polls in these areas.

The EC had directed the state government earlier to remove the Collectors of Bastar and Jashpur, but it was not complied with. In an extraordinary move, the EC today sought the Governor's intervention under Article 324 (6) in implementation of the transfer order.

Article 324 (6) says: "The President, or the Governor of a State, shall, when so requested by the Election Commission, make available to the Election Commission or to a Regional Commissioner such staff as may be necessary for the discharge of the functions conferred on the Election Commission by Clause (1)". The Clause (1) says: "The superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to Parliament and to the Legislature of every State and of elections to the offices of President and Vice-

President held under this Constitution shall be vested in a Commission" (referred to in this Constitution as the Election Commission).

In a letter addressed to Mr Jawahar Srivastava, principal secretary to the Governor, the EC said: "In view of the fact that the elections are already underway, the Commission would urge upon his excellency, the Governor of Chhattisgarh, kindly to ensure compliance by the State Government at the earliest." The letter further stated: "In disregard of the orders of the Commission and the orders of the High Court, Chhattisgarh, the incumbent Collectors continue to be in position, thereby seriously hampering the conduct of free and fair elections in these two districts for which the constitutional responsibility vests with the Election Commission."

On 29 October, the EC had ordered the state administration to transfer Jashpur Collector Mr BS Ananth and Bastar Collector Mr LN Suryavanshi to the state secretariat immediately and provide a panel of names of IAS officers for posting as Collectors in the two districts. The concerned officers, instead of handing over charge, obtained a stay order of their transfer from the Central Administrative Tribunal, Jabalpur and the CAT had directed the EC to maintain status quo. But, later the High Court had set aside the stay.

Gehlot men dominate Rajasthan list

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov. 10. — The Congress today announced 193 of the 200 party candidates for Rajasthan with chief minister Mr Ashok Gehlot's nominees dominating the list.

The fact that only 23 MLAs, including a minister, were dropped shows that Mr Gehlot thwarted the attempt of a section of the AICC and state leaders to clip his wings by demanding that at least 50 sitting members, loyalists of the chief minister, be denied tickets to minimise the anti-incumbency syndrome.

As compensation to the Gehlot rivals, tickets have been given to the sons and other relatives of around 10 senior leaders, much to the dismay of several workers. Till now the party has named 17 women, 19 candidates belonging to minorities, 33

from SCs, and 26 from STs, marking a marginal increase from the last election tally. Sixty-seven candidates belong to the OBCs, which comprise the influential Jats, while 76 candidates are from the general quota.

Though pressure groups had forced the AICC screening committee to reopen the list of probable candidates in order to drop some Gehlot loyalists, the low-profile but politically crafty chief minister managed to protect most of his men, potential backers for his second term in the event of the Congress winning the state. "The selection of candidates was done on the basis of performance," the chief minister said.

Though the party has not named its candidates against the BJP's chief ministerial nominee, Ms Vasundhara Raje, among the candidates being considered is Ms Rama Pilot, widow of Rajesh Pilot.

Industrialist to take on CM

NEW DELHI, Nov. 10. — The BJP has fielded industrialist Mr Mahendra Jhabak from Sardarpura to take on Mr Ashok Gehlot. The BJP calculates that the young Vaishya leader will turn the tables on Mr Gehlot.

Though the Congress has not announced its candidate from Sardarpura, Mr Gehlot is likely to contest from there. Mr Jhabak's name figured in the second list of BJP candidates for Rajasthan, containing 73 seats.

The BJP's second list contained one Muslim candidate — from Deodwana, Mohammad Yunus Khan. With this, the party has been able to nominate two Muslim candidates. With today's list, party has finalised tickets for 527 of the 590 Assembly seats in the four states to go to the polls. — SNS

CM cashes in on 'rubbish' row

RASHEED KIDWAI

Bhopal, Nov. 8: The Congress has sought to take advantage of the spat between Uma Bharti and Vikram Verma by ordering hoardings and pamphlets highlighting selective parts of her apology letter.

Chief minister Digvijay Singh today issued a statement making light of the apology by the BJP's chief ministerial candidate in Madhya Pradesh, saying, like Verma, he was also expecting an apology for remarks made by her.

"I am sure that one day my younger sister Umaji would show similar compassion and tender an apology to her other elder brother. I shall wait for that occa-

sion," said the Congress leader.

Digvijay highlighted Bharti's remark implying that Verma had "*dimag mein kachra* (rubbish in the brain)".

However, Bharti's supporters said the *sarvasin*, known for her plain-speaking, was suddenly provoked by a personal remark that they claimed was more distasteful.

In BJP circles, the public spat is seen as a blot on a party that projects itself as a disciplined organisation.

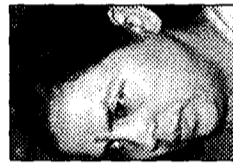
Digvijay and his spin doctors



Digvijay Singh, Uma Bharti

Opposition party incapable of providing good governance.

Bharti's troubles do not end here. A section of BJP leaders, including Verma, Sumitra Mahajan, Kailash Joshi, Babul Gaur and Yashodhara Rajee Scindia, have begun to close ranks for a joint resistance against Bharti during nominations for



plan to dub Bharti "impulsive, unpredictable" and, therefore, unfit to be chief minister. Congress campaign managers said the BJP's internal bickering would help him dub the main opposition party incapable of providing good governance.

Bharti continues to face a stiff challenge from those within and outside the BJP despite taking over the reins of the campaign almost a year ago. The BJP leader has emerged as a front-ranking campaigner, an effective crowd-puller and orator. However, several middle-rung leaders in the party have not accepted her leadership, despite repeated declarations by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, party president M. Venkaiah Naidu, as well as senior leaders Arun Jaitley and Pramod Mahajan.

BJP enters SMS mode, Cong nonchalant

Subtle oneliners swamp Madhya Pradesh

Vasundhara come hither to Rajasthan electorate

Santosh Singh in Bhopal

Nov. 5. — "Sadak, bijli aur rojgar, das saal mein bantadhar" — this could be just one of the SMS on voters' mobiles in Madhya Pradesh.

Disinterested voters may stay away from public meetings and ignore blaring loud-speakers canvassing for political parties, but they cannot escape electoral fever if they are close to phones — landline or cellular.

The BJP is all set to make the most of technology during election campaign. Several candidates in the poll fray will reach out to voters through voice-mail messages. Catchy SMS will always be there as supplementary to keep voters in good humour.

Besides 10 lakh landline subscribers, there are about seven lakh mobile users in the state. Getting these numbers is not much of a problem as BSNL directory and records of private mobile companies will always come handy for the BJP.

Though the BJP is hardly done with announcement of its candi-

dates, the party spokesperson, Mr Kailash Vijayvargiya, had the first taste of voice-mail messages to his "well-wishers". Mr Vijayvargiya's "Diwali" message — being played a week after the festival was celebrated — can be dubbed the trial-run.

The legislator, after having wished Happy Diwali, deftly talked of a "changeover" from 10-year-old darkness (read Digvijay Singh's rule) to light (prospective BJP rule). Those at the "receiving end" were made to listen as there is no way one can respond to recorded messages.

Now it is just a matter of days before the BJP stops circumlocuting. It would directly spread messages such as "Desh me vikas, pradesh ka satyanash". "Desh aage, pradesh piche kyo?" and a host of oneliners several BJP brains still working on. Most of one-liners are apparently coined by the BJP national president, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu.

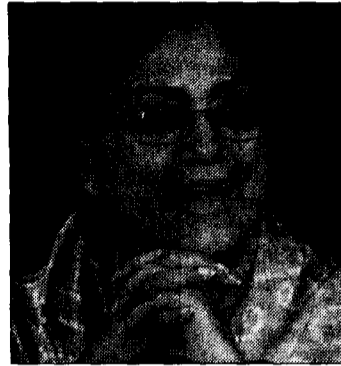
The Congress, however, is banking on traditional mode of canvassing through banners and cut-outs as the party has not yet showed its penchant for technology.

Ranjeet S Jamwal in Jaipur

JAIPUR, Nov. 5. — The Rajasthan chief minister, Mr Ashok Gehlot may be working hard to keep BJP's chief ministerial candidate Ms Vasundhara Rajee at bay but what if he receives a telephone call or an SMS from the BJP rival appealing him to vote her party to power?

Also, if Ms Rajee pleads her case saying the state's people are determined to vote out the Congress government for a developed and prosperous Rajasthan where women, farmers, youth and employees are respected and not harassed? Even if Mr Gehlot is not very happy with the message, he will not be able to convey his feelings to Ms Rajee.

The reason: Ms Rajee won't be personally on line. Rather, this "personal message" in Ms Rajee's voice seeking support during the Assembly elections, will be pre-recorded and flashed to over 10 lakh telephone users (which of course will include Mr Gehlot, other Congress leaders and supporters) in Rajasthan through an automatic dialling system. The telephone will get automatically disconnected after the thirty-second message beginning



TO THE POINT: Ms Vasundhara Rajee with: "Namaskar, main Vasundhara Rajee bol rahe hoon (I am Vasundhara Rajee)".

Such messages will be sent as part of the BJP's strategy for reaching maximum number of people once filing of nomination papers starts. The BJP is also planning to send SMS to all cell-phone users and e-mails to Internet users by setting-up a special call-centre for this. The party is acquiring the required software and telephone lines for the purpose.

This apart, in every Assembly constituency, there will be at least 1,000 people (five hundred VIPs and five hundred party workers) who will receive letters from Ms Rajee for support in elections.

The BJP's media-in-charge,



UNRUFFLED: Mr Ashok Gehlot

Mr Sunil Bhargava said: "In addition to this, we will be using other conventional methods of publicity like audio cassettes and advertisements in electronic media." The ruling Congress, on the other hand, will rely on traditional methods of canvassing like public meetings and door-to-door campaign.

"We are going to the polls with the achievements notched by our government over the last five years to recommend us. We don't need to resort to the BJP's cash-intensive method of catching votes," Congress spokesperson Mr Raghu Sharma said. He was dismissive of the telephone messages saying it will hardly have any impact on the rural voters.



PRINCE AND RANI: Prince Charles has a word with Rani Mukherjee at a reception in Mumbai on Tuesday evening. The heir to the British throne left on Wednesday after a nine-day tour of India. — PTI

Jammu-Udhampur rly link soon

NEW DELHI, Nov. 5. — After much delay, the Jammu-Udhampur rail line will be commissioned by next month, four months ahead of the introduction of normal traffic on the route, the railway minister, Mr Nitish Kumar, said today.

Mr Kumar told the consultative committee attached to his ministry that the commissioning would pave the way for trial run of trains before the normal traffic which would start before March next year. Work

is also progressing as per schedule on the Udhampur-Katra-Quazigund-Srinagar-Baramula rail link, a national project, he said.

On safety measures Mr Kumar said the steps taken so far had resulted in improvement in safety of train operations and underlined the need for continued vigil on this front. He informed members about the technical break-through achieved by the railway coach factory, Kapurthala, by developing a fire-proof prototype coach. — SNS

Saffron salve for the no-ticket sulk

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

NEW DELHI, Nov. 5. — With nominations for most Assembly seats in the four states likely to be out by tomorrow, the BJP has decided to focus on the next big challenge — to rein in the rebel candidates. Successful ticket seekers have been asked to first spend some time trying to rope in their unsuccessful party colleagues before launching their campaign.

Also senior leaders who are known for their impartiality, have been assigned to talk to the unsuccessful candidates and make them work for the party nominees rather than turn into supporter of a candidate of the rival party or a rebel. Plum posts could be offered to them, in exchange, if the BJP came to power in these states. In a certain instances, local RSS leaders are likely to be drafted to put a check on rebel candidates. Since stakes are very high in all these states — the BJP being the principal adversary — those not getting party nominations would not take things lightly.

The party has adopted the principle of re-nominating most sitting MLAs to reduce the chances of revolt. Yesterday's list of candidates for Madhya Pradesh showed that all 58 sitting MLAs were re-nominated in the 139 seats declared. However, the party is still wary of the rebel phenomenon in states that are likely to witness photo-finish contests.

The phenomenon of rebel candidates was the BJP's scourge during the Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh and also turned out to be one of the main causes for the party's humiliating defeat in the state.

Ruckus greets list of candidates

NEW DELHI, Nov. 5. — Slogans of "Vasundhara Rajee murdabad" confronted the BJP's chief ministerial candidate for Rajasthan as the party announced the first list of candidates for the Assembly elections in December.

The party's list for 93 of the 200 Assembly seats included Ms Rajee from Jhalrapatan (an assembly segment in her Lok Sabha constituency, Jhalawar), a seat considered "very safe" for her. Ms Rajee had complete sway over the list, sources said.

The police had to intervene as some BJP workers tried to force their way into the party headquarters to meet Ms Rajee and ask her why a party ticket was denied to Amar Chand Midha who represented Suratgarh between 1993 and 1998 but failed to win it for the second time. The party spokesperson, Mr Prakash Javdekar, had a tough time explaining to the agitated workers the need to maintain discipline.

Luckily for the BJP, the band of Midha supporters came from only one constituency. While BJP leaders asserted that they all came from one family, those shouting slogans said that it was not true.

Ms Rajee's response was to the point: "That he lost

in 1998 assembly elections indicated he was not a winning candidate. After all the party has only 200 assembly seats to distribute from among the bio-data of about 7000 aspirants. Winnability was the only criterion."

The sitting MLA of Nainwa, Mr Prabhulal, who has been denied ticket wore a sombre look and tried to catch Mrs Rajee's attention. He said he was confident the party would re-nominate him as the party's nominee from Nainwa since Mr Hemraj Nagar was not a winning candidate.

Among other important leaders who were given tickets were Mr Harishankar Bhabra from Ratanagarh and Mr Narpal Singh Rajvi (son in law of Mr Bhairon Singh Shekhawat) from Chittorgarh. Mrs Kiran Yadav, wife of BJP MP from Alwar, Mr Jaswant Singh Yadav, has been fielded from Tizara. Mrs Kamala Kaswan from Sadulpur is the other relative to get party ticket. Her husband, Mr Ram Singh Kaswan, is the BJP MP from Churu.

The list contained 11 women. Mrs Rajee said that the party was trying to ensure that it fielded at least one women candidate from each of the 25 Lok Sabha seats. — SNS

Mizoram Only State With A Different Poll Schedule

MP, Delhi, Rajasthan to go to polls on December 1

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 6 OCTOBER

THE Election Commission on Monday kicked off what is largely perceived as a "semi-final" for the Lok Sabha polls due next year, by announcing a one-day poll for Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Assemblies on December 1. Mizoram will be the only state with a different poll calendar, with voting there slated to be held earlier on November 20. With the announcement of the poll schedule for the crucial round of state polls has begun the warming up for the general elections. The outcome of the former may not only impact the strategy of the political parties for the Lok Sabha elections, but also may have a bearing on the timing of the general election itself.

As a senior government leader put it, "even if it may not really be indicative of the likely party position in the Lok Sabha polls, it will certainly boost the morale of the cadres of the party that emerges the winner and give it a psychological advantage."

According to the election schedule announced by the Election Commission, the notifications for four states will be issued on November 11 and for Mizoram on October 27. Scrutiny of nominations will be held on November 4 for Mizoram and on November 15 for the remaining



LYNGDOH: ON GUARD

states. Counting for the four states is slated for December 4 and for Mizoram on December 2. The election is to be completed before December 9 in Mizoram and before December 11 in rest of the states. The model code of conduct comes into effect from Monday.

For the first time, the candidates will have to file affidavits disclosing their educational qualifications, assets and liabilities as well as their criminal record. The returning officers, who will make these affidavits freely available to all concerned parties, will however not have any powers to disqualify a candidate on the basis of the information provided in the affidavits, which can be challenged only later by filing an election petition in the high court.

Roll calendar to see truncated winter session

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 6 OCTOBER

THE poll calendar for five states is likely to push the winter session to as late as December 3, with the government and Opposition leaders being in the thick of poll campaign towards the end of November.

The winter session usually begins in the third or fourth week of November and closes just before Christmas. However, with the Election Commission scheduling the polls to New Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram on December 1, the government managers have decided to depart from convention and keep aside the month of November for campaigning. The result, of course, is a truncated winter session.

The government has, of late, been in touch with the commission to schedule the winter session in such a way that it did not clash with the poll campaign. In fact, the government had already set December 1 as the tentative date for opening of the winter session.

However, with the EC scheduling the polling in the four major states on December 1 itself, the winter session in all probability will have to wait until December 3.

EC puts political donations by cos under the scanner

Our Delhi Bureau
NEW DELHI 6 OCTOBER

THE Election Commission (EC) has kick-started the process of tracking corporate donations to political parties, following presidential assent to the Election and Other Related Laws (Amendment) Bill 2003 last month. With Assembly polls coming up in four states in December and January and general elections next year, the EC has sought inputs from the finance ministry on the implications of the tax breaks and the monitoring mechanism.

Indian companies or residents contributing to political parties are entitled to deductions from their total income for any sum contributed as a donation in the previous year to a recognised political party. The tax break will be available under 80 GGB of the Income Tax Act. Under the existing provision of the Companies Act, 1956, any company which has been in existence for more than three years can donate up to 5% of their average of net profits for three years to a political party or for political purposes to an individual.

Income tax relief would also be available to political parties, provided they file reports with the EC for con-

tributions in excess of Rs 20,000 received from any person or company other than a government company in that financial year. The annual report — giving details of donations and the expenditure incurred on them — will have to be filed by the treasurer of the party. The accounts of the donations contained in the report submitted to the EC will be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India once in a financial year to determine the expenditure on constituency campaigns and the expenditure on the general party campaign incurred by the concerned political party.

The objective of introducing the law was to usher in transparency into the funding of political parties by the corporate sector. In fact, section 293A inserted into the Companies Act in 1960 allowed for contribution by companies to political parties. The provision was reversed through an amendment to the Companies Act in 1969 not only to prohibit political contributions by corporates but also to make it punishable. The Inderjit Gupta Committee, which went into the issue, left the decision in this regard to the wisdom of the government and Parliament. The law also provides for partial funding of elections under which the EC will supply specified items to voters.



Uttarpara bypoll peaceful

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, September 27

POLLING FOR the Uttarpara Assembly by-election ended peacefully with no major incidents reported from anywhere. The turnout was recorded at 60 per cent.

The seat, which fell vacant after the death of sitting Trinamool MLA Swaraj Mukherjee, witnessed a four-corner contest. The Trinamool fielded Indrajit Ghose, Uttarpara

Municipality vice-chairman. The CPI(M) put up Jyotirishna Chatterjee who had lost to the Trinamool candidate in the last election. The Congress, which did had field any candidate in the last election because of its alliance with the Trinamool, put up Adhir Mukherjee. The Janata Dal (S) fielded Zahidul Islam.

Polling was delayed for as long as three hours in three booths because of a technical snag in the electronic vot-

ing machines. "The machines were repaired and polling at the three booths began after three hours," an official said.

The election commission's rule that the polling agents in a booth should also be a voter of that booth was implemented in this by-poll. But the Trinamool and the Congress fail to appoint agents in all the booths.

Trinamool district president and MP Akbar Ali

Khondkar said CPI(M) cadres threatened agents at booths in Dankuni, Raghunathpur and Kanaipur. Party candidate Indrajit Ghosh said CPI(M) men could not create trouble in Uttarpara town due to the tight security.

CPI(M) zonal committee secretary Shantoshree Chatterjee denied the Trinamool allegations, expressing confidence that the Left candidate would register a huge win.

EC removes Nadia DM

SANTANU BANERJEE
KOLKATA, JUNE 6

THE Election Commission today removed Nadia district magistrate and returning officer Krishna Gupta for violating the model code of conduct as he was with Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya during his visit to campaign for by-election to the Nabadwip Lok Sabha seat.

According to Chief Electoral Officer S.N. Haque, several Opposition parties had complained about Gupta's calling on Bhattacharya at Krishnanagar Circuit House. When Haque sought an explanation from Gupta, he "explained that it was a courtesy call". But this didn't satisfy the Election Commission and Gupta was ordered out till June 16 when the poll process is expected to be completed. Nabadwip parliamentary seat is going to a bypoll on June 8

following the death of Trinamool MP A.M. Biswas.

While senior additional district magistrate K.K. Paul would officiate as DM, a former CEO and Presidency Range divisional commissioner S.K. Magan was made returning officer for the district.

The EC action came as a virtual snub for the ruling CPI(M)-led LF coalition, involving none other than the CM. It also coincided with the beginning of party's Politburo meet here today. "We have no problem. Whoever becomes the RO, we're confident that poll would be held democratically," said Anil Biswas, state CPI(M) secretary and Politburo member. However, the CM refused to comment.

Jubilant Opposition members from the Trinamool Congress and the Congress, which lodged the complaint with the EC the day after Bhattacharya's visit, said: "It's a significant step taken by the Election Commission."

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 JUN 2003

Poll courtesy-call kick

OUR BUREAU

June 6: Courtesy calls can earn a ticket to the doghouse when a bypoll is peeping round the corner.

Nadia district magistrate Krishna Gupta has been transferred after the officer conceded that he had called on Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Wednesday while the chief minister was on his way to a campaign rally in Nabadwip.

The Nabadwip Lok Sabha seat is set to elect its representative on June 8, for which Gupta was the returning officer.

Gupta now finds himself shunted to Banga Bhavan in Delhi, where he is slated to take over as Bengal's additional resident commissioner.

The transfer — the first such punishment in the state — has raised several eyebrows in a system where more serious slip-ups have gone unpunished, and at times even been rewarded.

The Opposition in Bengal often complains that the govern-

ment gifts prize postings to police officers and bureaucrats who harass anti-Left political activists.

Bengal chief election commissioner S.N. Haque said a political party had lodged a complaint about Gupta with the Election Commission in Delhi.

"Yesterday, I received a call from a senior EC official who wanted to know whether the complaint was true. I contacted Gupta who told me it was just a courtesy call and he had discussed drinking-water problems with the chief minister. Accordingly, I informed Delhi,"

he said at Writers' Buildings.

Another call came in the afternoon. "The EC asked me to remove Gupta from the post of returning officer as well as district magistrate till June 16," Haque said.

CPM state secretary Anil Biswas said his party was not bothered about the decision.

But the Opposition claimed that Gupta had not only called on the chief minister at Krishnagar

Circuit House but also accompanied him to two political rallies. Congress general secretary Manas Bhuniya said the party lodged an official complaint with the Election Commission yesterday.

Presidency division commissioner S.K. Magon will be the new returning officer for Nabadwip. Additional district magistrate (general) K.K. Pal will take over as Nadia district magistrate till June 16, the day the bypoll procedure ends.

The Congress and the Trinamul Congress were already raising allegations of partisan conduct by the administration in Nabadwip.

"We complained to the observers about the district magistrate not sharing our concerns about the possibility of terror being unleashed in Chakdah and Haringhata," Nadia Trinamul leader Gouri Datta said.

"Besides, our demand that all 1,047 booths be declared sensitive found no response from the administration," he added.

7 JUN 2003

Cong springs Shimla surprise, Left Front retains Tripura

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & AGENCIES

SHIMLA/ NEW DELHI/ GUWAHATI/ KOHIMA, March 1. — The Congress today put the Gujarat debacle behind it to oust the BJP in Himachal Pradesh, for long perceived as a saffron stronghold, with a majority that fell just short of two-third. The Left Front retained its stranglehold in Tripura, where it has been in power since 1992. The Congress is also well-placed to cobble a coalition in Meghalaya, but received its only setback of sorts in Nagaland, which is headed for a hung Assembly.

An anti-incumbency wave shocked the BJP in Himachal, where attempts by the party by Hindutva's latest icon, Mr Narendra Modi, to weave his Gujarat magic did not pay dividends. The party could win only 16 seats as against 40 by the Congress. Many BJP stalwarts including Speaker Mr Gulabchand Thakur, state unit chief Mr Jai-kishen Sharma and 15 ministers were humbled, while the Congress' chief ministerial candidate Mr Virbhadra Singh won handsomely from Rohroo. Chief minister Mr PK Dhumal retained his Bamsan seat. And HVP supremo Mr Sukh Ram won from his fief Mandi for the seventh consecutive time since 1962.

In Tripura, the CPI-M secured an absolute majority on its own winning 36 seats in the 60-member House while its partners RSP won two and the CPI one. The newly-formed Congress-INPT alliance won 19 seats. Chief minister Mr Manik Sarkar retained Dhanpur comfortably.

Meghalaya is likely to witness another hung Assembly with no party being able to get a clear majority in the 60-member Assembly. The Congress emerged as the single largest party with 22, three short of its 1998 tally. The NCP was second with 14 on its poll debut in the state.

The same was the case with Nagaland where no party seems likely to win a majority. The ruling Congress was routed from its Kohima and Phek strongholds.

■ Detailed reports on page 10

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Total seats: 68
Elections held: 65
Results declared: 65

Congress: 40
BJP: 16
HV Congress: 1
Lok Janshakti: 1
Loktantrik Morcha: 1
Others & Ind.: 6

TRIPURA

Total seats: 60
Elections held: 60
Results declared: 58

Left Front:
CPI-M: 36
RSP: 2 CPI: 1
Cong-INPT:
Cong: 12 INPT: 7

NAGALAND

Total seats: 60
Counting held: 58
Results declared: 55

Cong: 21 NPP: 18
BJP: 6 JD-U: 2
NDM: 3
Samata: 1
Others & Ind.: 4

MEGHALAYA

Total seats: 60
Results declared: 60

Cong: 22
NCP: 14
BDP: 9
MDP: 4
Others & Ind.: 11

ASSEMBLY POLLS: THE VERDICT

Nagaland heads for a hung House

Prabin Kalita
Guwahati, March 1

NAGALAND APPEARED to be heading for a hung Assembly with both the Congress and the Nagaland Peoples' Front (NPF)-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) fighting neck and neck as counting for votes went on.

Of the 60 seats, the results for 53 seats declared so far were divided almost equally between the two fronts. The Congress was ahead as the single largest party with 24 seats.



S.C. Jamir
Winning smile

The Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN), including the BJP, Nagaland Peo-

ple's Front (NPF), Samata Party and JD(U) was threatening to dislodge Chief Minister S.C. Jamir and the Congress from its almost 20 years of rule.

The NPF had 19 seats and leads in two, while the BJP, making its debut this time, had won five of the 35 seats it contested. The Samata Party had won one and the JD(U) two, taking the DAN alliance tally to 24, four seats ahead of the Congress and its possible post-poll ally, the Nagaland Democratic Movement (NDM), which had won

three seats. The JD(U) and the Samata too were opening their account for the first time in the state.

Five years ago, the NSCN(I-M)'s election boycott had helped Jamir and his 52 legislators take complete control of the 60-member Nagaland House. This time, there was no such call this time and it seems to be working against the Congress. Taking credit for "bringing back peace" by getting the NSCN(I-M) to hold talks with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and deputy Prime Minister LK

Advani, the BJP set the ball rolling to win the hearts of the peace-yearning Nagas.

Among the prominent Congress losers were Health Minister Neiba Ndong, Speaker Z. Lohé, deputy speaker Joshua Sumi, Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary Nuzola Swuro, Social Security and Welfare Minister SK Sangam. And NPF's chief ministerial candidate, Neiphu Rio won from Angami-I constituency, defeating his nearest Congress rival, Zakie-o Metha, by a margin of 6,573 votes.

Jaideep Mazumdar
Kohima, March 1

THE NSCN(I-M) has emerged as the prime victor in Nagaland. With the (NPF)-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) all set to form the government, the outfit has inflicted a stunning blow to its rival faction led by S.S. Khaplang.

That the NSCN(I-M) supported the NPF, the BJP and the Samata Party (DAN constituents) is a well-known fact. The results prove this

amply — constituencies where the diktat of the outfit ran saw DAN candidates win. There have also been reports of the NSCN(I-M) funding NPF candidates led by Neiphu Rio, a former Congress heavyweight. Rio, who's known to be close to the outfit, fell out with Jamir late last year and floated his own party. Reports say Rio was egged on by the outfit and assured of financial support in the February polls.

The results have some very grave implications for Nagaland. With Rio in the CM's chair, the NSCN(I-M), say analysts, would remote-control the government. That's bad news, feel intelligence officers.

Though the poll results would have no direct outcome on the ongoing peace talks between New Delhi and the outfit, the NSCN(I-M) leaders would now naturally be in a more comfortable position and will talk more confidently at the negotiating table.

NSCN(I-M) 'friend' likely to call the shots

Assembly polls see 68% turnout

2712
9 Election (State)

7 persons killed, 3 injured in NE

Our Political Bureau & Agencies

NEW DELHI 26 FEBRUARY

S EVEN persons, including five BSF personnel were killed and three injured and a number of Electronic Voting Machines damaged in stray violence in the North East as 68 per cent of an estimated 8.31 million voters cast their ballots in Himachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya on Wednesday amid tight security.

Tripura recorded the highest 72 per cent, Nagaland, 70, Meghalaya 68 and Himachal Pradesh 63 per cent respectively.

Five BSF personnel and their driver were shot dead and three jawans injured by suspected National Liberation Front of Tripura militants, when they returning from poll duty at Snatarampara in West Tripura district.

In Nagaland, one person was



FALLING IN LINE: Women queue outside a polling station in Shimla on Wednesday. — AP

a 54% and 55% turnout, is also being eagerly watched. While the Bharatiya Janata Party is keen to retain Haidergarh, vacated by former chief minister Rajnath Singh, Gauriganj sees a tough fight between the Congress and the BSP. Nagaland chief minister,

S. C. Jamir, may be worried at the 70% turnout on Wednesday, given that the Congress had won the last election virtually without any contest, due to a poll boycott called by insurgent groups. With the NSCN(IM) said to be tacitly supporting the candidates put up by the Opposition, the Nagaland Political Front, the response of the state's electorate may not only confirm the insurgent group's popular base but also spell trouble for Mr Jamir, who is believed to back the rival Khaplang faction of the NSCN.

CODE OF CONDUCT TAKES EFFECT IMMEDIATELY: LYNGDOH

Assembly polls in four States on Feb. 26

By-elections (State)

*HD-1
12/1*

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, JAN. 11. The Election Commission today announced that Assembly elections to the four States of Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura would be held on February 26.

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), J.M. Lyngdoh, flanked by two other Election Commissioners, T.S. Krishnamurthy and B.B. Tandon, told presspersons that simultaneously, byelections would also be conducted in seven Assembly constituencies spread over six States — two in Uttar Pradesh (Gauriganj and Haidergarh) and one each in Jammu and Kashmir (Pampore), Tamil Nadu (Sattankulam), Jharkhand (Poriyahat), Karnataka (Humnabad), and Maharashtra (Bhokarden).

The CEC said polling would be held in June for the three snow-bound Assembly constituencies of Himachal Pradesh — Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur and Pangi Bharmaur. All the remaining 65 seats in Himachal Pradesh and 60 each in three northeastern States would go to the polls on February 26.

Mr. Lyngdoh said the notification would be issued on January 31; last date for nominations, February 7; scrutiny on February 8; withdrawal, February 10 and counting of votes on March 1 and the new Assemblies would be in place by March 7.

He said the term of the present Assembly in Himachal Pradesh was due to expire on March 11; Meghalaya on March 8 and Nagaland and Tripura on March 22.

The Code of Conduct in these States and constituencies where byelections were to



J.M. Lyngdoh

be held would come into force with immediate effect. It would be applicable to all the political parties and to the State and Union governments. The CEC said electronic voting machines (EVMs) would be used in all the Assembly constituencies in the four States and in the byelections and a massive training and awareness programme had been launched.

He said the Commission had asked the Union Home Ministry for adequate security forces to ensure a free and fair poll. The Commission had detailed discussions with the Union Home Secretary and the Chief Secretary, the Director-General of Police and senior officials of these States besides making its own assessment before finalis-

ing the poll schedule. Mr. Lyngdoh said the Commission members would go to Nagaland and Meghalaya next week. He was optimistic that elections would be conducted peacefully in Nagaland in view of an assurance given by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) leaders that they would not interfere with the poll process.

Compulsory voter identification

The CEC said compulsory identification of voters would be made for these elections. However, as the process of issuing photo identity cards to voters was not yet completed, other documents would be used for identification so that voters, whose names were found in the electoral rolls, were not deprived of their right to franchise.

Asked about the possibility of illegal migrants figuring in the electoral rolls in Tripura, he said the names of 1.54 lakh Bangladeshi migrants, whose names figured in the rolls were ordered to be deleted in 1995. However, some names which were included subsequently would also be removed this time.

He said that in Nagaland electoral rolls were found to be in order, by and large. But the Commission had asked for fresh enumeration in four constituencies in Dimapur district and it would be published by the month-end. Asked whether the Commission would issue a direction to disarm the special police officers, several of whom were CPI(M) activists, Mr. Lyngdoh said though there was no such intention now. "It is a relevant point. We will consider it when we go there".