

তদন্ত শুরু, আজ বসছে কমিশন

টাকা বিলির অভিযোগ এ বার জর্জের বিরুদ্ধে

সূত্রত বসু • পটনা

২৫ ডিসেম্বর: লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের পরে এ বার জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ। আর জে ডি প্রধান ও রেলমন্ত্রীর পরে এন ডি এ-র আহ্বায়ক জর্জের বিরুদ্ধে একটি দলিত পরিবারকে টাকা দেওয়ার অভিযোগ উঠল। ঘুষ দেওয়ার অভিযোগে জর্জ এবং আরও ১৯ জনের বিরুদ্ধে থানায় এফআইআর-ও দায়ের করা হয়েছে।

আজ সকালে প্রাক্তন প্রতিরক্ষামন্ত্রী জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ তাঁর নিজের কেন্দ্র মুজফফরপুরে ‘অন্যাহারে আত্মহত্যা করতে যাওয়া’ একটি পরিবারকে টাকা দিয়ে সাহায্য করেছেন বলে অভিযোগ। তদন্ত শুরু করেছেন মুজফফরপুরের জেলাশাসক সূর্যকুমার মিশ্র। তিনি ওই পরিবারের কাছ থেকে কিছু টাকা বাজেয়াপ্ত করেছেন। পরে জেলা শাসকের নির্দেশে আহিয়াপুর থানা ১৭১(বি), ১৭১(সি), ৩৪(আইপিসি) ধারায় এফআইআর দায়ের হয়েছে। জর্জের বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ এবং বিহার নিয়ে পর্যবেক্ষক কে জে রাওয়ার রিপোর্টের ব্যাপারে কাল দিল্লিতে বৈঠকে বসবে নির্বাচন কমিশন।

লালুপ্রসাদের বিরুদ্ধে এই তিন ধারাতেই এফআইআর হয়েছিল। বিহারে নির্বাচন বিধি কার্যকর হওয়ার পরে টাকা দেওয়া নিয়ে আরজেডি প্রধান এবং এনডিএ-র আহ্বায়কের বিরুদ্ধে মামলা হল।

জর্জ অবশ্য এই অভিযোগ সম্পূর্ণ অস্বীকার করে বলেছেন, “আমি কোনও টাকা দিইনি।” তাঁর সহকর্মীরা অবশ্য ওই পরিবারটিকে টাকা দিয়েছেন বলে জর্জ স্বীকার করেছেন।

নিজে টাকা দেওয়ার অভিযোগ অস্বীকার করলেও ঘটনাস্থলে হাজির স্থানীয় মানুষ জানিয়েছেন, সকাল ৯টা নাগাদ হাসপাতালে এসে জর্জ নিজের পকেট থেকে একটি একশো টাকার নোট বার করে ওই পরিবারটির কর্তা টুটু পাসোসায়ানের হাতে দেন। জর্জের দলের জেলা সভাপতি রাজেশ্বর পরিবারটিকে চারশো টাকা দিতে যান। দলের নেত্রী বিজয়া সিংহ হাতব্যাগ খুলে দেন হাজার টাকার একটি নোট। পরে একটি টিভি চ্যানেলের ক্যামেরা দেখে থমকে যান জর্জ।

ক্যামেরা বন্ধ হয়ে যাওয়ার পরে জর্জের সামনেই ওই টাকা পরিবারটির হাতে তুলে দেওয়া হয়।

সম্প্রতি লালুপ্রসাদ একটি দলিত বস্তিতে গিয়ে কয়েক জন মহিলাকে টাকা বিলি করায় তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে এফআইআর করেছিল নির্বাচন কমিশন। এই নিয়ে লোকসভায় লালুপ্রসাদের বিরুদ্ধে সরব ছিলেন জর্জ

ফার্নান্ডেজ-সহ এনডিএ নেতারা। আজ জর্জের বিরুদ্ধে নির্বাচন বিধি ভঙ্গের অভিযোগ ওঠায় আরজেডি নেতারা দৃশ্যতই খুশি। আরজেডি-র মুখপাত্র শিবানন্দ তেওয়ারি বলেন, “নির্বাচন কমিশনের উচিত এই ব্যাপারে উপযুক্ত ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া।” অন্য দিকে, কংগ্রেস নেতা রামযতন সিংহ বলেছেন, “জর্জের বিরুদ্ধে ওঠা অভিযোগের তদন্ত হওয়া উচিত।”

আজ জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ মুজফফরপুরের যে পরিবারটিকে টাকা দিয়ে সাহায্য করেছেন বলে অভিযোগ উঠেছে, তাঁদের কাহিনি অবশ্য চোখে জল আনার মতোই। দলিত পরিবারের শিশু দু’টির একটির বয়স ছয়, অন্যটি মাত্র দেড় বছরের। দিনের পর দিন না-

অবস্থায় তাঁর পক্ষে রিকশা চালানো আর সম্ভব হচ্ছে না। মুজফফরপুরের হাসপাতাল এসকেএমসিএইচ-এ ভর্তি সুনীতা দেবী চিকিৎসকদের জানিয়েছেন, গত আট দিন তাঁদের ঘরে রান্না হয়নি। বাচ্চা দু’টিকে প্রতিবেশীদের কাছ থেকে চেয়েচিন্তে দু’চার দিন আধপেটা খাওয়ানো হয়েছিল। কিন্তু গত কয়েক দিন ধরে প্রায় না-খেয়েই রয়েছে ছ’বছরের শিশু অভিষেক এবং দেড় বছরের অভিজিৎ।

মা হয়ে ক্ষুধার্ত শিশুদের কান্না সহিতে না-পেরে শেষ পর্যন্ত আত্মহত্যা করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেন সুনীতা দেবী। গত বৃহস্পতিবার দুপুরে তিনি শিশু দু’টিকে নিয়ে আখড়াঘাট পুল থেকে নদীতে ঝাঁপ দেন। এই সময়ে নদীতে মাছ



মুজফফরপুরের হাসপাতালে জর্জের সামনে দাঁড়ানো ব্যক্তির হাতে ধরা পাঁচশো টাকার নোট। প্রশ্ন, জর্জ কি ঘুষ দিয়েছেন? — পি টি আই

খেতে পাওয়া এই শিশু দু’টির কান্না সহ্য করতে পারেননি মুজফফরপুরের শাহবাজপুর এলাকার বাসিন্দা সুনীতা দেবী। খিদের জ্বালায় কাঁদতে থাকা দু’টি শিশুকে নিয়ে নদীতে ঝাঁপ দিয়ে আত্মহত্যা করতে চেয়েছিলেন তিনি। মুজফফরপুরের আখড়াঘাট পুল থেকে নদীতে ঝাঁপ দেওয়ার পরে এলাকার মৎস্যজীবীরা এই তিন জনকে উদ্ধার করে হাসপাতালে ভর্তি করেছেন।

সুনীতা দেবীর স্বামী টুটু পাসোসায়ান এলাকায় রিকশা চালান। বেশ কিছু দিন ধরেই তিনি অসুস্থ। টুটুর প্রতিবেশীরা জানিয়েছেন, কয়েক দিন ধরেই কাশির সঙ্গে তাঁর মুখ থেকে রক্ত উঠেছে। এই

ধরছিলেন বেশ কয়েক জন মৎস্যজীবী। তাঁরা নৌকা নিয়ে এসে সুনীতা দেবী এবং তাঁর শিশু দু’টিকে উদ্ধার করে হাসপাতালে নিয়ে যান।

এর পরে রাজ্য প্রশাসন অবশ্য অন্যাহারের এই ঘটনাটি ধামাচাপা দেওয়ার জন্য উঠেপড়ে লেগেছে। মুজফফরপুরের জেলাশাসক সূর্যকুমার মিশ্র বলেছেন, “তদন্তের পরে জানা গিয়েছে, স্বামীর সঙ্গে ঝগড়াঝাটির পরেই সুনীতা দেবী আত্মহত্যা করতে গিয়েছিলেন।” এই পরিবারটির এখন কোনও রোজগার ছিল না, তা অবশ্য স্বীকার করে নিয়েছেন জেলাশাসক।

● কাজে ফিরতে হল ডিএম-কে...পৃঃ ৫

FIR filed against Fernandes for "violation" of model code

By K. Balchand

PATNA, DEC. 25. The Muzaffarpur district administration today filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the National Democratic Alliance convener and Janata Dal (United) chief, George Fernandes, charging him with violating the model code of conduct. The allegation was that money was given to a woman who had attempted suicide on Thursday due to poverty.

The District Magistrate, S.K. Mishra, visited the Shri Krishna Medical College Hospital near Muzaffarpur where the woman, Sunita Devi, 40, is undergoing treatment. She had jumped into

the Gandak river with her two minor children. Later, Mr. Mishra directed the Sub-Divisional Officer, Maharshi Ram, who is the Returning Officer of the Bocchaha Assembly constituency, to file the case against Mr. Fernandes.

Ms. Sunita Devi is alleged to have told the two officials that JD (U) supporters had given her Rs. 500 in the presence of Mr. Fernandes when he came to express his sympathies with her. The District Magistrate has since seized the money.

The FIR lodged at the Ahiyapur police station charged Mr. Fernandes and other JD (U) workers with giving bribe under

various Sections of the Indian Penal Code relating to attempt to induce voters.

Mr. Fernandes, who was in his Lok Sabha constituency, Muzaffarpur, on his way to Chapra to attend a party meeting, denied that he had given any money. "No money has gone from my hands nor did I have any money," he said adding the allegations were "a lie".

A week ago, an FIR was lodged against the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, for allegedly distributing money to Dalit women in Bihta in Patna district ahead of his rally, which he subsequently called off.

26 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Laloo gets a stick to beat George with

11/12/04
to be
to J. Bleekin (sub)
K.C. PHILIP

Patna, Dec. 25: The election-time generosity that has singed Laloo Prasad Yadav today burnt the fingers of his rival George Fernandes after authorities filed a case against him for violating the model code of conduct in poll-bound Bihar.

The NDA convener has been charged under Section 171 (b) of the IPC for trying to influence voters after he was accused of giving money to a poor woman who had attempted suicide.

A delegation from the Rashtriya Janata Dal — which was hauled up by the Election Commission after its chief Laloo Prasad distributed cash among poor Dalits at a recent public meeting — is understood to have met the poll panel and demanded action.

TV grabs showed Fernandes purportedly giving a 500-rupee note to a man at a hospital in Muzaffarpur, his Lok Sabha constituency. Beside the man stood Sunita Devi, who had tried to kill herself on Thursday. Sunita Devi's rick-

shaw-puller husband Tuntun Paswan is fighting blood cancer. Unable to cope with grinding poverty, she had decided to end her life with her two children — Abhishek, 5, and Abhijit, 2 — by jumping into the Buri Gandak river. They were saved by fishermen.

District magistrate S.K. Mishra visited the hospital and took Sunita Devi's statement after a private cable channel showed the footage. Reports said the woman acknowledged before the official that "netaji" — but she is not sure if it is Fernandes — gave her a 500-rupee note, which Mishra apparently took from her.

"The incident, if true, is a clear violation of the model code of conduct," the district magistrate said.

Fernandes, who was on his

QUOTE

No money has gone from my hands nor did I have any money

GEORGE FERNANDES

way to Chhapra to kick off the Janata Dal (United)'s poll campaign, denied the allegation. "No money has gone from my hands nor did I have any money," he said. The allegations, he added, were "a lie" and threatened to sue for defamation.

However, unconfirmed reports later said Fernandes accepted he had given money and said if helping the needy was a crime, he is ready to face any punishment. State BJP chief Gopal Narayan Singh said: "After all, he (Fernandes) gave the money not for buying sweets but to help a family in dire straits."

In Delhi, poll panel sources said the commission would pursue a similar line of action as it did against Laloo Prasad if there is evidence that Fernandes, too, distributed cash. "We have not received any formal complaint. But in the event that there is evidence, you can expect us to be even-handed," said a source.

The commission will meet tomorrow to discuss the model code violations.

■ Picture on Page 6

No code violation, Lalu to EC

574
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 24. — Union Railway minister and Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Mr Lalu Prasad today told the Election Commission that neither he nor his party has violated the model of conduct.

In a major blow to the party in the run-up to the Assembly elections in Bihar, the RJD chief was accused of distributing money to voters last week. In this context, the Election Commission had issued a show-cause notice to him on Monday seeking his reply on why his party should not be de-recognised for "disregarding and failing" to abide by the model code of conduct and its lawful directions to ensure free and fair polls. It had asked him to file his reply by 3 p.m. today.

"I have submitted the reply in writing. I have told them the truth," he told reporters after nearly an hour-long meeting with Chief Election Commissioner Mr TS Krishnamurthy, here today.

Mr Prasad claimed that neither he nor his party workers had violated the model code of conduct. Unlike in the past, he seemed to be on the defensive today as he said: "We have always respected the Commission's decisions. We have never given any bribe to anyone."

Report submitted

NEW DELHI, Dec. 24. — A senior Election Commission official today submitted a "factual" report on the alleged misuse of government machinery and violation of model code of conduct in Bihar. "A factual report has been submitted to the Commission and it is for it to decide", EC Advisor Mr KJ Rao, who was sent to Patna to monitor the now-cancelled RJD rally on 23 December said. He, however, refused to disclose his findings. — PTI

"Whatever we have to say we have told the EC," Mr Prasad said.

On the issue of his demand for a one-day poll in the state instead of the three-phased polls as announced by the EC, he said the commission told him it faced a problem over the availability of paramilitary forces for conducting polls on a single day.

"Since the three-phased elections anyway end on 23 February, there will be no problem in presenting the Railway budget," the railway minister added.

On the last minute cancellation of his rally earlier scheduled for 23 December in Patna, the RJD chief said the Election Commission had nothing to do with this decision. The railway minister said the Commission had not banned the rally but he himself cancelled it to avoid any embarrassment.



A HEAD FOR TROUBLE: Mr Lalu Prasad steps out of the Election Commission on Friday. — PTI

Sonia joins Bihar pantheon

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Dec. 24. — Bihar's first family of deities has a new addition. Mrs Sonia Gandhi, whom RJD supporters consider the 'apostle' of supreme sacrifice, has now been given the status of 'living deity'.

Mrs Gandhi's new rank was formalised by RJD supporters yesterday who put her image on the pedestal hitherto reserved for the raja of Bihar and his wife.

The RJD chief is usually

depicted as a reincarnation Lord Krishna. His better half is called the devi, firmly ensconced as she is in the seat of power. But that's old hag.

This is the second 'honour' for the Congress President in a week. Earlier, she lost the top slot to Ms Condoleezza Rice in the worldwide list of Women of 2004 published by *The Guardian*. Mrs Gandhi, incidentally, is described as a politician with humility.

The ceremony drew an impressive crowd when the RJD student's wing

began performing a puja after installing the idols of Mr Prasad, Mrs Gandhi and Mrs Rabri Devi at the Rajendranagar Terminal here. Sharing space were idols of Mr AB Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani, predictably, as devils.

There were six statues at the makeshift stage with Mother India in the middle. To her extreme left was a statue of Mr Prasad carrying a *chakra*. By his side, in the form of the 'Goddess of sacrifice' a likeness of Mrs Gandhi stood armed with bows and arrows.

7 more FIRs against Lalu men

9-6-04
 11/27/12

Vijay Swaroop
 Patna, December 22

ELECTION COMMISSION adviser K.J. Rao, who today held a day-long probe into alleged violation of code of conduct for an election rally by the RJD, ordered registration of seven FIRs against those found guilty of putting up posters, hoardings and banners on government buildings.

Rao met a cross-section of people, including government officials and businessmen to inquire about alleged misuse of official machinery, expenses on hoardings, banners, posters and other preparations for the rally, which was suddenly called off by RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav on Tuesday.

Sources said Rao asked the authorities of Patna and Vaishali districts to register FIRs against those guilty of putting up posters, banners and hoardings on Central and state government buildings, including Railway premises.

Accompanied by Patna district magistrate Gautam Goswami, Rao went around the city and took the officials to task for not enforcing the model code that came into effect on Friday

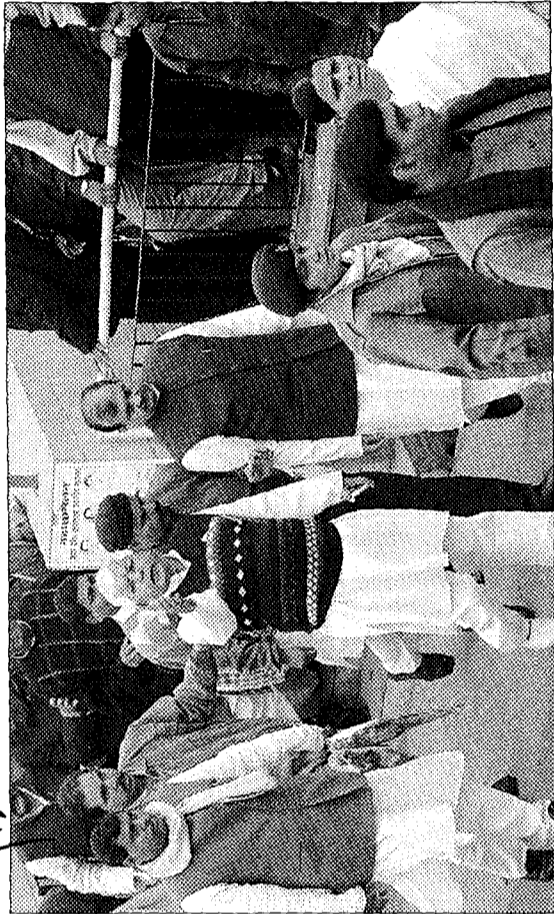
after the EC announced dates for the three-phase assembly polls in Bihar.

When approached by the media, wanting to know if the model code had been violated, Rao shot back, "You people have been with me all through. You tell me how things are?"

Petition dismissed: A Patna court today dismissed a petition seeking appropriate legal action against the EC chief T.S. Krishnamurthy. Bihar chief electoral officer K.C. Saha and officer in-charge of Bihta police station M.K. Madhu for allegedly filing a "false and fabricated case of bribery" against Lalu in connection with distribution of cash among dalit women.

While observing that no case was made out against the three officials, chief judicial magistrate (Patna) R.P. Choubey dismissed the petition at first sight.

Deo Kumar Singh, a village head of Baligram panchayat and Ambedkarwadi Samaj Vikas Parishad secretary Amitesh alias Abhay Kumar Choudhury had in their petition sought action against the three officials for getting registered "a fabricated case" of bribery against Lalu.



Lalu Yadav and Rabri Devi on their way to a RJD meeting in Patna on Wednesday. PTI

RJD boss ignores 'quit' demand

REJECTING OUTRIGHT the Opposition NDA's demand for his resignation in the wake of registration of a case against him for violating the model code of conduct, Railway minister and RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav on Wednesday asserted that his party would storm back to power in Bihar after the upcoming assembly elections.

"The NDA, led by the communal BJP, is maligning me and my party. Why should I resign when I have committed no crime?"

The electorate of Bihar will ensure RJD storms back to power," Lalu said while addressing his party's national executive.

Lalu, who dedicated most of his speech to slamming the NDA for "hatching a conspiracy" against his party's "pro-poor and pro-social justice government", said the party's December 23 rally was postponed as a "precautionary measure" as he apprehended the NDA would create "mischief".

PTI, Patna

23 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2004

पुस्तक (State)

VOTE ON ACCOUNT

H/D-10 21/12

QUICK ON THE heels of the announcement of elections to the Assemblies of Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana comes controversy. In the middle of the storm is — who else but Lalu Prasad, caught on camera distributing 100-rupee notes in a Dalit locality. Since the act violates the Model Code of Conduct, the Election Commission has directed that a First Information Report be filed against the Railway Minister. There is no doubt that Mr. Prasad committed a grave error by seeming to offer monetary inducements to a section of voters. The Minister ought to have acted with greater responsibility, for the sake of propriety and knowing that he would be keenly watched by the legion of opponents he has made in the 15 years he has been at the helm of Bihar politics. The pity is that he hardly needed to resort to any kind of skulduggery to win this contest. Having lost two successive elections — the 14th general election in May 2004 and then the Maharashtra State Assembly contest in October 2004 — the National Democratic Alliance is on the back foot, whether in Bihar, Jharkhand or Haryana.

Indeed the NDA has a lot more riding on this round of contests than the Congress-led alliance, which is much better placed to endure any setbacks (after performing above expectations in recent electoral battles). Mr. Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal is itself on a hat trick, having clinched two victories in a row, the last time seemingly from the jaws of defeat. The RJD fought and won that election single-handedly — and against a formidable Opposition. Since then the picture has changed substantially. First, Bihar has been partitioned to yield Jharkhand, which has worked to the advantage of the RJD. Mr. Prasad's party held only nine seats in

South Bihar (which went on to become Jharkhand) as opposed to 115 in the rest of the State. Secondly, in the 2004 general election, Mr. Prasad put together a virtually unbeatable alliance with the Congress and the Lok Jana Shakti Party led by Ram Vilas Paswan.

The NDA, on the other hand, is a shadow of itself, its ranks depleted by desertions and its self-image dented by successive electoral defeats. The exit of Mr. Paswan has added to its woes, which must explain why the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Janata Dal (U) have embarked on a mission to win back the Dalit leader at any cost, even offering to project him as the alliance's Chief Ministerial candidate. That Mr. Paswan and Mr. Prasad have fallen out is a hopeful sign for the NDA even though the LJSP leader seems wary of renewing his ties with the twice-defeated alliance. In Jharkhand, the BJP faces a bleak situation. Not only is Chief Minister Arjun Munda ranged against an Opposition (the Congress, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, and the RJD) whose defeat is statistically improbable. He also needs to contend with raging dissidence (three former JD (U) Ministers joined the RJD on Sunday), not to mention his own abysmal incumbency record. In Haryana, the BJP is even worse off than in Bihar and Jharkhand. Before the Lok Sabha election, the BJP severed its alliance with the Om Prakash Chautala-led Indian National Lok Dal, seeing the partnership as a needless liability. The break-up resulted in a Congress sweep: the Congress won nine of the 10 Lok Sabha seats, polling 42.1 per cent of the vote, and leaving only Sonepat to the BJP. Since then the Haryana Vikas Party has merged with the Congress in a signal that nothing succeeds like success.

21 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

H-0-1
18/12
J. B. Leela
(Sasi)

Bihar, Jharkhand, Haryana go to the polls in February

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 17. Elections to the Bihar and Jharkhand Assemblies will be held in three phases in February 2005 and Haryana will have a day's polling, the Election Commission announced today. While the whole of Haryana will go to the polls on February 3 along with the extremist-infested areas of Bihar and Jharkhand, elections to the remaining Assembly segments of the two States will be spread over February 15 and 23. Counting of votes will be taken up on February 27 and the election process will end by March 5.

The Chief Election Commissioner, T.S. Krishnamurthy, said the model code of conduct comes into effect along with his announcement of the election schedule. The code, he said, was applicable to the three States. It would be binding on the Central Government too vis-a-vis any announcement relating to Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana.

The terms of the Assemblies of Bihar and Jharkhand are slated to expire on March 6, and that of Haryana on March 8. In all, elections would be held to 243 Assembly segments in Bihar, 90 in Haryana and 81 in Jharkhand.

As for the phase-wise break-

up of constituencies in the two States where polling is to be staggered, the CEC said a separate notification would be issued. The extremist-infested areas of Bihar and Jharkhand would go to the polls in the first phase. The schedule had been drawn up after taking into account the Government holidays, school examinations and the time needed to move security forces. The Commission had decided not to allow any photog-

raphy — still or video — inside polling stations. It would deploy one general observer in each Assembly segment and at least one expenditure observer in every district instead of the earlier practice of deploying two general observers and one expenditure observer in each district.

Officials employed in the State would be assigned areas through a computerised random selection to ensure impartiality.

Schedule for Assembly elections

	Haryana	Bihar, Jharkhand		
		PHASE-1	PHASE-2	PHASE-3
Issue of notifications	10-01-2005	10-01-2005	20-01-2005	29-01-2005
Last date for nominations	17-01-2005	17-01-2005	27-01-2005	05-02-2005
Scrutiny of nominations	18-01-2005	18-01-2005	28-01-2005	07-02-2005
Last date for withdrawal of candidatures	20-01-2005	20-01-2005	31-01-2005	09-02-2005
Date of poll	03-02-2005	03-02-2005	15-02-2005	23-02-2005
Counting of votes	27-02-2005	27-02-2005	27-02-2005	27-02-2005

18 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Give three chairs, take throne

Who GETS What

- CONGRESS KEEPS**
Chief minister
- NCP GAINS**
Two more cabinet ministers and a minister of state
- Two portfolios from Congress**
- Retains deputy chief minister**

Sharad Pawar with Sonia Gandhi at an iftar on Monday



K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Oct. 27: Eleven days after Maharashtra learnt who won the elections, the state has been told which party the new chief minister will belong to but not his name.

Driving a hard bargain for several days and nights, the Congress and the NCP this evening came out with a compromise package almost identical to the 1999 model.

The chief minister will be from the Congress, which has fewer MLAs than Sharad Pawar's NCP. Going by the public pronouncements of both parties, Pawar does not appear to have made much of a gain other than three additional berths and two portfolios. (See chart)

But the involvement of the Prime Minister and Laloo Prasad Yadav in last-minute negotiations has fuelled speculation that Pawar's party could be accommodated better in the Union government. NCP leader Praful Patel, however, insisted that his party had not bargained for "anything beyond Maharashtra".

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had a brief session with Pranab Mukherjee and Pawar soon after a cabinet meeting this afternoon. Laloo Prasad was present at Sonia Gandhi's 10 Janpath residence just before the Congress chief finalised the deal.

Soon after Laloo Prasad left Sonia's home dropping hints that the stalemate was over, the Congress' Margaret Alva and Ahmed Patel headed to Pawar's official residence nearby to announce the agreement along with Praful. In the 43-member ministry,

the Congress will have 19 slots, including the chief minister's post, and the NCP 24.

However, the joint announcement maintained some ambiguity over the choice for chief minister. Outgoing Congress chief minister Sushil Kumar Shinde is widely known to be the NCP's favourite, but Alva and Ahmed refused to make any commitment.

Congress sources said late tonight that two Maratha leaders — former chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh and Pathangrao Kadam — have thrown their hats into the ring. Shinde, a Dalit leader, has the support of the high command but a section of the state leadership has been pushing for a more assertive nominee to counter Pawar's stature.

The leader would be chosen at the Congress legislature party meeting scheduled in Mumbai on Friday. The NCP, too, will meet the same day to elect its legislature party leader.

The agreement came as an anti-climax for the NCP state leaders who were called to Delhi. Questions were raised whether the NCP secured anything substantial after prolonging the negotiations for many days.

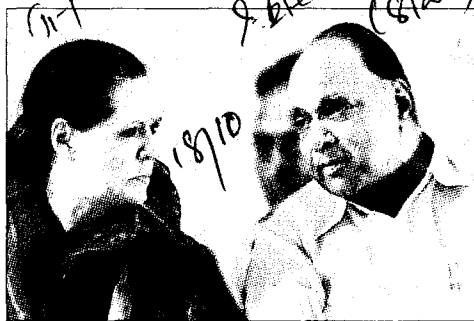
Pawar blinked first this Sunday when the NCP gave up the demand for the chief minister's post. On Tuesday, the NCP dropped another demand — the revenue and cooperatives portfolios.

By this afternoon, the party climbed down from the stand that it should be given a second deputy chief minister's post.

NCP stakes claim to CM's post

New Delhi: With numbers in his favour, NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday met Congress president Sonia Gandhi and staked claim for Maharashtra chief ministership for his party, which has emerged as the single largest party in the assembly polls. "We are ready to show our figure. Our position is good," Pawar said here soon after the meeting, the first between the two leaders after the polls.

Pawar, who had late in the evening on Saturday asserted his party was entitled to have the chief ministership, said the 1999 formula was discussed in the meeting with Sonia. Under the formula, NCP had conceded chief minister's post to the national party which had more number of MLAs. In the just-concluded polls, NCP has won 71 seats and the Congress 69. To a question about the Congress claiming that the three seats won by the CPM, to which it had allotted five, should be added to its kitty, Pawar said, "We are prepared to discuss any methodology" and make a list of MLAs supporting each of the alliance partners.



Pawar said he did not dispute the Congress claim of support of left parties as they had allotted seats to the CPM.

However, he said, "We can also show our supporters. There are 9 to 10 independents who back us." NCP leader Praful Patel will meet senior Congress leader Ahmed Patel and exchange list of supporters of either parties to show who has more numbers, Pawar said.

Senior party leaders Tariq Anwar, D P Tri-

pathi and Praful Patel will attend the NCP legislature party meeting in Mumbai on Monday.

"They will interact with the MLAs and come back to Delhi," Pawar said.

Asked how much time would it take to select the chief minister, he said, "The process could take two to four days. Last time (in 1999) it took 10 days." Whether any names were discussed for the post of the chief minister, Pawar replied in the negative.

In the 288-member Maharashtra assembly, the Congress has won 69 seats and its junior partner NCP, which contested just 124 constituencies, has secured 71 seats. NCP ally RPI (A) has got one seat and the Congress ally CPM, three.

Jana Surajya Shakti, born out of a fight with NCP, has secured three seats.

The Shiv Sena-BJP combine got 119 seats with the Maharashtra party bagging 62 on its own and the national party 56. Their ally Swatantra Bharat Party, headed by Sharad Joshi, got one seat. P 11

All Eyes On The Indian Air Force, Including Jumbo & Turbanator



AWESOME: Lakhs of Mumbaikars crowded Marine Drive on Sunday to witness the spectacular air show organised by IAF and AI to commemorate JRD Tata's birth centenary and 50 years of Air Marshal S Mukherjee becoming the first Indian air chief. The excitement was matched by Anil Kumble's exploits in the second India-Australia Test match at Chennai. Kumble (6 for 130) and Harbhajan Singh (3 for 110) have put the home team within sight of victory. India, needing 229 to win, were 19 for no loss at close of play. P 21

BIG FLOP



Mayavati's Bahujan Samaj Party scored a duck at the hustings after contesting in 272 seats

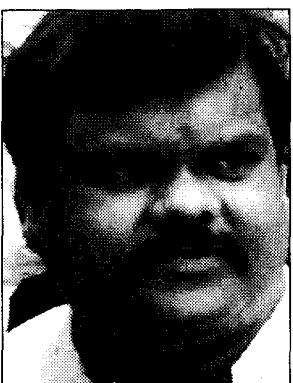
OTHER FLOPS



Fashion designer Shaina NC lost from Bandra in her maiden election fight

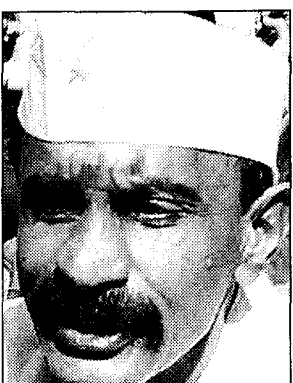


Shashi Prabhu, secretary of actor Govinda, lost from Borivli

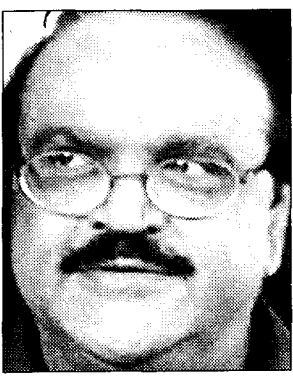


Deepak Nikhalje, the brother of gangster Chhota Rajan, lost from Chembur

WINNERS



Arun Gawli won the Chinchpokli seat by 8,000 votes



Chhagan Bhujbal beat J.K. Patil of the Shiv Sena from Yelva in Nashik district by a margin of 35,649 votes

Smiles for Pawar, frowns in BJP

Merger whiff in NCP-Cong tango

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Oct. 16: The Maharashtra election verdict has come as a lease of life to the Nationalist Congress Party headed by Sharad Pawar.

Retaining power in the state was very important for the party which not long ago was struggling to maintain its separate identity with top leaders contemplating a return to parent party Congress.

The NCP in alliance with the Congress, has not only retained power but may have won a bonus by way of chief ministership. It has emerged as the single-largest party in the new Assembly, winning 71 seats — four more than the Congress — in the 288-member House.

The strong position the NCP finds itself in owes greatly to Pawar's assessment ahead of May's Lok Sabha polls that he needed an electoral alliance with the Congress to remain relevant in Maharashtra and national politics.

That realisation prompted Pawar to virtually bury the issue of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin that caused him to break away and form the NCP in May 1999.

Even though Pawar joined hands with the Congress to form a coalition government in Maharashtra after the October 1999 Assembly elections, he continued to oppose the party nationally until earlier this year. However, the NCP chief decided to join hands with the Congress to fight the parliamentary polls.

The NCP may have gained momentum from the November election to the Congress, possibly even merging with it.



Sushil Kumar Shinde being greeted by grandson Veer after winning from Sholapur. (PTI)

With his health problems mounting, Pawar is seen as no longer possessing the qualities that earned him the tag of Maharashtra's strongest leader. He is hardly a second-rung leader who can hold the NCP together and retain its identity as a

strong regional party. This realisation is what made many of his senior colleagues mull rejoining the Congress on the eve of Lok Sabha and Assembly elections alike.

Nor does the NCP have an undisputed number two. The

re is talk that Pawar would have been spared the headache of looking for a chief ministerial candidate if the Congress had won just a few more seats. The NCP leader may be worried at the prospect of intra-party rivalry over the top post.

NCP insiders, say left to himself, Pawar would be happy to allow the Congress' Sushil Kumar Shinde to continue as chief minister. The party chief might thus be compelled to move even closer to the Congress.

Pollsters find pulse

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Oct. 16: The Maharashtra election results have helped pollsters salvage their reputation, with most getting the poll tally right.

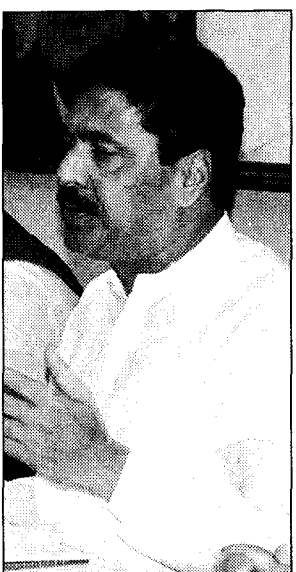
Psephologists had ended up with egg on their face after last May's Lok Sabha elections, which most got completely wrong. The majority had written off the Congress and its allies, saying the National Democratic Alliance would return to power.

But the results proved the pollsters wrong, making them the butt of ridicule and shattering the people's faith in election surveys.

However, today's Assembly results have brought the smile back to their lips even if dobbing Thomases in the Congress and BJP alike were unwilling to believe exit polls till this afternoon.

Reacting to the forecast today senior BJP leader Arun Jaitley had described the verdict as a "cracked mirror".

The Telegraph-STAR News-AC Nielsen survey, which gave the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party 142 seats, the BJP-Shiv Sena 122 and others 24, got the numbers right.



Pramod Mahajan at a news conference in Mumbai. (PTI)

Its region-wise forecast was quite accurate too.

Aaj Tak had the Congress-NCP at 140-150 seats, the BJP-Sena at 100-110 and others between 30 and 40. Zee News gave 125 seats to the Congress-NCP combine, 115 to the rival alliance and 48 to others.

Among television chan-

nels, NDTV got it wrong for it projected 125-135 seats for the BJP-Sena, 120-135 seats for the Congress-led alliance and between 30 and 45 for the other players.

The Congress was nervous over the election predictions, but the BJP was more vocal in trashing the exit poll projections.

Rejecting the surveys, Jaitley had said: "The Congress is facing a considerable anti-incumbency factor and the existence of the rebels has hurt the Congress-NCP and is more advantageous to us."

BJP spokesperson Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi had added: "Maharashtra is reeling under an anti-incumbency factor."

The response of Margaret Alva, the Congress leader in charge of the Maharashtra elections, was: "If we go by the exit polls, then we will be having a government of Independents."

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayavati was also unhappy with pollsters for saying her party, which contested 272 seats, might not do as well as expected. The BSP as well as the Samajwadi Party, which contested 95 seats, drew a blank.

sooner or later, either through paranormal configuration or political realignment.

First the BJP played with stars, literally. It peddled the "prediction" of an in-house astrologer that the Manmohan Singh government would fall on September 26, the Prime Minister's birthday, and either Atal Bihari Vajpayee would be back or a BJP-backed dispensation would be in place.

When nothing happened, the BJP outlined a scenario in which some UPA constituents like the DMK, NCP and the Lok Janshakti Party would quit the coalition after the Maharashtra election, which it was certain to win.

Sensing the BJP was back in the reckoning, these parties

would team up with the Samajwadi Party, Janata Dal (United) and other NDA constituents and have an alternative formation headed either by M. Karunanidhi or Mulyam Singh Yadav, with George Fernandes as the deputy Prime Minister. The BJP would support it from outside.

The scenario went for a toss today and the BJP's immediate concern was how it would face the next round of polls.

The cadre were down and out after the "shock" defeat in the Lok Sabha polls, the leadership was in disarray as a section of the party believed that Vajpayee and L.K. Advani were "spent" forces and there was no clear alternative emerging from the



Left Front candidate Abu Sufyan after his bypoll win in Calcutta on Saturday. (PTI)

Left keeps Calcutta

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Oct. 16: The Left Front strengthened its political sway in the city by retaining all three Assembly seats which went to by-elections on October 9 by greater margins.

The results were a setback for the principal Opposition party, the Trinamul Congress, which was relegated to a poor third in Entally and Jorabagan. It came second in Shyam-pukur.

The three seats fell vacant after front legislators Subrata Basu of the Forward Bloc, and Mohammad Selim and Sudhangshu Sil of the CPM were elected to the Lok Sabha in May.

The CPM's Abu Sufyan won from Entally by a record margin of 51,101 votes against his nearest Congress rival Khalid Abdullah.

Trinamul nominee Manzar Iqbal polled only 6883 votes.

At Jorabagan, Parimal Biswas, a local CPM councillor, defeated Rajesh Sinha of the Congress by 14,239 votes. Trinamul's Sanjoy Bakshi, a Mamata loyalist, came third.

The Bloc's Jiban Saha won from Shyam-pukur by a margin of 29,694 votes.

Here, Trinamul's Madan Mitra was ahead of Congress nominee Shivraji Sinha Roy by about 5,600 votes and took the second position.

While state CPM secretary Anil Biswas hailed the victory of Front candidates as "another instance of the people's trust in us", Trinamul spokesperson Partha Chatterjee said the result was the "natural outcome of the largescale rigging conducted by the Marxists on the bypoll day".

Mitra said a large number of genuine voters were not allowed to exercise their franchise by "CPM goons who forcibly occupied many polling booths at Shyam-pukur".

State Congress leaders, too, castigated the Marxists for winning the bypolls "by unfair means", but expressed satisfaction that its candidates came second at Entally and Jorabagan.

"CPM workers did not allow the people to cast their votes in many booths. Our party's performance would have been much better if

there was a free and fair by-election," said state Congress general secretary Manas Bhuniya.

The results show a steady erosion of Trinamul's support base in the city. The party's electioneering was hampered not only by chronic infighting, but also Mamata's virtual absence from the poll arena.

Mayor Subrata Mukherjee had opposed Bakshi's nomination at Jorabagan and refused to campaign for him.

Mamata, recuperating from the injuries she received when a dais she was speaking from collapsed in Midnapore on August 9, paid a whirlwind visit to the three constituencies for a few hours only a couple of days before the bypoll. She also faced criticism for nominating Mitra, a resident of south Calcutta, for Shyam-pukur in the north.

Compared to the lacklustre campaign of the Congress and Trinamul, the CPM's rallies and door-to-door canvassing were well organised.

There was a dispute between the Bloc and the CPM over nominating Saha for Shyam-pukur, but the dispute was quickly resolved.

Lok Sabha polls.

In Maharashtra, Hindutva, which was initially offered in the "Savarkar-Tricolour" wrapping, was junked after the state leaders felt "anti-incumbency" against the Congress-NCP government was a catcher slogan.

"The verdict is out. What is their answer now?" asked an RSS source. The sources felt that Hindutva was the answer to prevent the BJP's "core" vote from straying away in Bihar and Jharkhand.

This was the reason why it appointed two upper caste representatives, C.P. Thakur and Taranath Jha, as the vice-chairmen of its Bihar campaign committee.

Until yesterday, the BJP

Pramod down, who's up?

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Oct. 16: When the BJP suffered its first "shock" defeat in May 2004 after the Lok Sabha polls, the mourning was short-lived. The knives were in their place, nor was any leader out to score brownie points against another.

A week later, however, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee suggested that Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi's post-Godhra "excesses" were responsible for the rout, all hell broke loose. First the RSS, then M. Venkaiah Naidu and lastly Modi cried foul and silenced his brand of moderation.

Even the supposed Vajpayee loyalist, Pramod Mahajan, quietly advised his mentor not to meddle with Modi for fear of netting the BJP's Hindutva vote bank in Maharashtra.

But there was more to the nuggets of counsel doled out to Vajpayee. It appeared as though the party's GeNext was gearing itself to effect what a representative called a "generational change".

The insinuations were finally put in perspective by Advani, who in a TV interview said by the time the next Lok Sabha elections are here, he and Vajpayee would be into their eighties and, perhaps, "unfit" (not necessarily physically) to lead the party. More so because the Congress would have youngster Rahul Gandhi to show to the electorate.

But as Advani would not take names, the conundrum of "who after Vajpayee and Advani" persisted.

If the Sena-BJP had won the Maharashtra battle, Mahajan would have been a frontrunner because he made the election his solo show. But now that the die is cast, it is clear who is up and who is down.

■ Pramod Mahajan: The clear loser. He hoped to end his "kshetriya sanyas" (regional

seclusion) and make a grand re-entry into the capital. Although it looked like the BJP would continue with Naidu as president, a Maharashtra win would have made Mahajan a de facto head overseeing the next round of elections in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana.

■ Arun Jaitley: The distinct gainer. The Mahajan-Jaitley popularity sweepstakes were first debated when the BJP won Madhya Pradesh (with Jaitley as guardian) and Rajasthan (under Mahajan) last November. The Mahajan camp argued that a comparison was "unfair" as Madhya Pradesh had virtually come on a platter after the Congress blew up its second mandate while, in Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot was a "tougher" adversary.

■ Sushma Swaraj: Neither here nor there. Her threat to adopt a widow's life if Sonia Gandhi became Prime Minister and the Veer Savarkar satyagraha in Andaman backfired. But Sushma is still acknowledged as the BJP's biggest vote-catcher after Vajpayee.

■ Venkaiah Naidu: In perennial trouble. A fresh round of rumblings to replace him started today. The argument now is that if Mahajan is made the fall guy for Maharashtra, why should Naidu escape the blame for the Lok Sabha polls?

■ Uma Bharti: In sanyas. The sanyasin's future would rest solely on the BJP reviving Hindutva.

■ Narendra Modi: The question is whether he will survive another rebellion. Apparently, the dissidents were told by the Delhi bosses to wait till the Maharashtra polls.

■ Rajnath Singh: Has made no impact in Uttar Pradesh and is hardly known outside.

With so many things going against the BJP's GeNext, party sources conceded that its best bet was still good old Vajpayee.

Left Front wins all 3 seats

Trinamool and Congress candidates lose their deposits

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, October 16

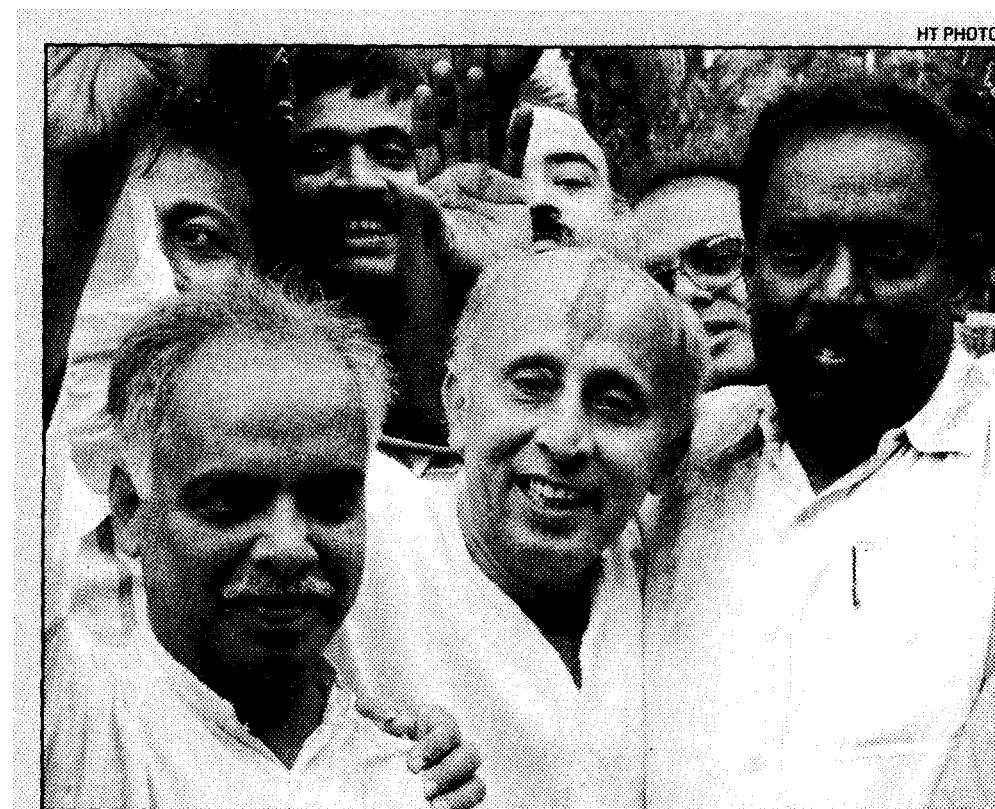
THE TRINAMOOL Congress has a bleak future in West Bengal, a smiling CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas prophesied on Saturday as the Left Front romped home in all the three seats where by-polls were held, driving both the Trinamool Congress and the Congress far into the back seat and firming up the red foothold in Kolkata, till recently known as a weak turf of the Left.

The Trinamool lost its deposits in Entally and Jorabagan, while the Congress in Entally and Shyampukur. In all three seats, even the combined votes polled by the Trinamool and the Congress was far less than that of the Left.

In Entally, the CPI(M) candidate got 60,736 votes (76.91 per cent), while the Congress got 9,635 and the Trinamool only 6,883. In Jorabagan, the CPI(M) candidate received 23,418 (58.45 per cent) votes. The Congress got 9,179 and the Trinamool 6,795. In Shyampukur the Forward Bloc candidate got 38,694 (74.33 per cent) while the Congress got 3,490 and the Trinamool 9,000.

Explaining the reason why the entire Opposition was trounced in all three Kolkata seats, Anil Biswas said that the Opposition supporters were politically demoralised and had decided not to vote at all. "On the other hand, though we were weak in the cities in the past, we are now able to convince the voters better. We will have to keep it up," Biswas said.

Even as the CPI(M) leader brushed away allegations of rigging on the day of the poll, both the Trinamool Congress and the Congress insisted that the results did not reflect the true mood of the voters. "We are revamping our party and will ensure that in future the people resist the CPI(M)'s rigging and cast their votes," Trinamool



MP Sudhangsu Sil (centre) and Left Front workers celebrate the CPI(M)'s victory in Jorabagan

**KOLKATA
VOTES**



CONSTITUENCY	Left Front	Congress	TMC
← Entally	60736	9635	6883
← Jorabagan	23418	9179	6795
← Shyampukur	38694	3490	9000

leader Pankaj Banerjee said.

Though insisting that the CPI(M) had rigged the polls, the Congress, however, added salt to the Trinamool's injury saying that it was time they seriously considered returning to the state Congress without much fuss.

The Trinamool should not retain their separate existence and help the CPI(M). It is time the leaders, including Mamata Banerjee herself, decide to wrap up their party and return to the Congress," state Congress general secretary Manas Bhuiya

said. He claimed his gesture of welcoming Mamata back to the Congress had the sanction of senior party leaders, including Pranab Mukherjee and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

Resentment surfaced within the Trinamool itself, as the party general secretary Sultan Ahmed observed that humiliation of the party in repeated elections in the state was the result of the Trinamool's continuing association with the BJP.

"The party should introspect on why people of West Bengal are rejecting us in

every election. An anti-NDA wave is still sweeping across the country, which is evident in the Maharashtra Assembly elections also. Our association with the BJP is a liability. We should come out of the NDA," Ahmed said.

Going a step forward, Trinamool Congress MLA Tapas Roy said it was time the party gave up its alliance with the BJP and joined hands with the Congress instead to put up a united fight against the CPI(M) in the next Assembly poll slated for 2006.

Apang sworn in as CM

BJP boycotts ceremony; AICC keen on Mithi as deputy CM

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, October 16

GEGONG APANG began his seventh innings as the chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh today after being administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor V.C. Pande at Raj Bhavan.

The ceremony was boycotted by all nine newly-elected BJP legislators. It was a brief affair since the swearing-in of the new council of ministers was "kept in abeyance".

The official invitation card had, however, said all ministers would be sworn in. Apang later said he had no intention of creating suspense about his ministry.

"The new ministers will be sworn in after the high command approves a list of names," he said.

The 57-year-old Apang, who is in his 21st year as chief minister intermittently since January 18, 1980, is expected to leave for New Delhi on Sunday carrying with him a list of probables.

He will be accompanied by PCC president Mukut Mithi, party source said here today adding its two working presidents — Takam Sanjay and Nabam Tuki are also likely to go with him.

The composition of the

Apang innings

- ▶ Headed Cong governments in 1980, 1984, 1990 and 1995
- ▶ Formed Arunachal Congress and headed the regional party government in 1996 when the United Front government ruled New Delhi

- ▶ Headed the United Democratic Front government in August 2003 after toppling Mithi
- ▶ After less than a month, UDF metamorphoses into the BJP government
- ▶ Apang sworn in as the head of another Congress government on October 16, 2004

ministry has become an important issue within the party with a section of it opposing Apang.

The situation has been compounded by the fact that since the regulation downscaling of the ministry to only 12, including the CM, there can no longer be jumbo ministries as in the past. Limiting the size of his ministry to a dozen would be a tough balancing act for Apang, who has to ensure proportionate representation of 28 major tribes and over 140 sub-tribes in the Assembly.

Apang has put the onus on the Congress high command to decide if a deputy chief minister will be appointed. The high command, it is learnt, is keen on making Mithi the deputy CM in order to keep his followers happy. Mithi, the state Congress president, had been a contender for the CM's post be-

fore the AICC decided on August 13 to hand over the baton to Apang.

But Mithi's supporters had raised objections, saying it was unfair for the party to ignore loyalists and reward turncoats. Mithi, though, congratulated Apang immediately after the swearing in ceremony, betraying no signs of the cold war between the two. Mithi — a Congress chief minister for four years till Apang engineered a defection to form the BJP ministry last year — was clearly disgruntled with the election of the CLP leader.

Speaking about the crucial CLP meeting on Wednesday night, sources said CWC member Ramesh Chennithala, the AICC secretary in charge of Arunachal who was camping here during the polls, had pacified Mithi and his followers at the CLP meeting on October 13 to allow an

unanimous election of Apang for the sake of the unity of the party.

Chennithala first reasoned with Sanjay, who had earlier made a statement to the Press that Apang's election as CM would be dangerous for the party. Sanjay reportedly told the CWC member that his main objection to Apang becoming the CM was his "aya ram gaya ram culture since he (Apang) ran away from the party when the colour of the Centre changed".

However, Chennithala convinced Sanjay, who in turn talked to Mithi to bow out of the race for the CLP leadership. The Mithi group expects that they will be compensated by the party high command by being allotted plum portfolios.

Assam truce

THE ASSAM government on Saturday asked security forces to stop operations against the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) after the rebel group accepted a government ceasefire offer, officials said. "After we got a written communiqué from the NDFB expressing their desire for a ceasefire, we have decided to reciprocate," state Health Minister Bhumidhar Barman said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 OCT 2004

Three killed in poll violence in UP

Byelections For 3 LS, 39 Assembly Seats In 16 States Peaceful



Muslim women queue up to vote in Allahabad on Wednesday

New Delhi: An estimated 55% of the electorate on Wednesday cast their votes for the 288-member Maharashtra assembly and bypolls to three Lok Sabha and 39 Vidhan Sabha seats spread across 16 states as poll-related violence claimed three lives in Uttar Pradesh.

"The turnout (in Maharashtra) is expected to be between 55 and 60 per cent," election commissioner A N Jha told reporters in Delhi. Barring an attack by Naxalites on a police patrol Gadchiroli district in Vidarbha region, balloting was peaceful in the Maharashtra polls, the first major face-off between the ruling Congress-NCP and the opposition BJP-Shiv Sena after the UPA government assumed power at the Centre.

Meanwhile, two persons were shot dead in Mainpuri Lok Sabha constituency where a kin of chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav is in fray and one was killed in Atrauli assembly seat in UP where bypolls were held along with 11 other assembly seats. Jha said that the polling party in one polling station colluded with one of the contestants in Mainpuri, the seat vacated by UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, and action was being taken to suspend the entire polling party. Mainpuri recorded an estimated 60% polling.

The commission may order re-polling in the polling station, he said. Among the states where bypolls were held, the two assembly constituencies in Nagaland and one in Goa recorded the highest voter turnout of 80% and an equal number of assembly seats in Delhi registered the lowest 35%.

In Jammu and Kashmir where bypoll to four assembly seats were held, Batamalloo assembly seat recorded as low as 12% and Pahalgam, where chief minister Mufti Mohd Sayeed contested,

recorded 19%. In the other two assembly constituencies in the state, the polling was estimated at 58 per cent in Basohli and 60 per cent in Akhmoor, Jha said. Counting of votes will be held on October 16.

In Madhepura Lok Sabha constituency in Bihar where RJD candidate Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav is contesting 50% polling was recorded. There was no untoward incident reported, Jha said. The voter turnout in Bidar parliamentary constituency in Karnataka, was likely to be around 40%, he said.

Giving breakup of voting percentage in various assembly constituencies in states, Jha said in Andhra Pradesh's Siddipet the polling was expected to be 55% and Asafnagar 37%. Assam—Moran (65%); Goa—Poinguinim (75-80%); Gujarat, where bypoll was held for five assembly constituencies, (55-65%); Himachal

Pradesh—Guler (65%); Manipur—Konthoujam (65%); Madhya Pradesh—Nohata and Dwarahat (40-45%); Nagaland—Tening, Aongolenden (ST) and Tehok (ST)—(85-92%); Punjab—Kapurthala and Garshankar (60%); Rajasthan—Behor (68% and Merta (60%); Uttaranchal—Dwarahat (45%). Jha said re-polling, if any, would be held on October 15.

55 p.c. polling in Maharashtra

14/10
By Our Mumbai Bureau

MUMBAI, OCT. 13. The fate of the 2,678 candidates for the 288 Assembly seats in Maharashtra was sealed today with millions of people casting their votes and bringing to an end one of the most intensely contested elections. According to estimates, the polling percentage was around 55.

Barring a few minor incidents of violence in the naxalite-affected Gadchiroli district, polling passed off peacefully. In the Konkan region and in Pune, clashes were reported. In Mumbai, over 200 people were affected by food poisoning in the Nagpada area of central Mumbai when they consumed sweets distributed near the booths.

The Chief Electoral Officer of Maharashtra, U.P.S. Madan, told reporters that by 3.30 p.m., 45 per cent polling had taken place in the State and he expected that the percentage would cross 55 per cent in the remaining two hours.

67 p.c. in Sangrul

The voter turnout was comparatively high in the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party stronghold of western Maharashtra where the parties are facing a serious challenge from rebel candidates. Mr. Madan said the highest voting of 67 per cent was recorded in the Sangrul constituency of Kolhapur district and 63 per cent for the Sangoli seat of Solapur district.

Middle-class apathy

In Mumbai, where each of the 34 Assembly seats is being fiercely contested, the response was not so good

with only 38.18 per cent of the voters turning up. In the suburbs, the turnout was even lower at 37 per cent. As is the norm in Maharashtra's capital, polling was higher in the slum areas than in the middle-class localities. This, despite the fact that the polling day was midweek and people could not combine it with the weekend to take some days off.

Naxalite attack

Mr. Madan and the Director-General of Police, K.K. Kashyap, said that police parties were fired upon by naxalites in Binagoonda and Koindur villages in Bhamragad taluk of Gadchiroli district. One constable of the State Reserve Police was injured in the first incident and a jawan of the Central Reserve Police Force was injured in the second. These did not affect polling.

In Kodoli village in Panhala constituency of Kolhapur district, workers of two candidates clashed at a polling booth and the battery unit of the electronic voting machine (EVM) got detached. It was replaced soon and voting resumed.

Voters of two booths of Karjat in Ahmednagar district boycotted polling after a group clash. In Malton village of Pune district, dispute over the identity of two women voters resulted in the EVM being thrown down. It was later replaced. In Kandarpada polling station, an EVM was replaced after complaints.

Mr. Kashyap said 40,000 persons were taken into preventive custody till Tuesday evening to ensure peaceful polling.

More reports on Page 11

APANG EDGE OVER MITHI FOR CM'S CHAIR

Arunachal Cong stages comeback

51-3 12/10 2 elections (82%)

Shahid Parvez
in New Delhi

Oct. 11. — As the Congress cruised to a lacklustre victory in the Arunachal Pradesh Assembly polls today, the race for the chief ministerial office intensified with the incumbent chief minister Mr Gegong Apang clearly having a distinct edge over his arch rival and PCC chief, Mr Mukut Mithi.

The Congress could barely manage to clear the simple majority mark, bagging 34 of the total 60 seats. In the wake of Mr Apang's return to the Congress along with his Cabinet colleagues, the party was expecting to repeat its total sweep of the state as in 1999. The party thought that with Mr Apang and others switching from the BJP to the Congress, there was hardly any Opposition left in Arunachal.

This explains why today's results surprised the Congress, especially with the performance of the "supposedly non-existent"

Centre mulls Manipur adviser

NEW DELHI, Oct. 11. — The Centre is getting serious about Manipur and as part of the process of easing the situation there, it is about to create the post of an advisor, Manipur affairs. A decision is likely in the next Union Cabinet meeting on Wednesday and the adviser is likely to brief the Union home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil and probably, the Prime Minister's Office. The post will be high-powered — the official is most certainly going to be equivalent to a top government official or even higher. The decision comes after the Union home ministry was criticised over the manner in which the Manipur situation has so far been handled. — SNS

BJP which won nine seats. About 25 Congress MLAs and ministers, including some high-profile ones, lost their elections, even as Independents, mostly Congress rebels, garnered an overall tally of 13 seats.

The astute leader, Mr Apang, known for his realpolitiking skills and networking, is likely to be elected as the Congress Legislature Party leader in a few days. Mr Apang is believed to be ahead in the race and numbers game. A chief minister for nearly two decades, Mr Apang could break Mr Jyoti Basu's record for the

longest-serving chief minister, if he assumes the office yet again this time.

Senior AICC leaders had been negotiating with Mr Apang to rope him into the party following the Lok Sabha polls. They succeeded after a deal was struck with Mr Apang which included the assurance given to him that he will be unofficially the party's chief ministerial candidate. The Congress central leadership could "adjust" Mr Mithi as the deputy chief minister. Mr Mithi might even be accommodated in the Central government.

Advantage Cong but BJP too gains

HT-1 11/10 J. Bheelia (Gato)

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, October 10

THE CONGRESS is poised to return to power in Arunachal Pradesh, but only after ceding a few vital seats to the BJP and its own rebels contesting as Independents.

Of the 43 seats declared after the first round of counting today, the Congress won 22 and ally NCP two. The BJP bagged a surprising six seats while the local Arunachal Congress, the party caretaker chief minister Gegong Apang had floated but ditched later on, won one seat. Independents, on the other hand, triumphed in 12 constituencies, most defeating their nearest Congress rivals by a wide margin.

Having already won three seats uncontested, the Congress and its allies thus have 27 seats and need another four to have a simple majority in the 60-member House. It should be a mere

Arunachal polls



Total seats	60
Seats declared	46
Congress	25
Independents	12
BJP	6
NCP	2
Arunachal Congress	1

formality on Monday when the remaining 14 seats are to be declared.

Poll pundits, though, had never doubted a Congress victory, what with Apang's BJP government having joined the party en masse barely two months before the October 7 Assembly

polls. But for Apang, all BJP leaders had been Congress ministers or MLAs in the Mukut Mithi government, which was toppled in August last year.

Mithi won his Roing seat comfortably while his bete noire Apang's fate would be decided on Monday. The victory of 12 Independents has largely been attributed to the rivalry between these two heavyweights, each of whom allegedly put up dummies to ensure the defeat of Congress candidates loyal to the other.

Though the Congress is comfortably placed, it appears less enthusiastic about the election result than the BJP. The saffron brigade is ecstatic about winning six seats "defying the money power of the Congress". The victorious Independents have formed a forum, leading to suspicion that the Congress and the BJP have both begun machinations to strike a deal with them.

Sonia, Pawar form united front, criticise Team NDA

R. Sriram

NASHIK 5 OCTOBER

CONGRESS president Sonia Gandhi and her one time critic-turned-friend Sharad Pawar presented a picture of unity and solidarity at a joint rally in Nashik, hoping that the galvanising effect of such a joint demonstration would spur the Congress-NCP to retain power in this crucial state.

Ms Gandhi, who spoke in the politically important Vidarbha region on Monday, bitterly attacked the saffron combine and promised the people the moon if her alliance is voted to power. Mr Pawar, who suffered a humiliating reversal a few days back when Sonia Gandhi did not support his candidature for the post of BCCI president, too, slammed the NDA government when it was in power at the Centre. He praised the UPA government saying it will fulfil all its promises to the electorate.

The rally, as such events go, was huge and took place in Nashik, which though not a Congress bastion in recent times, is quite close to constituencies such as Dhule and Nandurbar, the traditional strongholds. Ms Gandhi shared the dais with Mr Pawar and for a moment the troubles and the bitter wranglings did not seem to matter. Opinion polls are already predicting that the Congress-NCP combine will bag about 130-140 seats in the 288-member House, not enough to give them a majority but ahead of the BJP-Sena alliance, which is predicted to win about 110-120 seats.

That factor plus Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's decision not to travel outside Mumbai, Thane for campaigning seems to have infused new life into the Congress-NCP alliance, which is otherwise facing a rebel onslaught quite un-



HANDS ON: Sonia Gandhi with NCP president Sharad Pawar and Maharashtra chief minister Sushilkumar Shinde in Nashik on Tuesday. — PTI

heard of in recent times. Mr Pawar said the Congress NCP will come back to power and criticised the Sena-BJP for spreading communal violence and hatred.

Ms Gandhi reiterated the points she had made in Vidarbha and Yavatmal on Monday and Tuesday. She said the two parties are working together with a joint election manifesto and are committed to defeating the saffron alliance. She also said the party will fulfil all its promises and work for the development of people in Maharashtra.

The Nashik rally concludes Sonia Gandhi's campaigning in the state. The polls are on October 13 with the results to be declared on October 16. The Congress is on a relatively safe territory in Nashik and neighbouring districts but faces a Herculean task in the bigger regions of Vidarbha, western Maharashtra and Marathwada if it has to have any credible chance of retaining power.

But in both Vidarbha and Marathwada, the alliance is on the backfoot. Lack of clarity on the statehood issue and the strong BJP-Sena presence means that the Congress is on a sticky wicket.

Vidarbha sends 66 MLAs, Marathwada 48 and western Maharashtra 72. The Congress-NCP is the dominant force in western Maharashtra but recent inroads by Sena-BJP and the emergence of a number of rebel candidates looks set to spoil party. In the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections, the alliance lost two crucial seats in western Maharashtra — Khed and Solapur — to the Sena-BJP. Ujjwala Shinde, the Maharashtra chief minister's wife was defeated in Solapur.

Ms Gandhi also criticised the NDA government for doing nothing for Maharashtra. "Maharashtra would have seen development if we had a government at the Centre," she added. Lashing out at the NDA rule, Ms Gandhi said the BJP-led government sought to distort history, "their politics was not clean, the rule was riddled with corruption and the confidence of the nation was in tatters." "The people of the country taught a lesson to the Shiv Sena-BJP and their allies at the Centre. They thought they could fool the countrymen by issuing advertisements but were defeated," Ms Gandhi said. //

Sonia works magic on Vidarbha

Promises To Do Justice To People Of The Region

By Ramu Bhagwat/TNN

9.6.2004
(Sonia)

Nagpur: That Congress chief Sonia Gandhi had touched a deep emotional chord with the masses by declining to become the Prime Minister was in ample evidence on Monday when about one lakh poor voters turned up to listen to her at the first election rally she addressed at Paoni in Bhandara district. The meeting was followed by another one at Gadchiroli which was attended by 50,000 people.

It was Sonia's first election rally after she refused the top post. And the new Sonia certainly showed more crowd-pulling capacity than before. "The choice of the venue was deliberate. It was her wish to address her first public meeting in a backward, tribal area," explained chief minister Sushilkumar Shinde, touching an instant chord with the audience that braved the summer-like heat to see and hear her.

And playing to the gallery, Sonia, during her 12-minute address, said, "I know well the people of Vidarbha have different aspirations. This is not a mere election promise, but my



Sonia Gandhi with CM Sushilkumar Shinde at Paoni

party will do full justice to the region." It was her first commitment to the people of the region who have stood by the party through thick and thin for over four decades.

AICC general secretary in charge of Maharashtra Margaret Alva had recently claimed in Mumbai that only 17 per cent of the people of Vidarbha wanted statehood. Ignoring the observation, Sonia dropped

hints about fulfilling the aspirations of Vidarbhaites.

Picking up local issues, Sonia assured the people of eastern Vidarbha districts that the much-delayed Gosikhurd irrigation project would be completed soon. Drawing lessons from the battering the Congress-NCP combine received in the region in the Lok Sabha elections—it won only one of the 11 seats—five rallies were organised by the party. This time, meetings had a markedly different impact and the crowds had a better chance to hear and see the Congress chief as compared to her road-show last time during which she just zoomed past the crowds waving at them.

Sonia will address her last rally in Vidarbha at Yavatmal on Tuesday before addressing a joint meeting with NCP chief Sharad Pawar at Nashik later in the day. At her rally in Gadchiroli, Sonia said she was aware of the long-pending demand of a railway line for the district and promised that her party would chalk out time-bound developmental schemes for the area.

Maharashtra polls: 'Muslim' factor crucial in 30 seats

By Javed M Ansari
 The Bhiwandi
 factor

By Javed, M Ansari

BHIWANDI, OCT. 4. With less than 10 days for the Assembly polls, Maharashtra teeters on a political knife-edge. The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance believes this will be their moment of revenge for the "mistake" of May 2004, while the Congress-NCP-RCI combine fervently hopes that the State's largely "secular" character will redeem itself. Both political pundits and the man on the street agree on one thing: that this election will be a close call, whose fate may well be decided by the 30-odd constituencies in which Muslims play a dominant part.

From the backlanes of Bhiwandi and Nagpada to urbane Bandra, the "Muslim" factor is being hotly debated. And while there is no overwhelmingly unanimous reason why they are expected to vote *en bloc*, the fact

is that this community, which accounts for about ten per cent of the votes in the State, is likely to once again pitch for the Congress-NCP-RCI alliance.

Key factors

Economic wellbeing and personal security clearly hold the key. Despite their disenchantment with the ruling Democratic Front Government on misuse of POTA and its local variant, MOCA, and the inescapable fact that a large number of communal riots took place during the Congress-NCP rule, many Muslims believe that changing political affinities comprise a far too difficult leap of faith.

"We want to look ahead, but it is very difficult to erase the past. *Abhi zakhm bhare nahin hai.* [The wounds haven't healed as yet]," says 23-year-old Sheikh Ziauddin, who is a graduate and lives in Umerkhandi in

the heart of Mumbai.

It is in areas such as Umerkhandi, Nagpada, Trombay, Bandra, and Khetwadi and in adjoining Bhiwandi that one discovers a discernible pattern. Many families are desperately poor, living cheek by jowl, ten to a room.

Disillusionment

Political activists in Bhiwandi such as Mohammed Khojani, who have been soliciting votes for the Congress for as long as he can remember, finds it difficult to hide his disillusionment. "I campaign in every election. But nothing has changed in the lives of the people here. There is no accommodation, no schools, no sanitation and no jobs. Who can blame them if the people stay away from the polling booths," he asks.

Interestingly though, in this midst of this grind and squalor,

a small middle class seems to be emerging and many want to know how politics can help achieve their aspirations. They also realise that the fortunes of the Centre and the State are tied, that voting for the Congress coalition in the State will make it "easier" for the Congress coalition at the Centre to "help" out.

Bhiwandi's weavers

Bhiwandi looms large as a classic example. A textile town 60 km from Mumbai with a large Muslim population that is dependent for its "rozi-rozi" on innumerable small and medium power looms, Bhiwandi supports a migrant population from all over India, especially from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Contrary to its image of a communal tinderbox, it is Bhiwandi's economy and not its politics, which is its driving

force. The sprawling township is small but thriving middle class is clearly looking for a party which can keep the economy going. The Shinde Government's decision to remove excise duty on polyester oriented yarn, reduce power tariffs, waive interest on arrears has given them a fresh lease of life.

"The BJP-Sena kept promising they would do it but never did. The Shinde Government actually went ahead and did it. It has been a life-saver," says Shujauddin Ansari, a loom owner.

In Bandra, where 40 per cent of the population is Muslim, 34-year-old Ziaur Rahman, an executive in a private bank, echoes the thought. "After the Congress came back to power at the Centre, there is a sense of relief. All we want to do is to get on with our lives," he said.

Cong hopes quashed by Chamling

HT Correspondent
Siliguri, May 13

HT-9 9-87
1915

CHIEF MINISTER Pawan Kumar Chamling's Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) has won 31 out of the 32 Assembly seats, quashing all hopes of the Congress to come to power in the state that it incorporated into the Indian Union 29 years ago.

Not only this, the SDF, which had aligned with the NDA last time, handed out a humiliating defeat to the Congress in the elections to Sikkim's lone LS seat. Its nominee Nakuldas Rai beat the Congress' Biraj Adhikary by over 1.2 lakh votes. Rubbing salt to Congress' wounds, the SDF candidates defeated state Congress chief and ex-chief minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari in two seats with convincing margins.

The only solace for the Congress is the victory of its nominee, Tshering Lama, in the lone non-territorial constituency of Sangha. The SDF's outstanding victory reconfirmed the Sikkimese people's preferences for regional outfits over national ones. No national party has ever come to power in the state through an election, though the Congress ruled the state for two short periods in the 1970s and 1980s by aligning with a ruling local party.

15 MAY 2004

ANDHRA REBOO

George Fernandes - (State Minister)

Delhi scurries to rework sums

OUR BUREAU

Hyderabad/New Delhi, May 11: Some time after N. Chandrababu Naidu put in his papers, power went off in his capital's business district in symbolic acknowledgement of the possible reasons for his devastating defeat.

As the Congress steam-rollered its way back to power in Andhra Pradesh after 15 years — as good as grinding Naidu's Telugu Desam to dust — Delhi went behind closed doors with notebook and pencil to rework the numbers and formations of allies.

No opinion or exit poll had predicted, and the BJP had not feared nor the Congress expected, a rout of this nature where the victorious alliance piled up 34 seats and the losers were left counting their score of 50 on their fingers in a House of 294.

Leaders of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance met at the Prime Minister's residence to weigh implications of the Andhra results. In talks prior to that with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, NDA convener and defence minister George Fernandes is believed to have received the signal to start negotiations with parties outside the alliance.

According to the BJP's internal assessment, in the worst-case scenario the NDA would end up with a shortfall of 20 from the majority level of 272, which it believes it can make up.

BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu said for public consumption: "There is no alternative (other than the NDA)."

In the Congress camp, the immediate tendency appeared to be to interpret the Andhra results as an indicator of what is to come in the rest of the country.

"Here on, we and our allies should be in a position to form the next government at the Centre," a Congress leader said.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi is believed to have taken charge of contacting allies, current and potential. As the Andhra trend became clear, she drove down to meet CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet, who later spoke to Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, the hardest nut to crack among potential allies.

Back in Hyderabad, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy is expected to be the party's nominee for chief minister. The Congress Legislature Party is meeting tomorrow to elect the leader. Fifty-five-year-old Reddy, the leader of the Opposition in the dissolved House, had vowed to take political sanyas if the Congress could not cash in on the grievances of the state's people.

As the results came out, a 7.3 per cent swing away from the Desam pitchforked him to the chief minister's chair, with just the formalities left.

In the first flush of victory, Reddy took care to calm nerves — reflected in a huge fall on the stock market — over economic reforms. He said: "The Congress is not against development. But we will take up development activities with a human face and with real concern for the poor."

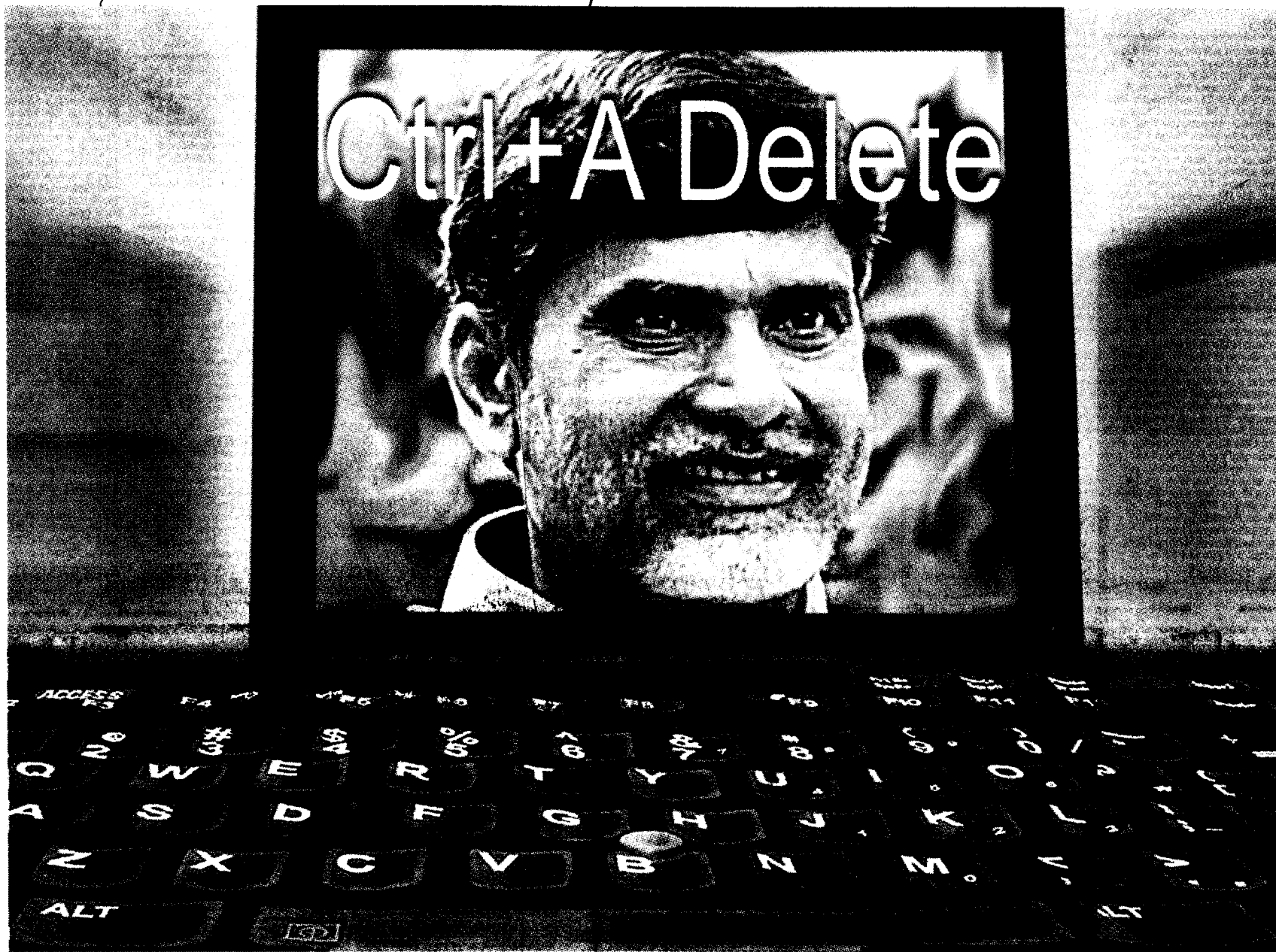
"It is the sufferings of the common man and the indifference of the Telugu Desam towards him that made him turn towards the Congress. We will see he does not regret his decision," Reddy said.

He is setting for the party a stiff task because other than the anti-incumbency feeling, seen to be natural after nine years in power, Naidu's perceived failure to address the plight of farmers reeling under four consecutive years of drought is cited among the key reasons for the cruel verdict. Chronic power shortage, after privatisation accompanied by increased tariffs, is another.

Naidu, straining hard to maintain at least a hint of a smile on his lips as he spoke to the media conceding defeat, described the results as unexpected, promising to play a "positive and constructive role" in Opposition, but said he was unrepentant about his policies.

"I worked hard to develop Andhra Pradesh as a model state. I have no regrets. I fully accept the people's mandate and will support good policies of the new (Congress) government," he said.

The "new government" will need some truly "good policies" because the first challenge will come from its ally, the Telengana Rashtra Samiti, which reminded the Congress immediately after the results were known about creating a separate state.



Development gamble flops, Sonia's pays off

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

Fifteen years after it last won an Assembly election in Andhra Pradesh, the Congress was on the road to power in Hyderabad. The cyber city joined the rest of Andhra Pradesh and gave "the CEO chief minister", N. Chandrababu Naidu, the thumbs down.

For a Congress fighting to return to centre stage, Andhra Pradesh may well show the way. This adage was true a decade ago when the late N.T. Rama Rao unseated the Congress taking more than two out of three seats.

A decade later, Sonia Gandhi's Congress put together a rainbow coalition, including the CPI

and the CPM and the sub-regionalist Telengana Rashtra Samiti (TRS). The votes of all these groups as seen in the rural panchayat elections of 2001 added up to over 52 per cent. In a sense, the Congress took a leaf from chief minister Chandrababu Naidu's own book.

Five years ago, he struck a perfect seat-sharing deal with the BJP. They pooled half the votes and restricted the Congress to double-digit figures in the 294-member legislative Assembly. The Kargil war helped the allies in a state with near-universal reach of satellite television.

Five years later, the entire picture has changed beyond recognition.

Already in the winter of 2003, Congress leader Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's *padayatra* or foot march through the rural interior evoked an enthusiastic response. Sonia also chipped in with carefully planned sorties to the families of farmers and weavers who had committed suicide.

The Telengana revolt against the ruling Telugu Desam helped the Congress in no small measure. K. Chandrasekhara Rao, former deputy Speaker and Desam

leader, resigned from the party and floated a local outfit to champion the creation of a new state.

The movement ironically got a fillip when the NDA government moved to create three new states in the Hindi belt in 2000.

The Congress moved into an alliance giving Rao's group as many as 42 seats. As it turns out, the results have put the larger party in the driver's seat. It has far more seats than the halfway mark of 148.

Though its bargaining power has been reduced and the

TRS held in check, the issue of Telengana's underdevelopment is certain to figure on the agenda once a

new government is formed.

The Andhra results will have far-reaching consequences. In terms of the development model he pursued, Naidu was often contrasted to Digvijay Singh of Madhya Pradesh. Both won their first re-election bids, and neither's government survived a second Assembly poll.

The one common factor, now stressed by party managers, is that both states faced years of repeated drought. But in Naidu's case, the new institutions of civic self-help did far little to alleviate distress.

The party's poor performance in the delta of the Krishna and Godavari, the prosperous rice belt of the coast, has left it in

ANDHRA SCORE

CONG + ALLIES: 234		GAIN
Cong	189	
TRS	26	+25
CPM	9	+7
CPI	6	+6
AIMIM	4	0

LOSS		
TDP	48	-131
BJP	2	-10

ANDHRA PRADESH Seats 294	SP	1
	BSP	1
	Others	8
		Gain/Loss over 1999 tally

CAPITAL HUDDLE

- George Fernandes calls on Atal Bihari Vajpayee
- They are joined by L.K. Advani, Jaswant Singh, M. Venkaiah Naidu, Pramod Mahajan, Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley for a meeting at the PM's residence
- Sonia Gandhi meets Harkishen Singh Surjeet
- CPI leader D. Raja calls on Sonia
- Arjun Singh and V.P. Singh meet Surjeet
- Sharad Pawar speaks to the CPM veteran
- Surjeet dials Mulayam Singh
- A.P.J. Abdul Kalam meets attorney-general Soli Sorabjee, former attorney-general K. Parasaran and former Chief Justice of India J.S. Verma

a state of shock.

Yet, the continued neglect of irrigation and rural credit has finally caught up with a government that prided itself on connectivity and e-governance.

Naidu's party has gone below the 50-seat mark in the Vidhan Sabha. This is lower than the figure in 1989 when NTR could not prevent a rout after nearly seven years in power.

The numbers are stark and simple and a warning to the NDA. In 1999, the Vajpayee-led coalition mustered as many as 72 of the 132 seats in the four states and two Union territories of the peninsula.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

QUOTE

I have no regrets

CHANDRABABU NAIDU

Andhra

► FROM PAGE 1

Half those seats came from Andhra. If the Assembly election results are any indicator, the best the TDP and the BJP can expect are about 5-6 seats.

Again, the lowest ever was a measly two in 1989. Even as the Congress was swept away in much of north India, it had held its ground in the South. This time, Andhra Pradesh has opened up new and unexpected possibilities for Sonia Gandhi.

There is still a sliver of hope for the NDA. The BJP may have struck a chord its local ally could not. If there has been split voting, the voters may give Naidu and the BJP some reason to smile. Still, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they will be stuck in the second slot.

The stakes are high in neighbouring Tamil Nadu, another drought-hit state where the ruling party is an ally. The BJP and friends picked up 26 seats, but the DMK now leads a formidable multi-party alliance.

The dice is loaded against the NDA. The Andhra results are also important as they point to a new entente between the Congress and the Left parties.

The CPI aligned with the larger party for the first time since 1977. The CPM struck a seat-sharing deal for the first time.

All reports indicate a closely-fought campaign with ground-level coordination between the Congress and the Left cadre. Tamil Nadu and Bihar are other states where they have joined forces.

Though not comparable to the cheer-leading role of the CPI for the Indira Congress in the seventies, the relationship has grown and deepened.

In a sense, the day belonged to Sonia and her party. Even the first round of opinion polls had given Naidu the edge. But the party president broke with past policies and gambled all on a wider alliance.

As the Congress slips into the alliance mode across the country, the tidings from Hyderabad will give it ground for hope.

The NDA in turn will wait with bated breath. It will hope, as in 1984 and 1989, that Andhra is out of sync with the rest of India.

But even a dispassionate look at the numbers will show the best it can hope for will be to crawl across the finishing line. Even that may not be as easy as it once looked.

চন্দ্রাবু

তিন চতুর্থাংশ গরিষ্ঠতায় কংগ্রেস

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন: হায়দরাবাদ ও দিল্লি, ১১ মে— সাইবারাবাদে বরবাদ হয়ে গেলেন অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের স্বঘোষিত চিফ একজিকিউটিভ অফিসার চন্দ্রাবু নাইডু। তাঁর সম্বন্ধে রচিত কারিশমা ধুলোয় মিশে গেল চরম লজ্জাজনক হারে। স্বপ্নের রাম রাওয়ের বিরুদ্ধে অভ্যুত্থান ঘটিয়ে সামন্ততান্ত্রিক কাঠামোর খোলনলচে পাস্টে আধুনিক অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশ গড়ে তোলার স্বপ্ন দেখিয়েছিলেন তিনি। তেলুগু দেশমের অভ্যন্তরীণ সমস্ত বিরোধ অক্লেশে মুছে দিয়েছেন অবিসংবাদী আধিপত্যে। ৯ বছর নিরঙ্কুশ প্রতাপে রাজত্ব করেছেন। জাতীয় রাজনীতিতেও তিনি হয়ে উঠেছিলেন ক্ষমতার নিয়ামক। তাঁর বিপুল জনপ্রিয়তার প্রমাণ আছে গত বিধানসভা ও লোকসভার ছবিতে। ভেঙে দেওয়া বিধানসভার ২৯৪ আসনের ১৯২টিই ছিল তেলুগু দেশমের দখলে। রাজ্যের ৪২ লোকসভা সদস্যের ৩৫ জনই ছিলেন তেলুগু দেশমের। জনপ্রিয়তা ও কর্তৃত্বের ওই চূড়া থেকে ধূলিতলে আছড়ে পড়লেন চন্দ্রাবু নাইডু। জনযুদ্ধ হানায় কোনক্রমে বেঁচে যাওয়ার পর তাঁর প্রতি সহানুভূতির হাওয়া কাজে লাগিয়ে বিধানসভা ভোট সেরে নেওয়ার কৌশল করেছিলেন। কিন্তু সেই কৌশল ভেঙে দেন প্রাক্তন মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনার জে এম লিংডো। অগত্যা রাজ্যের উন্নয়ন ও বিকাশের ইস্যুতেই জনগণের রায় চান। ২০ ও ২৬ এপ্রিল দু'দফার ভোটে জনগণ জানিয়ে দিল তারা চন্দ্রাবুর ওপর কতটা ক্ষুব্ধ, কতটা বিরক্ত, কতটা বীতশ্রদ্ধ। গত বিধানসভার ১৮০ থেকে তেলুগু দেশম কমে এবার হয়েছে মাত্র ৪৭। অর্থাৎ আসন কমেছে প্রায় তিন-চতুর্থাংশ। বি জে পি-র সঙ্গে জোট বাঁধা যে ভয়ঙ্কর ভুল হয়েছিল, তা সম্ভবত বুঝতে পারছেন ভারসাম্যের



মোট	২৯৪
কংগ্রেস	২২৬
দেশম জোট	৪৯
অন্যান্য	১৯

• সি পি এম ৯ • সি পি আই ৬

খেলায় একদা চ্যাম্পিয়ন চন্দ্রাবু। ভোটের এই প্রবণতা যদি লোকসভার ক্ষেত্রেও থাকে, অনুমান করা যায়, অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশ থেকে কংগ্রেস জোট ৩০টিরও বেশি আসন পেতে পারে। আজ বিধানসভার যে ফলাফল ঘোষিত হল, তার হিসেব এরকম: কংগ্রেস জোট পেয়েছে ২২৬, এককভাবে কংগ্রেস ১৮৫, তেলঙ্গানা রাষ্ট্রীয় সমিতি ২৬, সি পি এম ৯, সি পি আই ৬। জোটবদ্ধভাবে তিন-চতুর্থাংশ গরিষ্ঠতা এবং এককভাবে কংগ্রেসের দুই-তৃতীয়াংশের কাছাকাছি গরিষ্ঠতা। তেলুগু দেশম জোট ৪৯। তেলুগু দেশম ৪৭ এবং বি জে পি ২। অন্যরা হল সমাজবাদী পার্টি ১, বহুজন সমাজ পার্টি ১, জনতা পার্টি ২, এম আই এম ৪ এবং নির্দল ১১। গতবারের চেয়ে তেলুগু দেশমের আসন কমেছে ১৩৩টি এবং বি জে পি-র ১০টি। দলভিত্তিক ভোট পাওয়ার হিসেব এরকম:

এরপর ৫ পাতায়

৩ পাতায় • ৩৪ মন্ত্রীর মধ্যে হারলেন ২৭

অন্ধ্রে চন্দ্রের পূর্ণগ্রাস

কংগ্রেস একাই
১৮৫, দেশম
৪৭, বিজেপি ২

রজত রায়

মুখ্যমন্ত্রী চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর তেলুগু দেশম ও বি জে পির জোটকে শোচনীয় ভাবে হারিয়ে কংগ্রেস জোট অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশে ক্ষমতায় ফিরে এল। চন্দ্রবাবু নিজের কুপ্তম আসনটি বাচাতে পারলেও তাঁর মন্ত্রিসভার অনেক তাবড় তাবড় সদস্যই পরাজিত। গত নির্বাচনে ১৮১টি আসন পেলেও এ বার তেলুগু দেশম মাত্র ৪৭টি আসন পেয়েছে। জোটসঙ্গী বিজেপি পেয়েছে মাত্র দুটি। ২৯৪ আসনের অন্ধ্র বিধানসভায় কংগ্রেস একাই ১৮৫টি আসন অর্থাৎ নিরক্ষর সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা পেয়ে গিয়েছে। তার জোটসঙ্গী পৃথক তেলঙ্গানা রাজ্যের দাবিতে মাথা তোলা তেলঙ্গানা রাষ্ট্রীয় সমিতি (টি আর এস) পেয়েছে ২৬টি আসন। কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে আসন বোঝাপড়া করে দুই বাম দলও ভাল ফল করেছে। সি পি এম নয়টি, সি পি আই ছয়টি আসনে জিতেছে। বৃহৎ দলনেতা নির্বাচনের জন্য কংগ্রেস পরিষদীয় দলের নিয়মসম্মত বৈঠক নির্ধারিত থাকলেও অন্ধ্রে কংগ্রেসের 'তরুণ তুর্কি' বলে পরিচিত ওয়াই এস রাজশেখর রেড্ডিই মুখ্যমন্ত্রী হিসাবে শপথ নেননি বলে মোটামুটি ঠিক হয়ে গিয়েছে।

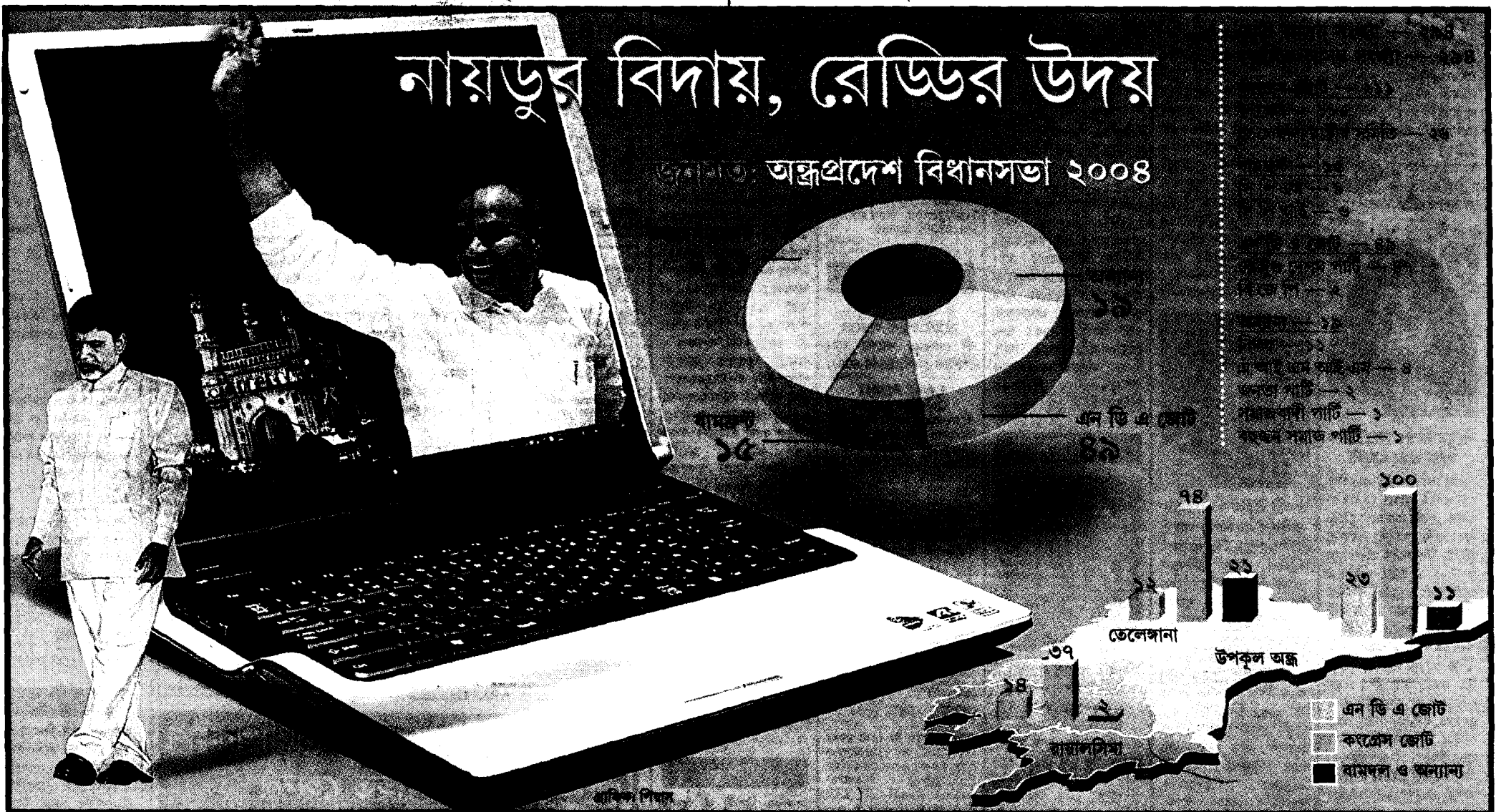
বৃহৎপন্থিবার অন্য সব রাজ্যের সঙ্গেই অন্ধ্রের লোকসভা নির্বাচনের ফলও জানা যাবে। অন্ধ্রে বিধানসভার এই বিরটি সাফল্যের প্রতিফলন বৃহৎপন্থিবার লোকসভার ফলাফলেও পড়বে ধরে নিয়ে দিল্লিতে কংগ্রেস ও বামমহল প্রচণ্ড খুশি, বি জে পি নেতারা মনমরা। এ বারের নির্বাচনেই কংগ্রেস অন্ধ্রে প্রথম জোট বেধে লড়েছে। তেলঙ্গানায় টি আর এস-এর সঙ্গে জোট কংগ্রেসকে এক ধাক্কায় তেলুগু দেশম-বি জে পি জোটের চাইতে অনেকখানি এগিয়ে দিয়েছিল। সেই সঙ্গে গোটা রাজ্যেই বামপন্থীদের সঙ্গে আসন সমঝোতা করার সুবাদে বেশ কয়েকটি আসনে ভোট কাটাকাটির সম্ভাবনাও কমে যায়। এমনিতেই ধারাবাহিক খরায় চাষিরা বিপর্যস্ত, বিক্ষুব্ধ ছিল। জলের সমস্যা নিয়ে উদাসীন থাকায় গ্রামীণ অন্ধ্র চন্দ্রবাবুর সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে যেতে তৈরি ছিল। তার উপর কংগ্রেস জোট বেধে নামায় ভোটের ফলে এই বিরটি ধস নামে চন্দ্রবাবুর বিপক্ষে।

তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি শিল্পকে অগ্রাধিকার দিয়ে হায়দরাবাদকে বিশ্ব মানচিত্রে তুলে ধরে খ্যাতি কুড়ালেও চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর সরকার অন্ধ্রের সাধারণ মানুষের, বিশেষ করে কৃষকদের সমস্যাকে পুরোপুরি অবহেলা করেছিলেন। টানা নয় বছর রাজত্ব করার পরেও খরাপীড়িত অন্ধ্রে জলের জন্য হাহাকার, ফসল নষ্ট হওয়ায় ঋণগ্রস্ত চাষিদের আত্মহত্যা তাঁর কাছে গুরুত্ব পায়নি। এ বার সেই চাষিরা, বিশেষ করে গ্রামাঞ্চলের মানুষেরাই চন্দ্রবাবুর সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে তাদের 'জল ও বিজলি'র সম্বন্ধে জমে থাকা ক্ষোভ উগরে দিয়েছেন ভোটের বাসে। কংগ্রেস নেতা রাজশেখর রেড্ডি আজও সেই কথাই মনে করিয়ে দিয়ে বলেছেন, মুখ্যমন্ত্রী থাকাকালীন আধুনিক কালের নিরোর মতোই আচরণ করেছেন চন্দ্রবাবু।

জনতার রায় চন্দ্রবাবু বিদায় নিলেন। কিন্তু ভোটের রাজনীতিতে তাঁর 'সংস্কার ও উন্নয়ন' কর্মসূচির এই পরিণতি ভারতীয় গণতন্ত্রের অন্য একটি দিককে ঘিরেও বিতর্ক উত্থে দিয়ে গেল।

ভোটের ফলেই স্পষ্ট, তেলঙ্গানা, রায়ালসিমা ও উপকূল—এই তিন এলাকাতাই চন্দ্রবাবুর জোটকে মানুষ প্রত্যাখ্যান করেছে। অন্ধ্রের ফসলভাণ্ডার বলে পরিচিত কৃষ্ণা বস্টীপ এলাকা তেলুগু দেশমের ঘাটি এলাকা। কৃষ্ণা, প্রকাশম, গুন্টুর প্রভৃতি জেলা ধানচাষের জন্য বিখ্যাত। উপকূল এলাকার এই জেলাগুলির সঙ্গেই পূর্ব ও পশ্চিম গোদাবরীতেও চাষবাসই প্রধান। খরায় বছরের পর বছর মার খেয়ে এই সব এলাকার চাষিরা অনেকেই কাজের খোঁজে শহরাঞ্চলে গিয়ে জনমজুরি করতে বাধ্য হয়েছে। আজ ভোটের ফলে পরিষ্কার, উপকূল এলাকার মানুষ বরাবর তেলুগু দেশমকে সমর্থন করে এলেও এ বার বর্জন করেছে। সস্তা বা কিনা মূল্যে চাষিদের বিদ্যুৎ দেওয়ার হাতছানি দিয়ে

এর পর সাতের পাতায়



শান্ত বিজেপি শিবির এ বার কেন্দ্রে সমর্থন জোগাড়ের চেষ্টায়

গৌতম হোড় • নয়াদিল্লি

১১ মে: অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশে বিধানসভার ফলাফলে শক্তিত বিজেপি এবং এন ডি এ নেতৃত্ব এ বার ভোটের বাইরের নেতাদের সঙ্গেও যোগাযোগ শুরু করলেন। মূলত মুলায়ম সিংহ যাদব, মায়াবতী, শরদ পওয়ার ও ওমপ্রকাশ চৌটারার সঙ্গে কথাবার্তা চালানোর চেষ্টা করা হচ্ছে। মুলায়মকে যদি নিজেদের পক্ষে পাওয়া না-ও যায়, সে ক্ষেত্রে তিনি যাতে তৃতীয় ফ্রন্টে কোনও ভাবেই না-যান, সেটা নিশ্চিত করার প্রয়াস চলছে। মুলায়মকে বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব বোঝাচ্ছেন, তাঁকে না-পেলে মায়ারতীর কথা ভাবতে হবে এবং সেটা হলে উত্তরপ্রদেশের মুলায়মের সরকারেরই বিপদ বাড়বে। বরং মুলায়মই তাঁদের সঙ্গে এলে রামমন্দির প্রসঙ্গে আলোচনার মাধ্যমে সমাধানসূত্র বার করার চেষ্টা চালানো যাবে।

এ ছাড়াও প্রাক্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী দেবগৌড়া, রামবিলাস পাসোসান, পি এম কে নেতা রামদাস, ভাইকো, ওমর আবদুল্লাহর মতো নেতাদের সঙ্গেও যোগাযোগ করা হচ্ছে। ভাবা হচ্ছে কংগ্রেসের শরিকদের কথাও। বিজেপি নেতারা গত কালের মতো আজও স্পষ্ট ভাবেই জানিয়েছেন, কংগ্রেস, মুসলিম লিগ এবং বাম দল বাদ দিয়ে তাঁরা অন্য সব দলের সঙ্গেই কথা বলতে চান। সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা না-পেলেও সরকার গঠনের চেষ্টা পুরোদস্তুর চালু রাখতে চান বিজেপি শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব। তাঁরা

কিছুতেই কংগ্রেস ও বামদলের সরকারে দেখতে নারাজ। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দফতর সূত্রে বলা হয়েছে, আড়াইশো আসন পেলে তাঁরা বিরোধী আসনে বসবেন বলে যে-খবর প্রকাশিত হয়েছে, তা ঠিক নয়। এ সব ভিত্তিহীন। ভোটের ফল প্রকাশের আগে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর অফিস থেকে পরিষ্কার ভাবে বৃষ্টিয়ে দেওয়া হল, সংখ্যা কম হলেও তাঁরা সরকার গঠনের চেষ্টা চালানো।

আজ সন্ধ্যায় দলীয় নেতাদের নিয়ে বৈঠক করেন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। উপ-প্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী, দলের সভাপতি বেক্কাইয়া নাইডু-সহ দলের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ নেতারা বৈঠকে উপস্থিত ছিলেন। সেখানেও ভোট পরবর্তী পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে আলোচনা হয়েছে। তবে খুঁকি না-নিয়ে বিজেপি এবং এন ডি এ নেতারা অন্য দলের নেতাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ শুরু করে দিয়েছেন। ছোট-বড় কোনও দলকেই তাঁরা বাদ দিচ্ছেন না। যে-চৌটারা একটি বা দু'টির বেশি আসন পানেন বলে বিজেপি নেতৃত্ব মনে করেন না, তাঁর সঙ্গেও যোগাযোগ করা হচ্ছে। মূলত কোনো বা দু'ত মারফতই কথা হচ্ছে। এন ডি এ-র তরফে এই যোগাযোগের দায়িত্বে আছেন জর্জ ফার্নান্দেজ, প্রমোদ মহাজন ও অরুণ জেটলি। আর সাভিক ভাভে বিষয়টির দেখভাল করছেন লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী। আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে জর্জের আধ ঘণ্টার বৈঠকও হয়েছে। প্রচারের যে-সব নেতা ও তারকারা নেমেছিলেন, তাঁদের নিয়ে নিজের বাড়িতে

এর পর সাতের পাতায়

সনিয়াকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করতে কোমর বেঁধেছেন সুরজিৎ

দীপেন্দ্র রায়চৌধুরী • নয়াদিল্লি

১১ মে: অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের জয়ের পর উজ্জীবিত বিরোধীরা যে ঘর গোছাতে নামবেন সেটা তো স্বাভাবিক। কিন্তু আজ প্রথম দিনের সব চেয়ে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ ঘটনা হল, সনিয়া গাধীকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করতে কোমর বেঁধে নেমে পড়েছেন হরকিষণ সিংহ সুরজিৎ। কংগ্রেস নেত্রী সনিয়া গাধী নিজেও এখন অনেকটাই তাঁর উপরেই নির্ভর করছেন। আর কংগ্রেস-সিপিএম উভয়ে এক সুরে আজই বলে দিয়েছে, অন্ধ্রের ফলাফল থেকেই স্পষ্ট, মানুষের রায় কেন্দ্রের বিরুদ্ধেই যাচ্ছে।

নিজেকে একটু পিছনে রেখে সকলকে সমবেত করার দায়িত্বটা আজ সকালে সুরজিৎের হাতে তুলে দিয়ে যান কংগ্রেস নেত্রী সনিয়া নিজেই। আজ সকালে অন্ধ্রের ফলাফল যখন ক্রমশ স্পষ্ট হচ্ছে, তখনই তিনি পৌঁছে যান ৮ তিনমুঠি লেনে। দু'জনের মধ্যে কী কথা হয় তার বিস্তৃত বিবরণ কংগ্রেস বা সি পি এম কোনও দলেই দেয়নি। কিন্তু এ টুকু স্পষ্ট যে সনিয়া গাধীর নেতৃত্বাধীন সরকার গড়ার বিষয়েই কথা হয়। রাজনৈতিক সূত্রে এই ইঙ্গিত পাওয়া গিয়েছে যে 'প্রধানমন্ত্রী-বিতর্ক' প্রকাশ্যে টেনে না-আনতে সনিয়াকে পরামর্শ দেন সুরজিৎ।

সনিয়া চলে যাওয়ার পরেই সুরজিৎ তাঁর কাজ শুরু করেন। তিনি কথা বলেন জাতীয়তাবাদী কংগ্রেস নেতা শরদ পওয়ারের সঙ্গে। তাঁর বক্তব্য, "পওয়ারের সঙ্গে

কথা বলে আমি সন্তুষ্ট।" তাঁর স্পষ্ট ইঙ্গিত, কংগ্রেস বা সনিয়া-নেতৃত্বাধীন সরকারে পওয়ারের মোটেই কোনও আপত্তি নেই। তা হলে তো বাকি রইলেন শুধু মুলায়ম। সুরজিৎের বক্তব্য, "হ্যাঁ। তবে বাকি সকলে যদি একমত হয়ে যান, তা হলে মুলায়মও তা মেনে নেন। মুলায়মের সঙ্গে আমার কথা হয়েছে। তিনি আমার সঙ্গে দেখা করতে আসছেন। আমি তাঁকে বোঝাব।"

কে প্রধানমন্ত্রী হবেন, সেই প্রশ্নের স্পষ্ট উত্তর না-দিলেও সুরজিৎ কিছু আজ স্পষ্ট করেই বলেছেন, "নেতৃত্ব নিয়ে কিছু প্রশ্ন অবশ্যই উঠতে পারে, কিন্তু সেটা কোনও বড় সমস্যা হবে না।" কিন্তু বিভিন্ন দলের নেতারা যখন বিভিন্ন জনকে প্রধানমন্ত্রী করার কথা বলছেন তখন তাঁর পছন্দের প্রার্থী কে? সুরজিৎ প্রশ্নটির উত্তর দিতে শুরু করেন এই ভাবে: "কংগ্রেস যখন বিরোধী শিবিরের" সব চেয়ে বড় দল স্বাভাবিকভাবেই...।" তারপর অকস্মাৎ থেমে গিয়ে সুরজিৎ বলেন, "না, আমি যখন সকলকে বোঝানোর চেষ্টা করছি তখন আমার বলা উচিত হবে না।"

তবে সুরজিৎের পরামর্শ অন্ধ্রের অন্ধ্রের মেনে আজ কংগ্রেসের তরফে অধিকা সোনি বলেন, অন্ধ্রের ফলের পর তাঁরা আশা করছেন 'কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন সরকার' কোমর বেঁধে প্রতিষ্ঠিত হবে। কিন্তু সেই সরকারের কর্ণধার কে হবেন? সোনির জবাব, "আমরা ভোট লড়েছি সনিয়া গাধীর নেতৃত্বে। তিনিই ছিলেন আমাদের

এর পর সাতের পাতায়

NDTV poll predicts Naidu's exit

40-1
28/4

J-Bheela
(S. Kishore)
BJP

● Clear win for Patnaik; Karnataka too close to call

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, APRIL 27. The Congress appears set to sweep the elections to the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, while the BJD-BJP combine is projected to retain power in Orissa with a comfortable majority, according to an exit poll conducted by

The exit poll-based projection in Karnataka showed that the voters preferred the Bharatiya Janata Party in the Lok Sabha election but gave no clear mandate in the Assembly poll. All that NDTV would say was that it was "too close to call."

However, the BJP has lost five percentage

NDTV EXIT POLL, STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2004

ANDHRA PRADESH			ORISSA			KARNATAKA		
	Exit poll	1999 results		Exit poll	1999 results		Exit poll	1999 results
Congress & Allies	180-205	93	BJD & Allies	99-105	106	BJP & Allies	Too close to call	62
TDP & Allies	80-105	192	Congress & Allies	56-45	26	Congress & Allies	Too close to call	132
Others	5-10	9	Others	15-15	15	JD(S) & Others	Too close to call	30

NDTV-AC Nielsen. As for the Assembly elections in Karnataka, the poll finds the outcome "too close to call."

In Andhra Pradesh, the Telugu Desam Party of the Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, was expected to perform much better in the Rayalaseema and coastal regions that went to the polls in the second phase on Monday.

However, the exit poll-based projection showed the Congress alliance headed for a near two-thirds majority in the State Assembly. But the Congress front had lost some ground when compared to the Lok Sabha election, the exit poll said. It has done better among men voters while more women appear to have backed the TDP.

points in the Assembly election compared with the Lok Sabha poll, while the Congress has gained two percentage points. Three results were possible — the Congress could win, the BJP could make it or there could be a hung Assembly.

In Orissa, the Chief Minister, Navin Patnaik, looks set to retain power. His Biju Janata Dal, in alliance with the BJP, is headed for a comfortable majority in the State Assembly though there is a two percentage point swing away from the ruling alliance. In both Orissa and Karnataka, the BJP has gained because of the Vajpayee factor in the Lok Sabha, but the Congress has managed to close the gap in the Assembly election, according to the exit poll.

Basu calls EC move a summary trial

9/2/04 J. Bhattacharya (CPM) *str 5 wfb*
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 19. — That the Election Commission's order that the three IPS officers be transferred from their present posts has caught the CPI-M on the wrong foot became clear this afternoon when former chief minister and Politburo member Mr Jyoti Basu told the media that "justice" demands that a reason be attributed before taking such drastic steps.

"This is like a summary trial. The officers don't even know what crime they have committed. One newspaper today said that they had been biased. When were they biased? Was it in 1895 or 1995?", asked Mr Basu. Yet he admitted in the same vein that under Article 311 of the Constitution, the gov-

ernment can dismiss any of its servants without giving any reason.

But it was a mellowed down Mr Basu who confronted the press today. He did not use a single word attacking the Chief Election Commissioner. Rather, he kept praising the Election Commissioners that he has known "for many years" as "good people who would not do any injustice and would ensure a free and fair election".

He wouldn't comment on whether he felt that the EC was acting under the influence of Opposition parties. However he said he wouldn't mind if the EC takes steps like transferring officers or bringing in observers from outside in other states as well.

The CPI-M state committee held a meeting today to review the transfer

of DIG Malda range, and the SPs of Nadia and North 24 Parganas. The committee adopted a resolution stating: "West Bengal has earned the distinction of having held free, fair and peaceful elections during the last 27 years. It is on record that the Election Commission of India thanked the state government several times during this period. We are confident that the 14th Lok Sabha election will reaffirm this record".

"We will send our resolution along with a letter to the EC and ask what is the crime of these officers. The government has a right to know, the officers have a right to know and the people have a right to know", Mr Basu said.

Left partners including the Forward Bloc also criticised the CEC.

THE STATESMAN

20 MAR 2004

Trinamul blues

Drama over renominating Sudip

Alimuddin Street must be watching with great interest the outcome of the clash between the Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and her recalcitrant former party MP Sudip Bandopadhyay over who should get the nomination for the safe Kolkata north west Lok Sabha seat. Being the sitting MP of Kolkata north west and having spent a lot of time and effort on nurturing his constituency for the last six years it is natural that Sudip should expect to get renominated. After all he was one of the very few Bengal Congress leaders who in 1998 took the bold step of resigning from the party and the state assembly to join Mamata. He also did not desert her when some other Congress stalwarts, who had joined her, reverted to their old party disillusioned by her whimsicalities. But he stood by Mamata during her darkest hours for which she rewarded him by nominating him for the "safe" north west seat both in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha polls, and which he won easily. His wife was also rewarded with the nomination for the Bowbazar seat which he had vacated.

Sudip's greatest fault during his second stint as an MP was that he took Mamata for granted which worsened his political and personal equation with her. He also hobnobbed with some NDA leaders and ministers who wanted to settle personal scores with her. At one stage he was more close to those leaders than to Mamata which made her scotch his induction into the NDA Government. In a leader-centric party like Trinamul the cardinal sin that Sudip committed was that he became a little too big for his boots. If now Mamata decides not to renominate him, he will certainly hit back by queering the pitch for this "safe" Trinamul seat. And that's what Alimuddin Street is waiting for.

THE STATESMAN

19 FEB 2004

19 FEB 2004

CHOICE OF 2004

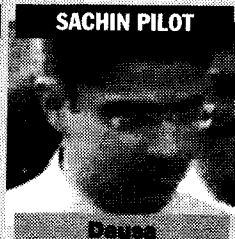
IN THE FRAY TODAY



ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE
Lucknow
Key rival: Ram Jethmalani Ind. (backed by Cong)



MULAYAM SINGH YADAV
Mainpuri
Key rival: Balram Singh Yadav (BJP)



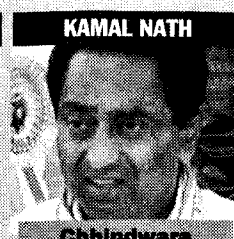
SACHIN PILOT
Dausa
Key rival: Kartar Singh Bhadana (BJP)



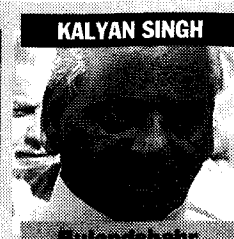
MEHBOOBA MUFTI
Anantnag
Key rivals: Mehboob Beg (NC) Yusuf Tarigami (CPM)



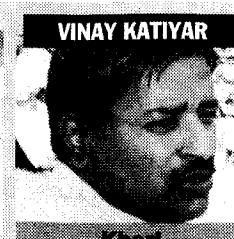
MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI
Allahabad
Key rival: Prakash Malviya (Congress)



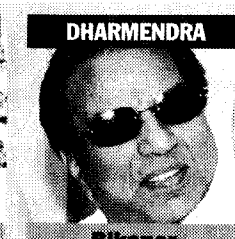
KAMAL NATH
Chhindwara
Key rival: Prahlad Patel (BJP)



KALYAN SINGH
Bulandshahr
Key rivals: C.S. Sharma (Congress) Devendra Bharadwaj (BSP)



VINAY KATIYAR
Kheri
Key rival: Ravi Prakash Verma (Samajwadi Party)



DHARMENDRA
Bikaner
Key rival: Rameshwar Lal Dudi (Congress)

Act III: BJP on friendly turf

Round Three of Elections 2004 unfolds in 83 seats across seven states.

The NDA, which holds 40 seats, does not have much room for improvement except in Uttar Pradesh. The task for the alliance is to guard its territory and pick up new seats wherever possible to beat the hung House scare.

For the Congress, the challenge is to improve its tally of 19 on hostile ground to stay in the fight.

Uttar Pradesh

All eyes are on Uttar Pradesh, as 30 seats in the crucial heartland state go to polls.

The BJP, which believes it has not done too well in the first round in the state, is hoping to make up with more seats this time. The stakes are equally high for the Samajwadi Party and the BSP. The Congress will be hoping to sustain the revival seen in the eastern region.

In 1999, the Samajwadi Party picked up 13 of the 30 seats. The BSP followed with eight seats while the BJP got seven and the Congress two.

This time, the BJP has campaigned hard, hoping to double its tally. The party expects Muslim votes to split but the Yadav (Samajwadi) and Jatav (BSP) blocks have proved impregnable. Brahmins, Thakurs and Banias are drifting away from the party in places. But the BJP's biggest worry is to ensure a respectable turnout in urban booths, particularly in Lucknow.

The Samajwadi Party, which virtually swept the area stretching from Agra to Etawah in 1999, is battling the personal unpopularity of its MPs and a split in Muslim votes. But it is hoping

Mulayam Singh Yadav's "charisma" will see it through.

Seats to watch: The Prime Minister's constituency, Lucknow. Lawyer Ram Jethmalani is contesting against him.

Murl Manohar Joshi is in the battle from Allahabad.

Mulayam Singh Yadav is in the field from Mainpuri and his son, Akhilesh, is fighting from Kannauj.

Madhya Pradesh

Twelve seats in the Mahakaul region and eastern Madhya Pradesh give their verdict. In Assembly polls, this was the region that traditionally backed the Congress. Four months ago, however, the party was wiped out here as in the rest of the state. In the Lok Sabha, the BJP has been strong and at present holds nine of the 12 seats.

The Congress, which faces an uphill task, hopes to do better in this round than the next one when the remaining 17 seats will go to polls. But any difference will be marginal.

Led by Uma Bharti in the state, the BJP is riding high on the "Lodhiana Express" — support from Lodhs and other OBCs. But the exit poll projections have cheered the Congress and it is gunning for four seats in this round.

Seat to watch: Chhindwara, where sitting MP Kamal Nath of the Congress faces a fight from Prahlad Patel of the BJP.

Rajasthan

All 25 seats vote in the state that's the pollsters' nightmare. In December, the BJP swept to power after all surveys had predicted another term for Ashok Gehlot. This time, the projections are that the BJP will improve its 1999



good news for the BJP is the Rajput consolidation behind the party.

Seats to watch: Dharmendra makes his debut in Bikaner.

Another debutant, Sachin Pilot, fights for his father's seat in Dausa.

Balram Jakhar is in the contest in Churu.

Vasundhara Raje's son Dushyant Singh tests the waters in Jhalawar.

Jaswant Singh's son Manavendra is in the fray from Barmer.

Bihar

The last 12 seats to vote in Bihar. These fall in the eastern and northeastern part, where the NDA has the edge over the RJD-Congress-LJP-NCP-CPM alliance. All five partners have fielded candidates.

In 1999, the Congress-RJD had not done too badly in the region, winning four of their total eight seats from here. Seven were won by the NDA.

This time, the NDA is sound in five seats and the RJD-led alliance in two. For the remaining five, the contest will be close. But it is each seat to itself, with local factors playing the decisive role.

Three Union ministers are in the fray and several criminals, including Pappu Yadav, Suraj Bhan and Ranjeet Don of the CAT paper leak, are also testing their strength.

Seat to watch: Madhepura, where Laloo Prasad Yadav will be raring to avenge his defeat at the hands of Sharad Yadav in 1999.

Northeast

Two seats in Arunachal Pradesh and the lone Nagaland seat give their verdict. All three are held by the Congress, but with

friendly governments in the states, the BJP stands a good chance this time.

Kashmir

Anantnag will have a three-cornered contest. PDP president Mehbooba Mufti is pitted against Mehboob Beg of the Na-

MY VOTE

Which issue is on top of your mind?

Development

Who do you think can address it?

BJP

Will you cast your vote?

Yes

● Name: Paritosh Ghosh ● Age: 71
● City: Calcutta ● Occupation: Businessman ● Family: Wife, son, daughter-in-law, two grandchildren
● Likes: Honesty ● Dislikes: Double standards ● Ambition: To see a recently widowed daughter and grandson settled in life

tional Conference and Yusuf Tarigami of the CPM. The National Conference holds the seat at present.

The main fight is between Mehbooba and Mehboob. Tarigami could cut into the anti-National Conference votes.