

# Exit polls favour Congress-NCP

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, OCT. 13. Barring just one television news network, the exit poll forecast gave the

ruling Congress-Nationalist Congress Party a second turn at the office. Exit polls for the keenly-watched Maharashtra Assembly elections projected the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party alliance to be ahead of the Bharatiya Janata Party-Shiv Sena combine.

Of the four news networks — NDTV, Aaj Tak, Star and Zee — two of the three exit polls gave a clear majority to the ruling combine. One projected the current Democratic Front being 20 seats short of a simple majority but ahead of the BJP-led combine by 10 seats while the NDTV projections indicated that the BJP-Sena combine would bag between 115-145 seats as

against 111-135 for the Congress-led alliance.

## "Others" shine

For the first time the "others", which include the Bahujan Samaj Party of Ms. Mayawati,

were estimated to have garnered a sizeable number of seats — the exit polls show varied figures ranging from 20 to 48 seats — to possibly emerge as the deciding factor in Government formation in the event of the Congress-NCP failing to reach a bare majority of 145 in an Assembly of 288 seats. Of the four exit polls, two estimated that the Congress-NCP alliance would come out ahead.

While Star and Aaj Tak gave a clear majority to the ruling combination, Zee showed it to be ahead but short of the majority mark. The NDTV put the tally anywhere between 111-135 for the ruling coalition and between 115-145 for the BJP-Sena combine.

If the Zee News exit poll is correct then the Congress-NCP would get 125 seats as against the BJP-Shiv Sena's 115 while as many as 48 seats will be cornered by "others".

The Congress-NCP alliance was projected to get 140-150 by Aaj Tak; 149 seats by Star; and 125 seats by Zee News. The BJP-Sena combine was estimated to get 100-110 seats by Aaj Tak; 119 by Star and 115 by Zee News on

the basis of their exit polls. The projections for the "others" category were 20 (Star); 30-40 (Aaj Tak), 48 (Zee News) and 30-45 (NDTV).

In the 1999 Assembly polls in the State, the Congress and the NCP together had 147 seats, the BJP-Sena 125 and "others" won 16. Of course, the Congress and NCP had fought against each other in that election only to come together to form the Government after the results. The NCP president, Sharad Pawar, had been expelled from the Congress just before the Assembly election, which coincided with the Lok Sabha election that year.

## Loses ground

The predictions suggest that the Congress, as expected, has indeed lost ground in its traditional Vidarbha bastion, possibly because "others" have eaten into its vote-share.

Take, for example the projection by Aaj Tak which has given "others" as many as 12-16 of the 66 seats in this backward region of the State which was in the news for suicide by cotton farmers. Almost all the three exit

polls have predicted between 30-35 seats for the BJP-led alliance and between 16 and 30 for the Congress-led combine.

NDTV put it in a range of 28-32 for the Congress-plus and 26-30 for BJP-plus. The prosperous sugar-belt in Western Maharashtra, where undoubtedly Mr. Pawar has held sway for decades, could see the Congress-NCP holding its ground if the exit polls are to be believed. Aaj Tak and Star gave this coalition around 50 seats although Zee was more cautious at 37.

The BJP-Sena alliance was projected to get 25 by Zee; 14-18 by Aaj Tak; and 12 seats by Star. The NDTV said the Congress-led alliance gets 43-47 seats as against 14-18 for the BJP-led force.

In Mumbai, where the Congress-NCP had recently swept the Lok Sabha poll much to the chagrin of the Sena, the prediction for the Assembly elections pegged them down to 16 to 24 seats as against 10 to 17 for the BJP-Sena combine. In the rest of the regions of Marathwada, Konkan and North Maharashtra the gap between the two rival alliances was predicted to be smaller.

# EC raps govt on minority job quotas

HTC and Agencies HC-1  
New Delhi, October 7

RAPPING THE Centre on the knuckles, the Election Commission today rejected its stand on the setting up of a panel to look into the possibility of reservation for minorities.

The government's decision to set up the National Commission for the Welfare of Socially and Economically Backward Sections among Religious and Linguistic Minorities "at this juncture when elections are being held in two states... gives the impression of being aimed at influencing some... of the electorate," the EC told the Cabinet secretary.

"The commission is emphatically of the view that the decision on the constitution of the commission should have been deferred till the date of poll, October 13," the EC said. The Centre had sought the EC's views on changing the Haj subsidy policy, but decided to defer the move.

The question of setting up a national commission on the minorities had the "same potential for influencing a section of the voters but the matter was not referred to the Election Commission for its views," the poll panel regretted, and hoped that such lapses would be avoided in future.

The government contended that setting up the commission would not violate the model code of conduct because the decision to do so was a continuation of the President's address to Parliament on June 7, 2004.

The EC said the terms covered in the CMP or the President's address were the statements of intent of the party in power, "but it is the Cabinet decision that translates the intent to an implementable/actionable matter".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 OCT 2004

# EC seeks report on minority panel

OUR BUREAU AND PTI

New Delhi, Sept. 30: The Election Commission tonight sought a report from the cabinet secretary on yesterday's announcement of a commission for religious and linguistic minorities, sources said.

They said the cabinet secretary has been asked to submit the report by October 4.

The Union cabinet had yesterday cleared the creation of a national commission to recommend welfare measures, including reservations, for the backward among religious and linguistic minorities.

A BJP team today urged the poll panel to take "corrective action" against the "violation" of the model code of conduct.

After submitting a memorandum to the Election Commission, BJP leaders Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and V.K. Malhotra said the cabinet decision and the policy announcement were a "calculated move" to woo minorities in Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh, where polls are round the corner.

"This is a deliberate and blatant violation of the code of conduct which not only disapproves of announcements, policy decisions and promises during an election process, but also in addition categorically states that there shall be no appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes," the memorandum said.

Naqvi said the Sonia Gandhi-headed National Advisory Council had also "flouted" the code by announcing projects for health insurance and free toilets. He added that the council should be covered by the model code as it is government-funded.

The BJP leader said the move to set up the commission is "against the interests of the minorities because they are being exploited for vote-bank politics. When the issue of employment is given a religious colour, it sows the seeds of divisiveness".

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শালবার ১৫ মে ২০০৮ CL

# লোকসভা নির্বাচনের রাজ্য-ভিত্তিক ফল

<b>অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশ (৪২)</b>	কংগ্রেস ২	<b>মেঘালয় (২)</b>	<b>উত্তরপ্রদেশ (৮০)</b>
সি পি আই ১	ন্যাশনাল কনফারেন্স ২	কংগ্রেস ১	বি জে পি ১০
সি পি এম ১	পি ডি পি ১	ভূগমূল কংগ্রেস ১	বি এস পি ১৯
কংগ্রেস ২৯	নির্দল ১		কংগ্রেস ৯
টি আর এস ৫	<b>ঝাড়খণ্ড (১৪)</b>	মিজোরাম (১)	রাষ্ট্রীয় লোকদল ৬
টি ডি পি ৫	বি জে পি ১	মিজো ন্যাশনাল ফ্রন্ট ১	সমাজবাদী পার্টি ৩৫
এম আই এম ১	সি পি আই ১		জনতা দল (ইউ) ১
	কংগ্রেস ৬	<b>নাগাল্যান্ড (১)</b>	এস জে পি (আর) ১
<b>অরুণাচলপ্রদেশ (২)</b>	ঝাড়খণ্ড মুক্তিমোর্চা ৪	নাগাল্যান্ড পিপলস ফ্রন্ট ১	এন এল পি ১
বি জে পি ২	আর জে ডি ২		নির্দল ১
<b>অসম (১৪)</b>	<b>কর্নাটক (২৮)</b>	<b>ওড়িশা (২১)</b>	<b>উত্তরাঞ্চল (৫)</b>
বি জে পি ২	বি জে পি ১৮	বি জে পি ৭	বিজেপি ৩
কংগ্রেস ৯	কংগ্রেস ৮	কংগ্রেস ২	কংগ্রেস ১
অ গ প ২		বিজু জনতা দল ১১	সমাজবাদী পার্টি ১
নির্দল ১			
<b>বিহার (মোট আসন - ৪০, ঘোষিত ৩৭)</b>	<b>জনতা দল (এস) ২</b>	<b>ঝাড়খণ্ড মুক্তি মোর্চা ১</b>	<b>পশ্চিমবঙ্গ (৪২)</b>
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কংগ্রেস ৩	<b>কেরল (২০)</b>	<b>পঞ্জাব (১৩)</b>	সিপিআই ৩
জনতা দল (ইউ) ৬	সি পি আই ৩	বি জে পি ৬	ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লক ৩
আর জে ডি ১৯	সি পি এম ১২	কংগ্রেস ২	আরএসপি ৩
লোক জনশক্তি ৪	কেরল কংগ্রেস ১	শিরোমণি অকালি দল ৮	কংগ্রেস ৬
	মুসলিম লিগ ১		ভূগমূল কংগ্রেস ১
<b>ছত্তীসগড় (১১)</b>	জনতা দল (এস) ১	<b>রাজস্থান (২৫)</b>	<b>আন্ধামান ও নিকোবর দ্বীপপুঞ্জ (১)</b>
বি জে পি ১০	আই এফ ডি পি ১	বি জে পি ২১	কংগ্রেস ১
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<b>গোয়া (২)</b>	<b>মধ্যপ্রদেশ (২৯)</b>	<b>সিকিম (১)</b>	কংগ্রেস ১
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কংগ্রেস ১	কংগ্রেস ৪		বিএনপি ১
<b>গুজরাত (২৬)</b>	<b>মহারাষ্ট্র (৪৮)</b>	<b>তামিলনাড়ু (৩৯)</b>	<b>দমন ও দিউ (১)</b>
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কংগ্রেস ১২	কংগ্রেস ১৩	সি পি এম ২	<b>দিল্লি (৭)</b>
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কংগ্রেস ৯	আর পি আই (এ) ১	এম ডি এম কে ৪	<b>লক্ষদ্বীপ (১)</b>
<b>হিমাচল প্রদেশ (৪)</b>	<b>মণিপুর (মোট আসন-২, ঘোষিত-১)</b>	পি এম কে ৫	জনতা দল (ইউ) ১
বি জে পি ১	কংগ্রেস ১	<b>ত্রিপুরা (২)</b>	<b>পন্ডিচেরি (১)</b>
কংগ্রেস ৩		সি পি এম ২	পিএমকে ১
<b>জম্মু ও কাশ্মীর (৬)</b>			



# Urban Areas Record Much Lower Turnout In First Two Phases Cast System Turns Off Metros, Smaller Towns Take The Cue

Arnav Pandya

ET INTELLIGENCE GROUP

**U**RBAN Indians seem less inclined to vote than their rural counterparts and the lack of interest seem to be spreading to smaller towns. If figures are anything to go by the apathy towards voting is no longer restricted to just the metros. Even second rung cities across states have started exhibiting low turnout figure.

An analysis of data from the first two phases of the ongoing elections shows very clearly that in state after state the urban areas are likely to end with a lower percentage of polling compared to rural areas.

Consider Andhra Pradesh where 24 out of the 42 seats recorded a turnout of more than 70% and 40 out of 42 more than 60%. In fact 9 out of the 10 constituencies which recorded the highest turnouts all over India are from the state. The two seats with the lowest turnout are the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, with 55% and 52%, a massive difference when compared to other seats. In the last election the turnout in Hyderabad was 69%, which shows the extent of the drop this time around.

In Maharashtra the seats of Thane and Nashik both recorded a turnout in the 40s.



While the turnout in Thane is actually an improvement from the 33% last time around, in Nashik it is another big fall of 14 percentage points. Most of the rural maharashtra seats have a 50% plus turnout this time around.

In Assam the Andhra story has been repeated as while most seats in the state have crossed the 70% mark its Gauhati, the capital, where the voting percentage is just 61% due to which it finds itself near the bottom of the charts. In Bihar, the state capital Patna recorded a turnout of 50%. Compare this to the other figures where a large chunk of seats have a turnout of over 60% including Nalanda and Gaya and around two thirds crossed the 55%

mark. Patna just managed to avoid the bottom spot as Bagaha ended up with a 47.9% turnout.

But the biggest support for this trend comes from Gujarat. Out of the 8 seats at the bottom of the turnout league, all of which recorded a turnout of less than 40%, 7 are urban seats and this includes all the major cities like Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Baroda, Surat, Jamnagar, Bhavnagar and Rajkot.

Chhattisgarh was one state where this kind of urban-rural divide was not visible as Raipur ended up in the middle of the turnout figures with several seats like Bastar and Bilaspur coming lower down the ranks. In case of Jharkhand the low urban vote trend was repeated as Ranchi recorded a turnout around 50%, which puts it nearly at the bottom of the charts.

In Karnataka no prizes for guessing the two seats at the bottom of the polling figure chart- Bangalore South and Bangalore North where the turnout was 49% and 54% respectively while there are a whole host of seats where the turnout has crossed the 70% mark. During the next two phases of polling it will be interesting to watch whether the low urban phenomenon spreads to the states of UP, Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

# Election Commission may challenge Patna High Court order

By Our Legal Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MAY 1.** The Election Commission is likely to move the Supreme Court, challenging the order of the Patna High Court that those behind bars cannot contest the elections. The High Court had said it expected the Commission to consider steps, including countermanding of the elections, where undertrials are contesting.

Though a formal decision is yet to be taken, sources said that in the Commission's perception such an order cannot be implemented.

It is pointed out that though the petition before the High Court had cited six jailbirds as respondents, there could be many more undertrials who might have filed their nominations and are in the fray.

If the Commission has to implement the order, it cannot restrict it to the six persons. It must collect from the Returning Officers details of all the contesting candidates from Bihar and find out whether any of them is an undertrial.

Also, when similarly placed candidates are found contesting from other parts of the country, to restrict the order to Bihar will not be feasible.

Countermanding the elections in select constituencies when the candidates are not otherwise disqualified will open the door to a spate of

litigation from the affected candidates and political parties.

The sources said that from 1952, in a number of court decisions, it had been clearly held that once the election process was on the courts should not entertain any petition relating to elections and the only remedy was for the parties to file election petitions.

The Patna High Court's order is a departure from these decisions. The Commission will also have to bear in mind the likelihood of cases foisted on political leaders being used as a tool to prevent their entry into Parliament or the State Legislature.

The sources cited two other orders passed by the Patna High Court on March 10 and April 1, directing the Chief Election Commissioner to file an affidavit separately though a Deputy Election Commissioner had filed an affidavit on behalf of the Commission in response to the notice issued on a petition.

The Commission obtained an interim stay against this order during 'mention' time on April 29, when a Bench, comprising Justice N. Santosh Hegde and Justice B.P. Singh, stayed the impugned order. Similarly, yesterday's order would have to be challenged in the Supreme Court, the sources said.

## A legally untenable order

By J. Venkatesan

**NEW DELHI, MAY 1.** The Patna High Court order on Friday, barring undertrials and absconders from contesting elections, is untenable and against the provisions of the Representation of the People Act (RPA).

The Act does not disqualify an undertrial from contesting elections; it only bars a person in jail from voting.

To contest the polls, the only requirement is that the nomination papers have to be filed, which can be done even from jail. Several High Courts have permitted those in jails to file their nominations under police escort.

Under the Constitution, a 'disqualified' person cannot be a representative of the people. Such a person cannot occupy any seat in either House of Parliament or in the State Legislatures. Section 8 (1) and (2) of the RPA deals with disqualification on conviction for certain offences. Obviously, this provision deals only with convicted prisoners.

Nowhere in the RPA or in any statute is there a bar on undertrials contesting elections. Undertrials are persons

who are yet to face trial. There is a presumption of innocence in their favour and it ends when the trial court convicts and sentences them.

Once a person is convicted the conviction operates; only the execution of the sentence can be stayed by the appellate court and the accused released on bail.

The right to contest an election, though not a fundamen-

### NEWS ANALYSIS

tal or a common law right, is a statutory right. When the statute has not imposed any disqualification on undertrials from contesting, can this right be curtailed by the courts?

Several senior leaders, who are now part of the National Democratic Alliance, had contested and won elections from jail after Emergency. George Fernandes, arrested for involvement in the Baroda Dynamite case, filed his nominations papers and had a landslide victory.

The Supreme Court, while dealing with criminalisation of politics, has suggested enacting legislation prohibiting lawbreakers from becoming lawmakers. Till such a law is put in

place, no ban can be imposed on undertrials contesting polls.

Further, the Election Commission, vested with powers to hold elections under Article 329 of the Constitution, cannot countermand the polls at this stage in the absence of a specific statutory provision empowering it to do so.

Section 58 A of the RPA deals with countermanding of polls on the basis of a report from the Returning Officer for such action in the wake of booth capturing. There is no scope in this provision for countermanding elections just because undertrials are in the fray.

The Supreme Court has held in several cases that once the election process starts, no court can entertain any petition relating to the conduct of the polls even if there is any irregularity or corrupt practice. The only remedy is filing an election petition after the polls are over.

While so, the intervention of the Patna High Court when elections are halfway through is untenable and liable to be struck down by the Supreme Court.

2 MAY 2004

# Atal tells voters to dump surveys

*Exit poll*  
*I believe (B)*  
*ETA*  
TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Lucknow, April 27: Atal Bihari Vajpayee appeared to gird up for future uncertainties today when he urged his constituency of Lucknow to vote disregarding exit poll results.

"You have to make up your mind. Don't be distracted by the predictions. Development agenda always runs a government and if I have done anything, I will win," he told a *mohalla* gathering at Bachchi Talab, commonly called BT, on the city's outskirts.

The cloud of uncertainty peeped through when he said: "I am a fighter. I am born to face

5,000 later at Kapurthala area in the city — were stingy with applause.

The worry is not victory but a low turnout, senior leaders said here, as Lucknow has had a low voting percentage in the past. Add the gruelling summer and the killer sari stampede, the apathy appears to have been compounded.

Vajpayee, however, kept the focus on his government's performance and its development agenda. "In an era of coalition government, poll prediction is not an easy task. I believe good work will be followed by good results in polls."

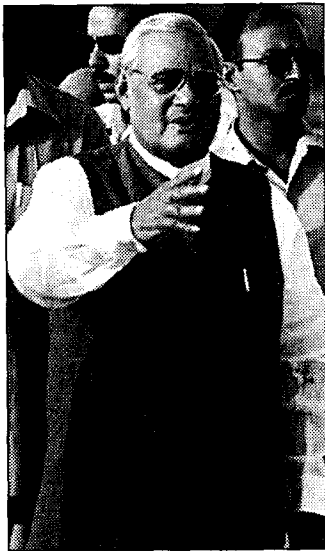
"We have successfully worked for the last six years," he said, referring to the work he had put in to cobble a disparate alliance and run it.

He listed the Centre's achievements in foreign relations and infrastructure development. "A relative peace has settled on the border and I can assure you the peace process will consolidate."

He talked of his government's ambitious plan to link rivers without which he said the country would be unable to overcome an impending water crisis. India's changing image among the international community, high foreign exchange reserve and increasing exports also found mention.

Vajpayee's poll managers, however, were concerned about voter apathy. They have now advised him to address small gatherings in residential colonies instead of large rallies. Vajpayee's first effort was to make personal calls on voters' cellphones. On May 1, he would send them personally signed letters urging them to vote, said Prabhat Jha, the Prime Minister's local media coordinator.

Vajpayee would spend tomorrow morning with party workers before flying across the rest of Uttar Pradesh for some hectic campaigning. He would also meet senior leaders Pramod Mahajan and Sushma Swaraj who are camping here to monitor his campaign.



Vajpayee in Lucknow. (PTI)

troubles. If I cannot change the aberrations in society, if I cannot change what I am destined to, what is the meaning of remaining alive."

Vajpayee waxed nostalgic about his association with the city, wanting to be remembered by it and mentioning an ambitious project now underway for its development. Apologising for not visiting Lucknow enough, he said: "But after retirement, I will like to settle down in a place like this."

The crowd response, however, was lukewarm. About 10,000 people gathered at BT — and the

# Exit signals shake BJP, Sensex

S - Bhaskar (A) J. Bhaskar

**Rs 52,000 cr wiped out in biggest fall since 9/11**

Anand Adhikari  
Mumbai, April 27

TAKING A cue from the rash of exit polls that have predicted a hung Parliament, Dalal Street on Tuesday witnessed its biggest ever fall of 213.30 points since the 9/11 terror attacks.

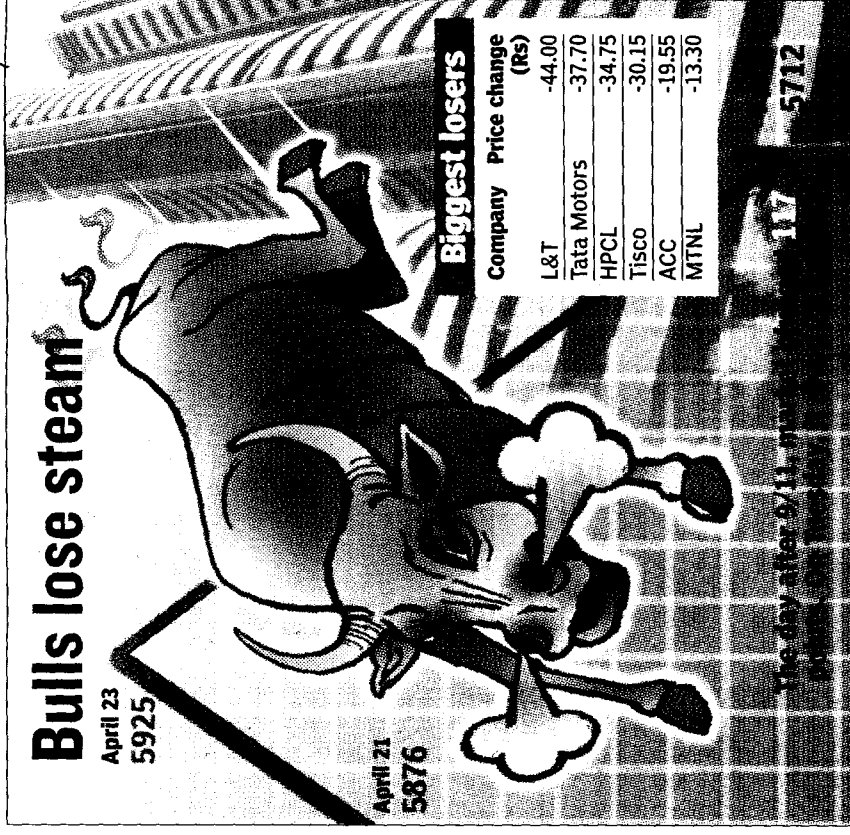
The possibility of a divided House has sparked fears of a slowdown in economic reforms. "The more the NDA loses in terms of its tally the more the index will lose," said U.R. Bhat, director at J.P. Morgan India.

Just as during the Tehelka disclosures and the twin blasts in Mumbai, the market barometer reacted negatively to the exit poll results. In the end, the BSE's benchmark 30-share price index plummeted by 3.60 per cent to close at 5,712.28 points after touching a low of 5,704.28 points.

The crash wiped out more than Rs 52,000 crore in shareholder wealth. The NSE's broad-based Nifty plunged by 3.97 per cent to 1,817.25 points. The mood took a heavy toll of the rupee as traders scrambled to cover their positions. The rupee tumbled by 19 paise to close at Rs 44.2150/2250 per dollar from last Friday's finish of Rs 44.03/04.

"The positives like good corporate performance, normal monsoon, higher GDP, etc, could be overshadowed by the uncertain political scenario," said N. Sethuram, CIO of SBI Mutual Fund. The optimists, however, said the NDA's strong holds, especially MP and Rajasthan, were yet to go to the polls. "There may be surprises in the next two rounds," an analyst said.

The biggest losers were public sector stocks followed by banking stocks led by Dena Bank, Andhra Bank and Union Bank of India.



**STREET WISE:** A man walks past graffiti lampooning Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Kolkata on Tuesday.

## SOS to Sangh Parivar for cadre support

Hemendra Singh Bartwal  
New Delhi, April 27

ALARMED BY exit poll predictions that the NDA may fall short of majority in the Lok Sabha, the BJP has fallen back on the RSS to try and boost its campaign for the remaining two phases of the election. Party workers will now work closely with Sangh Parivar cadres while senior leaders will fan out in all the states where polling is to be held to step up the campaign.

The party leadership has sent an SOS to the RSS to get its cadres to intensify their door-to-door campaign, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, where BJP general secretary and Sangh coordinator Sanjay Joshi has been stationed. Pramod Ma-

hajan and Sushma Swaraj are already camping in the state. Other leaders have been directed to campaign in the 48 Uttar Pradesh constituencies that will go to the polls on May 5. The focus will be on western UP, which has a high concentration of Muslims.

These decisions came at a strategy review meeting at BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu's home on Tuesday. Naidu, Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha and BJP general secretaries Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Sanjay Joshi discussed the feedback from the state units and RSS cadres.

Naidu put up a brave face today, rubbing the predictions. "According to our assessment, the NDA will get a clear

majority. The alliance's tally will go beyond a triple century; the BJP will cross the double-century mark and the Congress will be out without scoring a century," he said after the meeting. This is a shift from Naidu's earlier claims that the BJP would bag 300 seats on its own and the NDA would get two-thirds majority.

The BJP says that according to its own survey, the NDA will bag 186 of the 276 constituencies that went to the polls in the first two phases. The BJP hopes to win 133 of these. It expects eight of the 13 seats in Karnataka where polls were held on Monday, with another two going to the allies. In Bihar, it gives the NDA 16 of the 17 phase II seats.

But the survey, said to have been conducted by the BJP's research and docu-

mentation section, indicates that the party is under pressure in UP, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The survey gives the BJP 12 out of the 32 phase II seats in UP. In Andhra, it expects four of 21 seats, with eight going to ally TDP. In Maharashtra, the survey gives the BJP six of the 24 seats and the Shiv Sena only three.

### Cong upbeat

The Congress was understandably buoyant and claimed it would, along with its allies and the Left parties, win "a clear majority". Spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy ruled out accepting support from any NDA ally but appeared to keep the options open on a tie-up with the Samajwadi Party or the Bahujan Samaj Party. ■ Full coverage on Pages 13&14



# Exit polls show gains for Congress in A.P., NDA ahead in Karnataka

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 26. The State-wise break-up of the exit poll results shows the Congress making gains in Andhra Pradesh and gives a conflicting picture in Maharashtra. Karnataka is the only major State to have good tidings for the BJP today.

NDTV gave the Congress 18 of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh that went to the polls today and the TDP three. Aaj Tak projects a five-fold increase for the Congress overall — from five to 29. The TDP-BJP was down by a third to 12 seats. Sahara shows the BJP-TDP losing 12 seats while the Congress-TRS gains by an equal number. Zee shows the Congress alone bagging 12 seats of the 21 where elections were held today. The TDP was down to eight from 16. Star's final tally puts the Congress alliance at 24 and the TDP-BJP at 17, down by more than half.

In Maharashtra, NDTV gives the BJP 25

seats, a loss of three, and the Congress 22. The Aaj Tak poll showed the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party alliance getting 26 of the 48 seats. The NDA was down to 20 from 28 in 1999. The Star poll gives the Congress-NCP alliance 27 seats and the NDA 19. Sahara shows 29 to the Congress-NCP and 18 to the BJP. Zee gives the NDA an edge with 19 seats — three more than the Congress-NCP. According to Zee, the Congress and its new-found ally, NCP, do not make any gains here, the NDA loses nine seats, and others gain as many with a final score of 13.

The Aaj Tak poll shows no gains for the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, putting three of the 32 seats that went to the polls today in its kitty. The BJP is down to 11 from 13. The Samajwadi Party gains three seats and the Bahujan Samaj Party holds on to its four. But, the Sahara poll shows the Congress doubling its presence to six, the BJP coming down by one seat to 12 and the SP and

BSP picking up eight and six respectively in the second phase. Star also gives the Congress and the NDA six and 12 seats with others getting 14 of the 32. Zee shows the SP down to six instead of the 10 it won in 1999 and the BJP down from 13 to 11. The Congress and the BSP are the major gainers with the former getting six. The BSP is set to make a gain of five by bagging eight seats. The NDTV poll gives the Congress five, the BJP eight, the SP 10 and the BSP nine.

In Karnataka, Aaj Tak shows the NDA gaining five seats from 10 in 1999. Sahara gives it a gain of eight seats with a tally of 18. Star doubles its score to 20. Zee gives it a gain of only one in the final haul. The Congress, say Zee, is the main loser — down six. The Janata Dal (Secular) has gained seven seats and the BJP only one. The NDTV poll gives the BJP nine of the 13 seats where polling was held today and three to the Congress.

THE HINDU

27 APR 2004

## 'Opposition has no captain'

**BHAGALPUR (BIHAR), APRIL 25.** The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said the Congress-led Opposition had "taken field" (general election) without a captain. "When somebody asks me who is the captain of Indian cricket team, I say Sourav Ganguly. And who is the captain of NDA, I say Atal Bihari Vajpayee. But, the Congress-led Opposition has taken the field without a leader. And everyday a new name crops up as a probable who will lead the team after the match,"

Mr. Advani said addressing an election rally here to seek support for the party nominee, Sushil Kumar Modi. On the state of affairs in the Opposition camp, the Deputy Prime Minister said that "after the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) chief, Ram Vilas Paswan, a new name of the RJD supreme, Laloo Prasad Yadav, is doing the rounds as the leader of the team after completion of the match [announcement of



results of the Lok Sabha polls]."

He said it was to be seen how many more from the Congress-led secular alliance would now stand in the queue for Prime Ministership.

Asserting that the

country's image had improved tremendously in the world and India was making rapid strides in the field of economy under Mr. Vajpayee's leadership he said that was the reason for people to proclaim that "India is shinning." — PTI

## 'BJP wooing Muslims in desperation'

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 25.** "We wish him [the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee] well but the destiny of India cannot be entrusted to his leadership for another five years," the Congress spokesperson, Anand Sharma, said here today.

He also joined issue with the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, for his remarks about the Congress leadership, saying that on the contrary, the BJP's captain was "tired."

The party objected to the BJP's attempt to "woo" Muslims by making some announcements in Bihar during its campaign last week and said it sprung out of a "sheer desperation ... with utter disregard to norms." For instance, the announcement about the Government's intention to open more Madrasahs (Muslim seminaries) and appoint two-crore Urdu teachers reflected the intent. Mr. Vajpayee's statement on appointment of Urdu teachers also appeared to be erroneous since the country had a pool of six million teachers right from primary education to specialised higher education. Besides, the country did not have more the 12-crore Urdu-speaking people. "We do not think the Prime Minister is clear," Mr. Sharma said.

In any case, if Mr. Vajpayee and the BJP leadership were so concerned about the minorities, the Centre should have dismissed the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, against whose Government even the Supreme Court had made strong observations, Mr. Sharma said and cited the judgments in the Best Bakery and Bilkis Yakub cases.

The Congress also condemned the Himayat Committee, which was campaigning for the Prime Minister in Lucknow, for using the portrait of the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, on the bus it was travelling in. "It is reflective of the insensitivity ... insult to [the] patriotism of Indian Muslims. What message is the BJP

## We will win more seats in U.P.: PM

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 25.** The Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today said that the Bharatiya Janata Party would win more seats in Uttar Pradesh than in the last elections, though the picture was not very clear. In Bihar also, he expected a similar performance.

Asked whether his recent statement that the Samajwadi Party and the BJP had similar thinking indicated that the two could come together in a post-poll scenario, Mr. Vajpayee said, "They (the SP) would start howling. There are many possibilities. It is there now. It is difficult to detail them."

In an interview with PTI Editors at his residence here, he said that when he talked about a similarity in thinking between the two parties it was in respect

to the BJP in this election, Mr. Vajpayee said: "The community is still thinking. It has not decided. But the situation is also not that Muslims are against us and will not shake hands with us. This attitude is changing."

On his reported statement that he was worried about running a coalition, the Prime Minister said what he had meant was a compact coalition, which should not be unwieldy with single-member parties. "The number of parties in the coalition should be less."

About the personal attacks against him in the campaign, he said the Congress had raked up his alleged betrayal in the 1942 movement "knowing fully well that the allegation is baseless." Before every election, he said, the Congress raised

when he remarked that he was hurt more by criticism "from within," Mr. Vajpayee said it was the VHP, which had made some comments against him during the last two days.

### 'Foreign origin issue cannot be wished away'

UNI reports:

The Prime Minister said the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi's 'foreign origin' was a major issue that could not be wished away and there was nothing wrong if the BJP or its allies highlighted it in the elections.

During an interview at his residence last night, he was asked if the BJP was overdoing the issue because of fear that the Congress could stage a

# Exit Clause

## Election Commission can't ban post-vote polls

Having been bitten once, the Election Commission seems to have developed a healthy reluctance to overstep its boundaries. Hence, when the Congress once again sought a ban on publication and telecast of exit polls till all phases of voting are over, the EC responded that this was a matter best left to the legislature. We're particularly gratified because the EC's statement virtually echoes a point made by us in these columns ('Take It EC', April 17): Directives to the press can be issued only through legislation, and the EC is a regulatory body, not a legislative one. Exit polls have been criticised on many counts: they can be erroneous, misleading, and — some would argue — have the potential to sway voters. But the demand that the EC ban them is fundamentally misplaced, because it simply doesn't have the power to do so. Parties which make such demands are only abrogating their own responsibility to debate — and if need be, legislate — on such issues. In the process, they also reveal their ignorance of a landmark judgment delivered by the Supreme Court on September 14, 1999. The case involved EC guidelines banning exit polls during elections. Details of the five-judge bench's verdict are available on our website (Judgment day for the EC, [www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com](http://www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com)). But one observation by the bench is particularly telling: "The overall consensus among political parties to ban exit and opinion polls does not empower the EC to make guidelines binding people at large. You do not have any powers to issue such guidelines... the problem is your own creation. You should have seen what your powers are before issuing such guidelines".

The EC, at least, appears to have learnt its lesson from that episode, even if political parties haven't. Even so, it still slips up every now and then and exceeds its brief. It was one such action which prompted us to write the aforementioned editorial. To refresh your memory, the EC recently sent out a notice that newspapers would be held accountable for the political advertisements that appeared in them, and such ads would be treated on par with pamphlets and posters. We had pointed out that Article 19 (1)a of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, and the SC has ruled that commercial speech too is part of free speech. The EC is, therefore, committing a constitutional impropriety through its latest directive. Besides, the commission does not have the jurisdiction to issue instructions to newspapers, which are neither applicants nor supplicants in the theatre of democracy. The recent EC statement about exit polls gives us hope that it will display a similar willingness to accept its limitations, and withdraw the directive about political ads.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 APR 2004

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# Illusory Victory

Exit polls prejudge final outcome of elections

A curious thing happened during the first phase of polling: With four more rounds yet to come, much of the media had handed over victory to the BJP-led NDA coalition. Such a premature awarding of laurels raises a number of questions on the philosophy and methodology of exit polls. In the course of an earlier debate, exit polls were vindicated by virtue of the fact they were part of the constitutional right to the freedom of expression. It was argued that if elections were about informed choice, then, all information about them should be available in the public domain in order that the discerning individual is able to make a more educated choice. However, a case could equally be made that publicising the results of such polls before the conclusion of all phases of elections could prejudice and prejudice the eventual outcome: Indeed, exit polls in this sense would be a curtailment of the freedom of expression, especially given that the individual's political choice would be unduly influenced by the media hyperbole inevitably attending such poll findings. This perhaps explains the distinction made worldwide between opinion polls, which precede the conduct of elections and are therefore seen to be less definitive, and exit polls, which are deemed directly to reflect the actual trends in voting. Moreover, it could also be asked whether exit polls compromise the sanctity of the secret ballot.

In a heterogeneous polity such as India, a premature reading of exit poll results could create a very skewed impression of the eventual outcome. For example, voting trends in one part of an individual state need not be replicated in other parts of the state. Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, just to take two examples, have widely differing regions, representing totally varying aspirations, within them. By glossing over such significant variations, exit polls seek to impose a homogeneity on the country's variegated political landscape and as such compromise the primacy of individual choice which is the basis of any democratic exercise. Perhaps it is for all these reasons that exit polls have been notoriously wide off the mark in the past, the most recent example being the assembly elections of 2003. After all, exit polls are not the real thing, but only a very sketchy model of the reality on the ground. In that sense they are only an illusion of the actual political patterns that obtain in different parts of the country. Of course, advocates of Maya would suggest that it is not only exit polls which are illusory but the process of elections itself — not to mention the ephemeral power that politicians seek and which is the biggest mirage of all.

# Which side are you on? Time to pick

## Gujarat back in the riot dock

OUR BUREAU

April 19: A fresh crisis of credibility confronted the Gujarat government on the eve of the general elections with the CBI charging policemen as senior as a deputy superintendent, two doctors and several BJP and VHP activists in a grisly riot case.

As many as 20 people have been charged in the infamous Bilkis case within a week of the Supreme Court transferring the Best Bakery case out of Gujarat in a stinging indictment of the state government.

Bilkis Yakub Rasool, 24 and pregnant, was gangraped and 14 of her relatives, including her three-and-a-half-year-old daughter, were burnt to death by a mob in the post-Godhra riots of 2002. Among the attackers were people in the neighbourhood she had known since she was a child.

The Supreme Court had directed the CBI to investigate the case afresh after Gujarat police closed it citing lack of evidence.

The case had come to symbolise the tragedy in Gujarat because it not only underscored how long-lasting social ties were torn apart but also brought under the law's scanner the alleged complicity of the government machinery.

Gujarat police had closed the case in such haste that the investigators could not determine even the exact number of casualties. A turning point came when the CBI decided to dig up a grave.

Several packets of salt were found buried with the bodies. In the chargesheet, the CBI said it has traced a witness who had been told by local police to get 60 kg of salt to ensure early decomposition of the bodies.

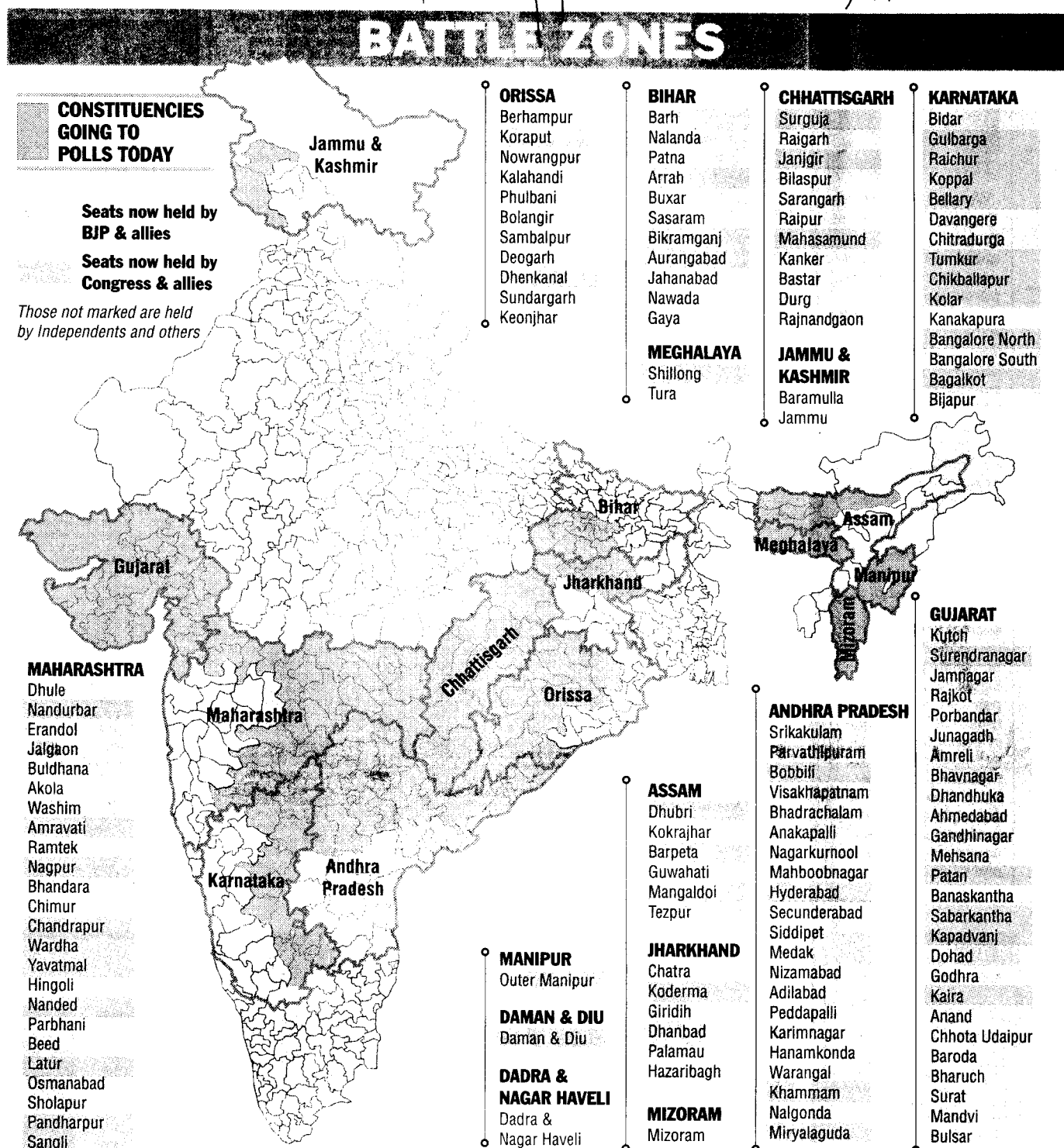
Among those charged are the then Dahod deputy superintendent of police R.S. Bhagora, circle inspector R.M. Balu, sub-inspector B.R. Patel, constable S.K. Gotri, and doctors Arun Kumar Ramkrishna Prasad and wife Sangeeta. The couple had performed the post-mortems and has been accused of suppressing facts.

Sub-inspector I.A. Syed and head constable Narpatsinh Patel, previously arrested for tampering with evidence, were also charged. The CBI will require the state's permission to take them into custody.

The CBI took over the case in December 2003, registered a case in January and followed up with 12 arrests, including those of Dahod district VHP president Shailesh Bhatt (who has been identified by Bilkis as the murderer of her daughter) and Ramesh Chandana, the personal secretary to former food and civil supplies deputy minister Jsvantsinh Bhabhor, a BJP MLA.

The arrested include VHP-BJP workers Jaswant Nai, Govind Nai, Naresh Maurya, Pradeep Maurya, Lal Vakil, Baku Bhai, Kesar Bhai, Raju Soni, Nitesh Bhatt and Lala Bhai — all of whom have been chargesheeted.

The BJP and the state government refused to comment amid a perception that if the indictments pave the way for a polarisation as witnessed during the last Assembly polls, the party stands to gain.



TELEGRAPH

20 APR 2004

The battle for Delhi kicks off today with elections in 140 seats. Eighty-eight of these are now held by BJP and allies and 14 by the Congress-led group. The Telegraph brings you a state-by-state report.

### Andhra Pradesh

Twenty-one of 42 seats vote on Day One. Most of these are in the Telengana region, where the Congress-TRS alliance is expected to lift its tally from 4 to 11.

The Telugu Desam-BJP combine could see its numbers fall from 17 to 10. In the Assembly poll, the Congress-TRS has the edge. The contest to watch will be Karimnagar, where TRS boss K. Chandrasekhara Rao takes on the BJP's Ch. Vidyasagar Rao.

### Karnataka

Fifteen of 28 seats give their verdict. The BJP looks sound in eight and the Congress in six. In the last House, the Congress held nine and the NDA five. S.M. Krishna's team has the edge in the Assembly poll.

The battle to watch is Bangalore North, where C.K. Jaffer Sharief of the Congress is fighting C.M. Ibrahim of the Janata Dal (Secular).

### Bihar

A fourth of Bihar will vote, with 11 of the 40 seats — most in the Naxalite-affected districts — up for grabs. The contest to watch is Barh, where Nitish Kumar faces a stiff challenge from the RJD's Vijay Krishna.

The NDA should pick up four and the RJD-Congress two. The

rest five are too close to call. In the last House, the NDA had eight and the RJD-Congress three of the 11.

### Jharkhand

As in Bihar, the terror belt goes to polls here. Six of the 14 seats will vote under the shadow of the Naxalite boycott call.

The fate of two Union ministers — Yashwant Sinha and Nagmani — will be decided but the contest to watch is Koderma,

## ROUND ONE

- **No. of seats:** 140
  - **Coverage:** 13 states & 2 UTs
  - **Sensitive booths:** 66,317
  - **Hypersensitive:** 22,585
  - **High alert:** Bihar, Jharkhand\*
  - **Low alert:** No sensitive booth in Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- \*(80% booths on sensitive and hypersensitive list)*

where former chief minister Babulal Marandi is taking on Congress' sitting MP Tilakdhari Singh. The BJP, which held five seats, is ahead in four. The remaining two are too close to call.

### Chhattisgarh

The Congress, still licking the wounds of December's crushing Assembly defeat, had three seats in the last Lok Sabha and should win at least two of the 11.

The fight really is for three seats — Janjgir, where the Prime Minister's niece is the BJP candidate, Mahasamund and Sarangarh. Everywhere else, the BJP

looks sound. All eyes are on Mahasamund, where Ajit Jogi takes on the BJP's V.C. Shukla.

### Maharashtra

Vidarbha and Marathwada vote. The Congress-led alliance is expected to win 15 of the 24 seats. In 1999, the NDA had won 13. The contest to watch is Solapur, where Ujwala Shinde is trying to win back the seat the Congress lost after her husband Sushil Kumar Shinde vacated it to become chief minister.

### Gujarat

The BJP claims it will win all 26 seats, but the Congress should retain the five it held in the last House and give a tough fight in another five.

### Jammu and Kashmir

The shadow of the gun reappears. The contest for both seats — Baramulla and Jammu — is close.

### Northeast

Ten seats in Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram go to the polls. The Congress should maintain its tally of six and the BJP may win a maximum of two. Guwahati is the contest to watch. BJP's Bhupen Hazarika is locked in a close fight with AGP's Bhriгу Phukan.

### Orissa

The Naveen Patnaik-led BJD-BJP alliance is way ahead in the 11 seats that vote first. The NDA is expected to bag nine, the same as last time. It also has the edge in the Assembly poll.



HPD-12  
19/19

# Making sense of the opinion polls

There is a near consensus among the surveys on the outcome of the elections in 12 of the 18 big States, says Yogendra Yadav

It's been raining polls in the last few days. Between Thursday and Saturday last week, as many as five new nationwide forecasts have been released by the media. It is hard even for professionals to keep track of this flood of polls and forecasts. It is understandable if an ordinary citizen feels dazed and somewhat confused. Let us therefore try to take stock of all the polls and try to look at the big picture along with the relevant details.

The big story that emerges from the latest round of polls is that the NDA juggernaut is now beginning to slow down. If one takes a simple average of all the five latest polls (NDTV-Indian Express, India Today-Bhaskar, The Week, Outlook and Star News) the NDA's tally works out to 271 seats, just below the majority mark in the Lok Sabha. That would bring no comfort to the NDA that was expected to win between 330 and 340 seats in the first India Today forecast in February. Since then, fresh polls have tended to bring NDA tally down, even if marginally. It is a difficult business to espy a trend across polls taken by different agencies with different sample sizes and designs. But now there is more robust evidence to suggest a decline in the NDA's fortunes. The update poll conducted by NDTV-Indian Express in the first phase constituencies shows a clear swing of more than one percentage point cutting across nine States. In terms of seats the NDA had lost 14 seats out of the 140 that are to go to polls in the first phase. If the trend is projected on to the remaining constituencies of these nine States, the loss could be about 25 seats. Something is clearly happening here.

Politically, the relevant question is, are we looking at a trend that is likely to continue further or has the situation stabilised? If it is a systematic trend, this is very bad news for the NDA. If its tally were to keep dropping in the next three weeks, even if marginally, it could fall below 250. There is another way of reading the situation. What we are witnessing is a one-time downward adjustment that happens when an abstract choice made before the candidates are announced is translated into a concrete choice in a real life political contest. On this reading, the NDA will not continue to lose in the next few weeks but will stabilise around the current projections. As yet we do not have sufficient evidence to say which of these readings is true. It is crucial to keep a close watch on the opinion trends in the next weeks.

As yet the big picture of the national verdict centres round the two possibilities mentioned earlier in this column. The first possibility is that the NDA secures a clear majority on its own. It looked the most likely outcome a few weeks ago and remains a possible outcome even now. The second possibility, that of the NDA falling short of a majority but still forming the Government by securing support from non-partners, now appears to be more likely than it did a few weeks ago. The third possibility, that of the non-NDA parties coming together to form the Government,

was an outside possibility right from the beginning but receded into the background once the Congress-BSP alliance failed to happen. It still remains an outside possibility, outside the range of the most likely, after the latest round of polls. The Congress and its allies are still expected to fall short of the NDA tally by nearly 100 seats. If about 50 seats of the Left are added to this tally, the combined opposition would still need to garner additional 70 MPs. That would be a tall order. The worst, and real scenario, for the NDA would be that it can form the Government, but not without securing the support of a major party like the SP, which can then extract a political price.

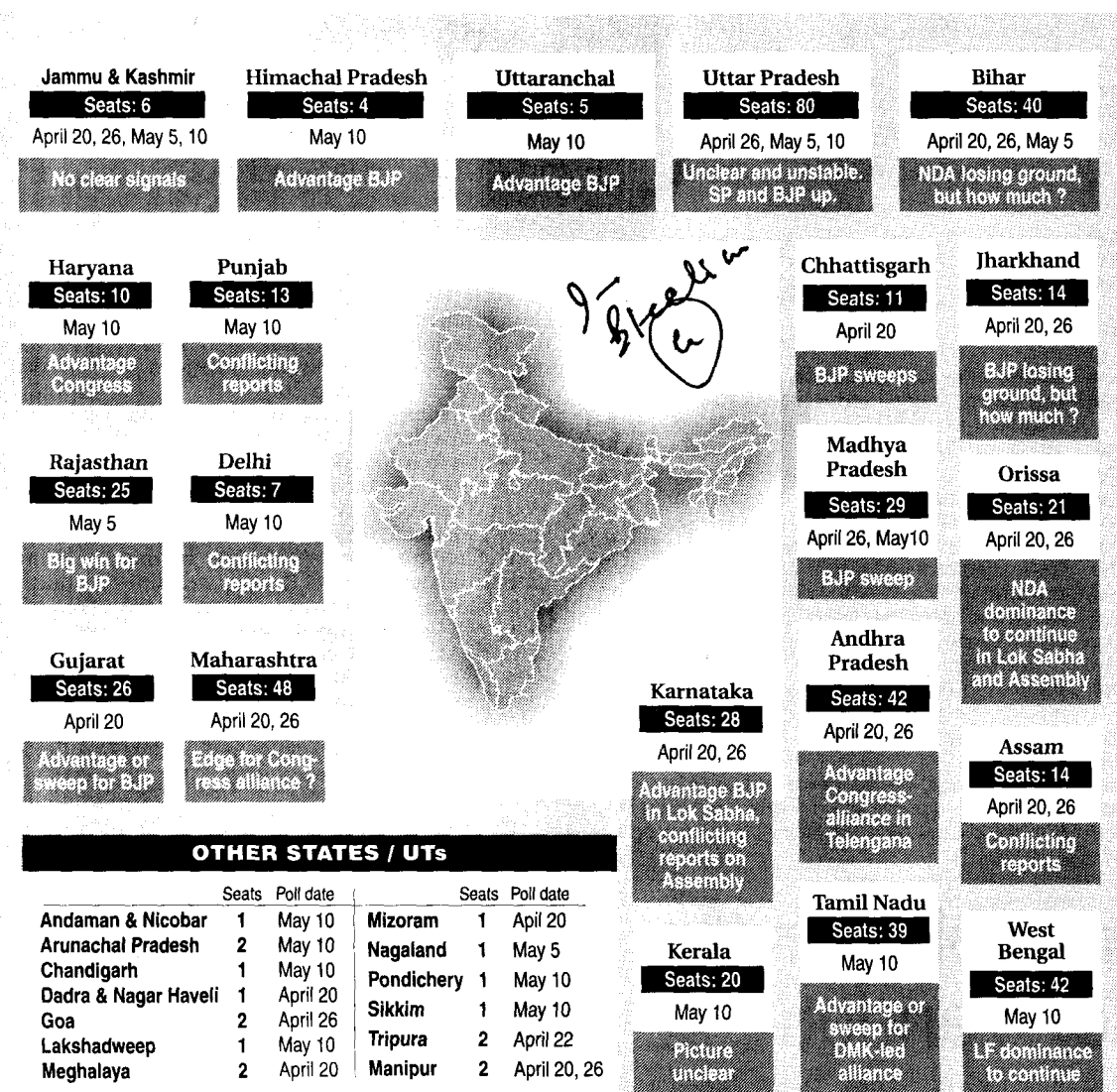
Which of the possibilities turns into reality would depend on how the contest evolves at the State level. A new and welcome feature of the opinion polling in this election is that some of the major forecasts have given a clear State-by-State break-up of seats for the big States. Earlier the pre-election surveys tended to employ a small sample (typically about 15,000 to 20,000) that did not allow them to give any break-up below the four broad zones in the country. In an era where politics is lived and articulated at the State level, this was quite unsatisfactory for political analysis. This time, the NDTV-Indian Express led the move to give State-wise break-ups and the second round of India Today-Bhaskar poll and the Star News poll followed it up, though the latter has done it on the basis of a small sample of 12,000. The Outlook poll gives the break-up for the three State assembly elections. If one puts all these trends together, one gets a fairly clear picture for most of the major States. There is a near consensus among the various polls in as many as 12 out of the 18 big states (with 4 seats or more). Let us first look at these.

**Rajasthan, M.P., Chhattisgarh:** All the polls point to a BJP sweep in these three States where the BJP won four months ago in the Assembly elections. The victory in the Assembly elections did not indicate a sweep, at least in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. The BJP had done very well here in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections too, but it did not sweep these States. This time the indications are that the BJP has gained votes since the Assembly elections in all these States and may pick up most of the few seats that it does not already hold. The Congress may have to struggle to pick up a seat in Chhattisgarh, the State where the BJP has recently benefited from incorporating an NCP faction. In M.P., the Congress bastions like Chhindwara do not appear safe, though polling is still two to three weeks away. The Congress may do marginally better in Rajasthan.

**Gujarat:** One could club it with the three States above that are showing signs of BJP sweep. No forecast has given the BJP less than 20 seats out of 26 in the State. But the NDTV-Indian Express poll found 59 per cent respondents agreeing with the suggestion that those not voting for Modi's party may be scared to say so. If the polls are not distorted by the fear factor, the BJP could sweep the State and add to its already high tally.

**Haryana:** Although polling is three weeks away and the effect of the candidates is yet to be measured, it is clear that neither the BJP nor its estranged ally, the ruling INLD led by Chautala, can look forward to the kind of windfall they had last time when they won all the seats. There is a distinct anger against the incumbent party and the Congress is set to benefit from the three or four cornered contests. The estimates of the Congress seats vary between 5 to 7, out of the 10 seats.

**Karnataka:** All the polls agree that the BJP has an upper hand in the Lok Sabha elections and can well surpass



Graphic by Varghese Kallada

the previous best of 18 that it secured in 1998 with the help of its allies. The latest round of surveys indicate that the party may have hit a peak and may drop a little in the final run-up to the polls. The signals for the Assembly elections are conflicting and range from a slight edge to the Congress in a hung Assembly, to forecasts of a clear majority for the Congress to

## BATTLEGROUND

the Assembly elections. **Tamil Nadu:** Every poll points in one direction here: the DMK-led alliance has an advantage over the AIADMK-BJP combine. The only

question is about the number of seats this will translate into. Will the DMK-led alliance win about two-thirds seats, as many polls are forecasting? Or are the pollsters playing it safe here, and we will finally see a tradition-

al Tamil Nadu style complete sweep? **Orissa:** It is clear that the BJD-BJP alliance is not affected by anti-incumbency. The NDTV-Indian Express survey does report a small

question is about the number of seats this will translate into. Will the DMK-led alliance win about two-thirds seats, as many polls are forecasting? Or are the pollsters playing it safe here, and we will finally see a tradition-

## Your guide to all the opinion poll based election forecasts for the 14th general elections

Sponsoring Publication / Channel	Date of publication	Agency	Sample size		Fieldwork period	Seats forecast		
			Seats	Persons		NDA	Congress	Others
India Today	Feb-9	ORG-MARG	98	17,649	Jan 9-17	330-340	105-115	95-105
Outlook	March 15	MDRA	102	12,249	Feb 19-25	280-290	159-169	89-99
NDTV-Indian Express	March 27	AC Nielsen	207	45,578	March 5-18	287-307	143-163	90-100
Zee	April 4	Taleem	65	12,788	March 15-20	265	196	83
Star News	April 4	C Voter	120	12,000	March last week	277	164	102
Rashtriya Sahara	April 10	DRS	500	65,089	March 28-April 5	271	168	104
The Week	April 18	TNS	143	17,513	March 25-April 1	230-265	170-200	95-110
India Today-Bhaskar	April 15	ORG-MARG	199	51,000	March 25-April 7	282	165	96
NDTV-Indian Express	April 15	NC-Nielsen	57 / 140	16,393	April 6-April 13	260-280	165-180	96-105
Star News	April 17	C Voter	120	12,000	April 10-16	272-286	154-170	95-111

Swing away from the ruling combine, but it is still a long way before this swing can cause serious damage. The alliance looks set to retain its majority in the Assembly as well, for there are no signs of any ticket splitting here.

**West Bengal:** There is little doubt that the Left Front is set to continue its dominance in the State and secure about three-fourths of the seats. There are no signs of any significant revival of the Congress. The only question is whether the Trinamool-BJP alliance can retain its impressive haul of 10 seats in the last parliamentary elections. The polls differ on whether it will retain its seats or lose some to the Left Front. Perhaps the confusion is because the fate of the two partners is somewhat different: the BJP may gain while Mamata's outfit may not.

**Uttar Pradesh:** As of now, there is a surprising degree of unanimity among the polls about U.P. All the polls show the SP and the BJP in a joint lead, followed way behind by the BSP and the Congress. But it remains to be seen how this trend translates into seats. Two warnings may be useful here. First, it may be too early to make confident seat forecasts in the triangular or four-cornered contests that U.P. is likely to witness. Second, in recent years, the opinion polls have tended to underestimate the BSP and overestimate the BJP in the State.

**Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh:** Although the Congress is in power in both States, the two polls that give a clear forecast for these (India Today and Star News) suggest that the advantage lies with the BJP. It needs to be remembered that it is difficult to predict smaller States with the kind of small samples that polls normally use.

The second category has some States where all the polls are not quite saying the same thing. The signals coming from the various polls are conflicting or changing or simply unclear. Let us take a look at these States to see if the uncertainties can be telescoped into a range.

**Andhra Pradesh:** The mother of all uncertainties in this election, the State has the pollsters, politicians and the public quite confused by now. There are at least three sources of uncertainty here. One, the trends have changed significantly over the last six months and is changing in the last weeks of elections, a point brought out very well by the Outlook State Assembly poll. Two, in the TRS we are dealing with a new political outfit on the upswing, a psephological nightmare all over the world. Three, there is a possibility that the State might witness a split verdict on regional lines: Telangana and the rest of Andhra Pradesh may vote as if they are two different States. The NDTV-Indian Express poll points in this direction. The cumulative effect of all this is that we have all kinds of forecasts: a near sweep for TDP-BJP or the TDP-BJP just ahead of the Congress alliance or the Congress alliance ahead of the NDA. All one can say is that it is not going to be a cakewalk for the NDA and that there is no indication of a Congress sweep in all the regions of the State. One can also say that there are no signs of a serious difference in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. Exit polls might reduce this confusion. I would wait for May 12, the day Andhra Pradesh counts its vote, a day ahead of the rest of the country.

**Bihar:** Another psephological nightmare in the best of times, the State has seen quite contradictory forecasts being made about it. One set of forecasts suggests that the BJP and the JD (U) will continue their dominance and win anything between 25 and 30 seats out of the 40 in the State, while the latest NDTV-Indian Express forecast puts the RJD

alliance firmly ahead of the NDA. There are difference about the direction of the change as well: Star News finds votes moving towards the NDA in the last few weeks, while the NDTV-Indian Express poll reports the opposite. This time the problem in Bihar is not that of a multi-cornered contest and therefore one can expect some help from the exit polls.

**Jharkhand:** Pollsters agree that this time the going will be tougher for the ruling BJP than it was in the last elections. The difference is on whether the Congress-JMM alliance will inflict minor or major damage on the BJP, and how many seats the BJP will win.

**Maharashtra:** Although the differences among the pollsters here have got more publicity than anywhere else, a close look shows that the differences are not as sharp as in Bihar. Everyone, including the confidential poll released by the NCP, agrees that the Congress-NCP alliance will bring it major gains but that some of this would be lost by the unpopularity of the Shinde Government. The differences between the forecasts are about whether the gains will be completely wiped out by the Government's unpopularity or not. The most generous estimates for the Congress-NCP put it around 30, while the least generous place it around 20.

**Assam:** No one is predicting a repeat of the Congress sweep, but there are very different estimates of how much of a surge has the BJP made in the state. Some forecasts see it gaining only three to four seats, while other forecasts have the BJP overtaking Congress for the first time. The NDTV-Indian Express poll suggests a late surge by the AGP that may damage the BJP. Given the difficulties of carrying out fieldwork in the State, it is risky to rely too much on any forecast.

**Punjab:** Prevailing political wisdom and some polls suggest that the Congress is going to face its Waterloo in this election, while at least one poll suggests otherwise. Elections are still three weeks away and I would wait for the second round of pre-election opinion polls.

**Delhi:** The polls and political estimates have exhausted almost all the combinations of how seven seats can be split between the Congress and the BJP, from 5 seats to the Congress to 6 seats for the BJP. But none of these polls has captured the situation after the candidates were announced. Given the media attention focussed on the national capital, one can expect better polls in the next three weeks.

That leaves 25 Lok Sabha seats where the opinion polls offer next to nothing. These include the 11 seats in the Northeastern hill states (including Sikkim), the 6 Union Territories besides Delhi, two seats in Goa and six seats in Jammu and Kashmir. Although India Today and Star News report polls from Jammu and Kashmir, these are pioneering efforts and it may be premature to depend on these indications from a State where survey fieldwork is quite challenging. In these States one has to go by political commonsense and reporting from the ground to gain a sense of what might happen.

That, incidentally, is not to be discounted in the other States as well. Years of observing elections and opinion polls has convinced me that opinion polls are perhaps the best indicator of the big picture. These are better indicators, at any rate, than gossip in the cocktail circles or press clubs. At the same time, polls cannot guide us in anticipating the precise details of the number of seats or the exact outcome in a specific constituency or a region. It is crucial to keep these warnings in mind while reading meaning into the opinion polls.

# Actress Soundarya, 3 others killed as plane crashes

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By Our Staff Reporter

**BANGALORE, APRIL 17.** Film actress Soundarya and three others were killed when the private four-seat Cessna 180 aircraft in which they were travelling crashed soon after takeoff from the Jakkur airfield on the outskirts of Bangalore today.

Ramesh Kadam, secretary, Hindu Jagrana Vedike, Soundarya's brother, Amarnath, and the pilot, John Philip, are the other victims. The bodies, which were burnt beyond recognition, were taken to the Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital.

The 32-year-old actress was on her way to Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh to campaign for the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Telugu Desam Party. She campaigned in the Varthur Assembly constituency, near here, on Friday.

The aircraft took off at 11.05 a.m. and turned in a westerly direction before crashing on the campus of the Gandhi Krishi Vigyan Kendra of the University of Agricultural Sciences. It had reached only a height of 100 feet before it crashed and burst into flames. B.N. Ganapathi, one of



Soundarya campaigning for the BJP candidate in Malleswaram, Bangalore, on Friday.

the two persons working on the experimental fields of the university, who rushed to the air-

craft to save the occupants, said the plane wobbled before the crash. He suffered burns and

wastaken to hospital.

Manufactured in 1955, the aircraft belonged to Agni Aviation a private company based at Jakkur. It was given the airworthiness certificate in December. Officials of Agni Aviation said the aircraft was owned by an information technology company in Pondicherry before it was sold to it 18 months ago. The aviation company had flown it for 110 hours. The company offers small aircraft and helicopters for chartered flights and adventure sports. It was involved in the cloud-seeding operations, Project Varuna, taken up by the Karnataka Government last year.

The chief executive officer of the company, Arvind Sharma, said the Cessna had been chartered by a person in Hyderabad for the election campaign.

A large crowd gathered at the scene of the crash. Police and firemen struggled to keep them at a safe distance. Soundarya's husband, another of her brothers, and her sister-in-law were among the first to reach the site. The Chief Minister, S.M. Krishna, the Union Minister, Arun Jaitley, the Karnataka Min-

ister for Urban Development, D.K. Shivakumar, and the BJP State unit president, H.N. Ananthkumar, rushed to the spot. The Director-General of Police, T. Madiyal, and the City Police Commissioner, S. Mariswamy, were present.

Mr. Madiyal said: "The Directorate-General of Civil Aviation will conduct the mandatory inquiry and the bodies will be

## 'She waved for help'

**BANGALORE, APRIL 17.** Actress Soundarya, who died in a plane crash today, had waved her arms seeking help but her saree caught fire preventing all efforts for her rescue, an eyewitness said.

"I and my friends saw Soundarya waving her hand for help and by the time we rushed to her rescue, her saree caught fire and we were forced to retreat," the BJP worker, M. Shekar, returning after a campaign at Jakkur where the accident occurred, told UNI.

He said he rushed to the spot on seeing the aircraft crash and was thrown back under its impact.

"We tried to put out the fire by throwing sand but the fire was so intense and our efforts became useless."

There were no fire fighters and locals who rushed to the spot had tried to extinguish the blaze by throwing sand from the barren Gandhi Krishi Vigyan Kendra land.

handed over to the relatives after the inquest." Two local DGCA officials visited the crash site and the Agni Aviation office. They will investigate the cause of the accident.

Mr. Krishna said that "it is very unfortunate event ... we have lost a talented actress who was popular both in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh." Mr. Jaitley said: "It is tragic that all four were young and the actress was actively involved in the election campaign ... while Soundarya was busy addressing election meetings, Amarnath was looking after media relations; Kadam was a popular BJP leader."

Mr. Krishna later ordered an investigation into the crash, according to the Karnataka Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education, B.K. Chandrashekar.

Soundarya was later cremated here.



The debris of the aircraft which crashed near Bangalore on Saturday killing actress Soundarya and three others.



## Outcome hinges on incumbency, Telangana factors

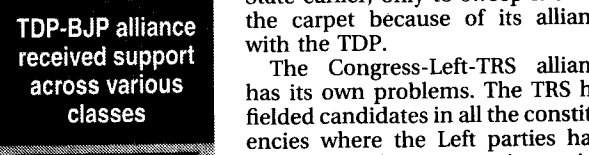
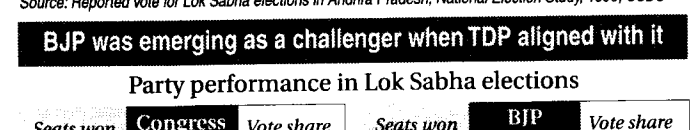
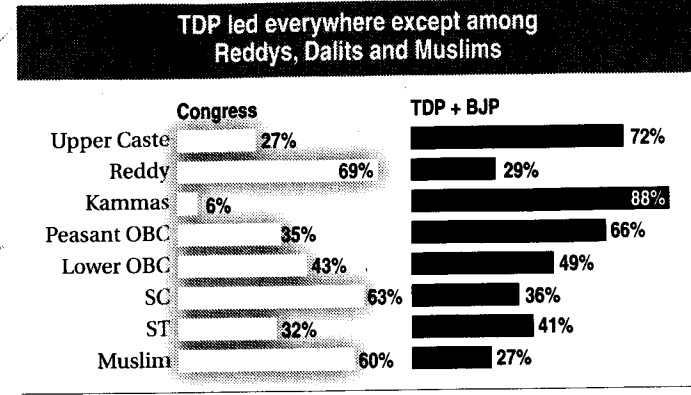
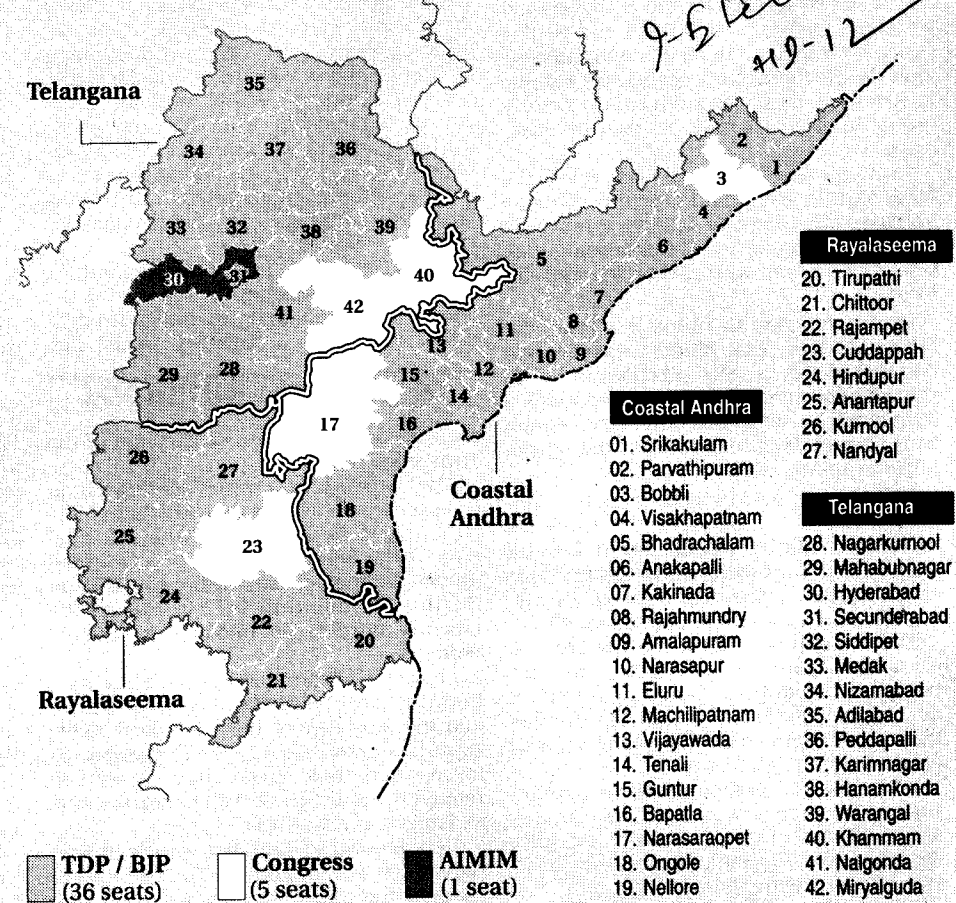
No matter what the opinion and exit polls might say, Andhra Pradesh is one State where the race is too close to call, say Yogendra Yadav and K.C. Suri

For once, there is a State that can challenge Uttar Pradesh for the title of the being the decisive electoral battleground. Andhra Pradesh this time is arguably the most interesting electoral battle to watch. Although only 42 Lok Sabha seats are at stake here, compared to 80 in Uttar Pradesh, the range of possible outcomes is wider — it could be a thumping majority for the NDA or for the Congress. The poll outcome in the State will have a direct bearing on the equation at the Centre. There is still an element of suspense in Andhra Pradesh, when the contours of the outcome are beginning to become clear in other States. The entry of a dark horse in the form of the TRS, the possibility of a split verdict along regional lines and the complexities of alliance arithmetic, make the story of Andhra Pradesh a psephological thriller. This State could become the graveyard for many a poll forecast.

Besides its obvious national effect, the outcome of the electoral race here can change the course of politics at the State and the regional level. The Assembly election, that is being held here simultaneously, will decide whether the TDP gets a third term in the State. N. Chandrababu Naidu, the TDP president and the Chief Minister of the State, opted for dissolution of the Assembly in November 2003 after surviving a deadly landmine blast engineered by the People's War (PW) naxalites near Tirupathi. The Election Commission's refusal to oblige him with early polls did not allow Mr. Naidu to gain from the sympathy wave following the attack. If he succeeds despite this, it would establish TDP hegemony in the State, akin to the dominance of the Left in West Bengal or that of the BJP in Gujarat. Conversely, if the Congress manages to lose yet again, it could set in motion the process of long-term decline of the party in the State. The electoral performance of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi will determine not only the fate of this new political formation, but also whether a State of Telangana comes into being or not. If the Congress does win in Andhra Pradesh, it can still ensure that it does not fall below its national tally in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, notwithstanding the current poll forecasts.

It is not going to be easy for the Congress. The TDP has dominated State politics in the last two decades, ever since the dramatic entry of NTR in the Assembly elections of 1983. Although the first victory of NTR had a lot to do with his charisma, subsequent victories were achieved through a carefully forged social coalition of castes, class appeal among the poor and political alliances with non-Congress parties, especially the Left. Consequently, the TDP has won all the Assembly elections since 1983, with the sole exception of 1989, when the Congress won in a simultaneous election to the Assembly and Parliament. True, the Congress has still managed to retain a decent vote share and has not fallen below the threshold of viability. The party has also tended to do better in the parliamentary elections and has taken the

### ANDHRA PRADESH-1999



State earlier, only to sweep it under the carpet because of its alliance with the TDP.

The Congress-Left-TRS alliance has its own problems. The TRS has fielded candidates in all the constituencies where the Left parties have put up candidates, protesting against the Left's inability to take a clear position in favour of a separate Telangana.

The TRS and the Congress are also locking horns in three key Assembly constituencies in the Telangana region, namely Choppandandi, Kama-reddy and Karimnagar. The leadership issue is another difficult area for the Congress. Mr. Naidu has challenged the party to name its leader, which the Congress has not done though Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy appears to be the front-runner. The TDP too has its factionalism, but there is no leader competing with Naidu for the chief ministership. The presence of a large number of rebel candidates, more from the Congress than from the TDP, with the accompanying drama of resignations, threats of defeating the official candidates, dharnas, threats of self-immolation and the like introduces another element of uncertainty.

In the last instance, then, the outcome will depend on how these two factors play themselves out — on whether Mr. Naidu suffers from a serious incumbency disadvantage and whether the Congress' advantage in Telangana is neutralised by a backlash in the rest of the State. Going purely by statistics, the Congress may have lost badly last time, but it does not have a huge gap to cover. If one puts together the votes secured by the Congress and the Left in 1999, the alliance can snatch three Lok Sabha seats from the NDA and increase its presence in the Assembly to 107. But this is not sufficient to dislodge the TDP.

The entire game changes once the TRS comes into the picture. If the panchayat election figures of 2001 are treated as the baseline estimates of the ground strength of the parties in the three regions of the State, and the Assembly and Parliamentary outcome worked out on that basis, a radically different picture emerges. The Congress-led alliance sweeps the Telangana region and overtakes the TDP-BJP alliance in the Lok Sabha and secures a clear majority in the Vidhan Sabha.

This of course assumes that the alliances work perfectly, that there is no incumbency advantage or disadvantage for the TDP and that there is no anti-Telangana backlash in the rest of the State. Once we introduce these possibilities, other scenarios open up. If there is a swing away from the TDP across the State, then the Congress alliance can look forward to an emphatic victory in the Lok Sabha and the Assembly elections.

But if there is only a mild 'backlash' in Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra, we could be looking at a cliff-hanger with both coalitions close to the majority mark in the Assembly. A stronger backlash, anything more than 2 percentage points, will of course see the TDP back in the saddle.

At this stage, the evidence from the opinion polls puts the TDP-BJP ahead. But this has to be taken with a pinch of salt, for opinion polls all over the world tend to underestimate new and upcoming political formations like the TRS in its first election. The situation is more complicated in India for the voters take time getting used to the symbol of a new party, something that pre-election polls cannot estimate. No matter what the polls and the exit polls say, this is one State whose result you want to watch on counting day. That is what makes Andhra Pradesh so fascinating in this election.

#### TDP dominated all the regions last time, particularly Coastal Andhra

Region	Total Assembly seats	Party performance in Assembly elections 1999							
		Congress		TDP		BJP		Left	
		Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)	Seats won	Vote share (%)
Telangana	107	42	38.9	50	38.5	8	6.1	2	5.8
Coastal Andhra	134	28	40.9	99	47.2	3	2.2	0	1.8
Rayalaseema	53	21	43.6	31	48.1	1	1.7	0	1.2
Andhra Pradesh	294	91	40.6	180	43.9	12	3.6	2	3.3

#### TRS emerged a big player in Telangana in Panchayat Elections 2001

Region	Party performance in Panchayat elections 2001				
	Congress	TDP	BJP	Left	TRS
Telangana	32.5%	35.4%	4.2%	5.4%	20.4%
Coastal Andhra	46.0%	49.5%	1.0%	1.4%	—
Rayalaseema	45.3%	49.5%	1.6%	1.2%	—
Andhra Pradesh	40.7%	44.0%	2.3%	2.87%	7.8%

#### Alliance would bring benefits to Congress, unless there is a backlash

What would the result be this time in case...	Lok Sabha 2004		Assembly 2004	
	TDP + BJP	Congress + allies	TDP + BJP	Congress + allies
...Congress and Left votes are merged on the basis of 1999	32	9	177	107
...Congress, Left and TRS votes in Panchayat Elections 2001 are merged	19	22	119	161
...and there is 2 pp swing against the TDP-BJP throughout the State	12	29	91	188
...a backlash gives TDP-BJP additional 2 pp outside Telangana	23	18	143	137

Graphic by Varghese Kallada

lion's share of the Lok Sabha seats from the State. Yet it has not quite succeeded when it mattered most.

The 1999 election, another simultaneous election to the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha, illustrates how the Congress lost an election that it should have won. The BJP had achieved a major breakthrough in the previous Lok Sabha elections held in 1998 by securing 18 per cent of the total votes and was set to emerge as a third force in State politics. The shrewd decision by Naidu to abandon his traditional allies, the Left parties, and enter into an alliance with the BJP robbed the Congress of what looked like a certain victory. He drove a hard bargain with the BJP in terms of the number of seats and the new allies ensured a successful transfer of their respective votes. As a result, the TDP-BJP combine swept all but six Lok Sabha seats in the State and the TDP secured yet another term in the State. The Congress could not even strike a deal with the Left parties that could have softened the blow of this defeat.

The TDP-BJP alliance continues this time, despite muted demands by the BJP State leadership for a larger share of the seats, as the BJP's need at the Centre matches the TDP's need at the State level. The alliance would seek to re-create the special social alliance forged by the two in the last elections. The TDP has, over

the years, enjoyed core support among the Kammas, one of the dominant peasant communities with early access to modern education, and has edged the Congress out among other backward peasant communities, while taking a chunk of the traditional Congress vote base among the Scheduled Tribes and the Muslims. Thanks to NTR's legacy of populist policies, the TDP has enjoyed considerable support among the poor and the very poor. The BJP commented this social base by bringing the Brahmin, Vaishya and other upper caste voters along with solid upper class support to this alliance. As a result, the Congress was squeezed from both ends. The party did get strong support from the Reddys, Dalits and Muslims, but that was not enough to match the social coalition of the TDP-BJP combine.

While social coalitions continue to be significant, it is unlikely that the elections will be decided here by any big shift in the voting pattern of the major social groups. The TDP hopes to swing the Madigas — a major Dalit community that got a separate sub-quota in job reservations for the Scheduled Castes — its way but it may be too early for that. Similarly, the Congress will be hoping to take

away the Muslim support of the TDP, but the TDP has been careful to distance itself from overtly communal activities of its partner. The TDP used to hold a major advantage among women voters, but that was considerably reduced by the 1999 elections. It is more likely that both the parties will retain their core social base, and that the electoral battle will be centre round making the most of the given vote base or marginally improving it across all communities.

### BATTLEGROUND

The Congress' strategy is to make the most efficient use of the anti-TDP votes in the State by forging a coalition. This time, it has learnt from the past and opted for an alliance with the Left parties and the newly-formed Telangana Rashtra Samithi. Now, for the first time after about two decades, there is a complete polarisation of the electoral contest in the State. While the CPI renewed its alliance with the Congress after a gap of more than 25 years, this is the first time the CPI (M) has a seat adjustment with the Congress in the State. The Left parties have grown weaker over time, but they still have enough clout in

some districts to influence the outcome in alliance with another major party. They are strong in the Khammam and Nalgonda districts in the Telangana region, and their very presence could add a progressive aura to the alliance.

The most significant and controversial decision of the Congress was the move to ally with the TRS, which was launched in April 2001 by a rebel TDP leader, K. Chandrasekhara Rao. A faction of the BJP, led by its MP, Narendra, too joined to the panchayats held in August 2001, the TRS polled about 20 per cent votes in the region, eating into both the Congress and the TDP support base, and proving that it has the capacity to translate its support into votes. This is what prompted the Congress to ally with the TRS and give it 42 Assembly and six Lok Sabha seats. The alliance poses a formidable challenge to the TDP-BJP combine. Besides, the PW naxalites have vowed to defeat the TDP and are doing whatever they can in their strongholds to prevent the TDP and the BJP leaders from canvassing and winning.

The second part of the Congress' strategy is to create an anti-incumbency climate in the State and convert it into votes against the ruling

formation. The Congress is focusing mainly on the 'misrule' of the TDP government, including corruption and the condition of the poor and farmers in the State. Although there appears to be no significant ideological and programmatic differences between the TDP and the Congress in the State, the Congress will be hoping that it can tap into the underlying resentment against the Naidu Government.

The TDP's election campaigning is mainly an attempt to anticipate and counter the issues the Congress is raising. Its campaign hinges upon three things: its claim of bringing development and economic reforms to the State, managing the law and order (read naxalite) problem, and the need to keep the State unified in the face of attempts to create a separate Telangana. The first two are aimed at countering anti-incumbency, while the third is a counter-offensive aimed at neutralising whatever advantage the Congress may get in Telangana by aligning with TRS.

As yet, the TDP's slogan of a unified State does not seem to have evoked a strong response from the electorate in the Andhra region. Mr. Naidu accuses the Congress leaders of opportunism in aligning with the separatist TRS. But this has not had much impact, since he himself had aligned with the BJP, which strongly advocated the bifurcation of the

### SO THEY SAID

- "I won't comment on youths who have just joined politics."  
L.K. Advani  
Deputy Prime Minister
- "[Pramod] Mahajan should go to my college and find out my educational qualifications."  
Rahul Gandhi  
Congress member
- "The NDA's feel good campaign and L.K. Advani's 'Bharat Uday Rath Yatra' have failed to evoke any response."  
Laloo Prasad Yadav  
BJD chief
- "The Congress is asking everybody for support but from every quarter it has been discarded."  
M. Venkaiah Naidu  
BJP president

## Migrant families denied right to vote

**Luv Puri**  
**BELICHRANA, JAMMU**

Driven out of their homes in the hilly regions of Jammu by terrorists several years ago, migrant families in Belicharana appear to have lost their democratic right to vote. They were unable to exercise their franchise in the last Assembly elections, and the story may not be any different this time either.

The Jammu and Kashmir Government's records show that the migrant families from Rajouri, Poonch, Doda and Udhampur districts of Jammu province migrated to safe zones in Jammu city. Around 1765 families migrated from these four districts of Jammu province, which has two Lok Sabha segments, namely Doda-Udhampur and Jammu-Poonch. The families from the Doda-Udhampur Lok Sabha segment are currently living in the Belicharana area of Jammu-Poonch segment, some seven km from the city.

They have not been able to vote as they have been denied migrant status; for that matter, they have not been provided relief either. However, the J & K Minister of State for Home, A.R. Veeri, said that relief was being provided to those migrants whose status is not in dispute.

Javed Iqbal, who fled Doda after militant threats, says that for years the migrants have been asking for re-

lief but the State administration had done nothing about it. In the last Assembly elections, they tried everything they could to vote, but were unable to.

This was mainly because they are not considered migrants. In the words of the assistant State electoral officer, Pawan Kotwal, "Only those who are accepted as migrants will be able to cast their votes. The rules are quite clear in this respect." Those who have been granted migrant status can cast their vote by postal ballot or in the special electoral booths set up in the camps where they reside.

The fact that they (the Belicharana migrants) have been cut off from the democratic process has made them very bitter; they believe that political parties don't care for them, as they have ceased to be voters. The migrants, who come from poor families, are also forced to live in primitive conditions in the camps — many of them have only plastic roofs to protect them from the heat of summer or the rains.

Asha Devi, a migrant, demands to know why they are not being allowed to exercise their franchise. "It is our right to vote and why are we being prevented from doing so?" she asks. It is not only the migrants in Belicharana who are unable to vote; migrant families living in the Talwandi area of Udhampur are in a similar situation.

## LS election, but purely local issues

**S. Nadarajan**  
**PONDICHERY**

It may be a Lok Sabha election, but the issues are purely local. The candidates in the fray for Pondicherry's lone parliamentary seat all say that their top priority is the law and order situation in the Union Territory.

The BJP nominee, Lalitha Kumaramangalam, has already expressed concern over the deterioration in law and order and says she might even be forced to seek police protection.

The Tamil film actor Anandaraj, says that as a native of Pondicherry he is keen that it should not lose its reputation of being a peaceful Union Territory. He said the very fact that he had decided to contest the poll was because of his concern for law and order.

The Dalit Panthers of India nominee, K. Nambiar alias Sozhanambiar, says that the People's Alliance, to which the DPI is affiliated, would fight the poll to ensure that there was peace in the Union Territory among other things.

The New Justice Party nominee, S. Ponnurangam, says that if he is elected, he will strive for enforcement of the Goondas Act as recent instances of murders, including the one inside a police station, had tarnished the image of Pondicherry.

This is the first time in the electoral history of Pondicherry that contestants are focused on the threat to law and order in the Union Territory, say observers.

## CANDIDATE WATCH

**Jayaprada, Samajwadi Party candidate, Rampur Lok Sabha seat**

It is hard to live down your film star image even though you are trying to mouth weighty social issues and present yourself as a serious political entity. Jayaprada, the Samajwadi Party's candidate for the Rampur Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh is forced to realise this wherever and whenever she goes out campaigning. The star of many successful films in Hindi and some southern languages, Jayaprada finds that a large number of those who come to her election meetings are children and adolescents, who are yet to become voters. They come more to see her and less to hear what she has to say.

But that does not bother Jayaprada. "I am sure that my political message, or at least parts of it, will ultimately reach the masses as well as the voters," she says with a smile as this correspondent catches up with her in Rampur. And what exactly is her political message? Most of Jayaprada's lines on the campaign platform are predictable. That "she should not be treated as an outsider because art belongs to the world and artists are not bound by limitations of region or language." That "Andhra Pradesh is her *Jannabhoomi*" but Uttar Pradesh will be her *Karmabhoomi* for all times to come." That "she is inspired by SP leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav, Amar Singh and Azam Khan." That "she shall do whatever possible to strengthen the hands of these leaders and improve the lives of the people of Uttar Pradesh."

In a one-to-one conversation, however, Jayaprada demonstrates that she can go beyond commonplace propaganda speeches and dwell on political issues earnestly. Jayaprada says she does not want to be treated as yet another film star on the political circuit. Rather, she wants to part ways with the Tehlu Desam Party (TDP) was the "criminal silence from the leaders of TDP, including the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, after the Gujarat carnage engineered by the Sangh Parivar." That she has tremendous feeling for the plight of the minorities in the country and this is what prompted the SP leadership to choose her as the candidate from Rampur, which has a large number of Muslim voters. But will a south Indian like her fit in with a quintessential Hindi heartland region such as Rampur? "Why was such a question not asked to Sonia Gandhi when she contested from Bellary," asks Jayaprada, firmly emphasising her political personality.

Notwithstanding all this, the parting question has to relate to her career in showbiz. How did it feel when maestro Satyajit Ray himself, rated her as the "most beautiful woman in Indian cinema"? The actress seems to blush for a fleeting moment but the reply is matter of fact. "Of course, it felt good." The blunt tone says it all; the political role is firmly in place on this pretty face.

— Venkitesh Ramakrishna





# Ban on opinion, exit polls unconstitutional, says Soli Sorabjee

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, APRIL 9. The Union Law Ministry has forwarded to the Election Commission the opinion of the Attorney-General, Soli J. Sorabjee, who takes "serious and formidable objection" to the Commission's proposal for a ban on the publication and telecast of opinion and exit polls during elections. Mr. Sorabjee's considered opinion is that such a ban would "be violative of Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution."

The opinion was sought by the Government on the Commission's suggestion to promulgate an ordinance to ban the opinion and exit polls.

Backed by the unanimous suggestion expressed by political parties for a ban on opinion and exit polls, the Commission had on Wednesday referred the matter to the Government to explore the ways of bringing about such a ban.

The crux of Mr. Sorabjee's argument is that the freedom of speech and expression cannot be curbed just because all political parties find the exit/opinion polls irksome; instead, he suggests, that all institutions must respect the voter's capac-

ity to make a considered choice. He argues: "A citizen may or may not vote for a particular party or its candidate or may not vote at all depending upon his assessment of the weight to be attached to the opinion and exit polls. It needs to be emphasised that there is more than one opinion and exit poll and the citizen can decide which of them is credible and reliable for making his informed electoral choice just as he or she will assess the weight to be attached to the editorials and articles projecting different views in several newspapers."

According to Mr. Sorabjee, the Supreme Court has over the years upheld that the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 19(1) can only be restricted by the conditions detailed in Article 19(2); but, he says, "the proposed restrictions in the form of prohibition of publication or opinion or exit polls are clearly outside the permissible heads under Article 19(2) and, consequently, the proposed legislation would be clearly in breach of Article 19(1) and, hence, unconstitutional."

Opposing a complete ban, Mr. Sorabjee suggests that certain conditions could be imposed on the publication of the

opinion or exit polls and cites the Council of Europe's recommendations in this regard. Particularly, each poll must carry the following information: (a) name of the political party or other organisation or persons who commissioned and paid for the poll; (b) identify the organisation conducting the poll

## CEC refuses to comment

RAIPUR, APRIL 9. The Chief Election Commissioner, T.S. Krishnamurthy, today refused to comment on the opinion given by the Attorney-General, Soli J. Sorabjee, that a ban on opinion and exit polls during elections by an ordinance would be unconstitutional.

"Let me have the letter first and only after discussions, I will express my opinion," he told reporters here.

Replying to a question, he said the Commission could not go by press reports and after going through the communication, it would decide.

Mr. Krishnamurthy was here to review poll preparedness for 11 Lok Sabha seats in Chhattisgarh. — PTI



Attorney-General, Soli J. Sorabjee. — Photo: Bijoy Ghosh

and the methodology employed; (c) indicate the sample and margin of error of the poll; and (d) indicate the date and/or period when the poll was conducted.

In Mr. Sorabjee's opinion, these conditions would ensure that "the opinion or exit polls are not manipulated and also provides the voter with relevant information in order to enable him or her to judge the credibility or reliability of the opinion and exist polls and thereby to make an informed choice."

The Attorney-General concludes that the Election Commission can invoke its plenary powers under Article 324 "to issue directions requiring the media to comply with the aforesaid recommendation." Such a recommendation would be "regulatory in nature and not restrictive of the fundamental right of free speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a)."

# Exit polls can't be banned: (w)

## Sorabjee

HTM 10/4  
HT Political Bureau  
New Delhi, April 9

ATTORNEY-GENERAL Soli J. Sorabjee on Friday rejected the Election Commission's proposal for promulgation of an ordinance banning pre-poll surveys and exit polls during elections.

In his opinion to the Law Ministry, Sorabjee said an ordinance banning such polls would violate the fundamental right to free speech and expression under Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution.

The A-G's opinion, however, has triggered a fierce debate. The Opposition criticised the Election Commission's proposal for an ordinance and not acting on its own under Article 324 of the Constitution.

The government, however, indicated its acceptance of Sorabjee's views. Sources in the EC said the poll panel was also likely to go by the A-G's recommendation and would not move the Supreme Court. They said that Article 324 was not "specific or clear" on the issue under debate.

Speaking as a legal expert, Congress spokesman Kapil Sibal said: "The A-G's opinion is not final and has to be tested in a court of law. The EC can pass an order on its own."

He said there is no need for an ordinance because contrary to popular perception, the Supreme Court did not pass a judgment but merely made some observations on the subject of poll predictions in 1999. "It was not a verdict," Sibal said.

The A-G had said in his opinion that the "unanimous view of political parties ... is not decisive on the question of constitutionality of a statute". He agreed, though, that reasonable restrictions could be imposed on the publication of the opinion and exit polls in accordance with Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

# SC wants ad rules fine-tuned

Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, April 8. — The Supreme Court today expressed reservations on the guidelines submitted by the Election Commission for monitoring political advertisements in the electronic media and asked the Centre to further fine-tune the guidelines. The court has asked the government to submit its response within three days.

The EC today reiterated before the Division Bench of Chief Justice Mr VN Khare, Mr Justice SB Sinha and Mr Justice SH Kapadia that it would prefer a ban on all political ads for "this election", but suggested that "only registered parties and contesting candidates" be allowed to place

political ads on TV as a mode of monitoring such ads.

The court, however, wondered how any "citizen" could be deprived of his right to air an ad on TV. It indicated that it would issue orders on Monday if the EC and the government failed to evolve a satisfactory mechanism to monitor such ads.

Till then, the court's earlier order that political ads on TV should conform to the norms of "morality and decency", and should not hurt "religious susceptibilities" of people will remain in force. Appearing for the EC, Mr KK Venugopal submitted that "the sheer magnitude of the monitoring process at pre-telecast and post-telecast stages will be beyond the scope of the limited resources available at the EC's command."

Appearing for the Centre, attorney-general Mr Soli Sorabjee agreed to consider the EC's guidelines and further fine-tune them, but not before he had made out a case for vacating the stay on the operation of Rule 7(3) of the Cable TV Network Rules, 1994.

## Opinion/exits polls

The government today sought the attorney-general's opinion on the feasibility of promulgating an Ordinance banning all kinds of opinion and exits polls relating to the forthcoming elections. The law ministry has referred to the A-G the poll panel's suggestion that an Ordinance be promulgated in keeping with the views expressed at an all-party meeting on 6 April.

## UNCONSTITUTIONAL MOVE

THE ELECTION COMMISSION seems to have learnt nothing from its 1998-99 misadventure of seeking an unconstitutional 'ban' on the publication by the Indian news media of the findings of pre-election public opinion polls and exit polls during the pendency of long, multi-phase general elections. The patronising reasoning behind that high-handed move was that the findings of these polls would distort electoral choice in "a poor and half-literate society having multi-party democracy." The EC's failure to get its banning guidelines taken seriously, let alone enforced, half a decade ago marked an important practical triumph for freedom of the press — which everywhere in the democratic world is understood to include the freedom to offer uninhibited political analysis and commentary, and to make forecasts and surmises (right or wrong) about the outcome of electoral contests. At another level, the flopping of the attempted ban was a setback to the authority of the EC, a constitutional body that has made a tireless effort over the past 14 years to expand its jurisdiction and powers and to bring in new players and subjects under its effective regulation, if not control. In all fairness, this failure must be set off against an excellent recent track record of conducting fairly and seamlessly one of the wonders of the world, Indian general elections. In a move that is flagrantly out of tune with both the Constitution and the times, the EC has on the eve of the 14th general election orchestrated a banning "consensus" among political parties and gone so far as to ask the Central Government to explore the possibility of imposing the desired ban through an ordinance.

Let us briefly look at the background to this outrageously illiberal demand. On January 21, 1998, on the eve of the 12th general election, the EC issued "guidelines" (constructed in the style of an order) "banning" the publication and broadcast of the findings of public opinion surveys between February 14 and 28, and of the findings of exit polls between February 16 and 28. *Frontline*, a publication from *The Hindu* stable, along with some other newspapers, went to court challenging the attempted "gagging" of the press and the other news media as violative of the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression guaranteed in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, and also as being completely outside the power and jurisdiction of the EC. The matter went down to the wire and, by declining to issue any interim order on February 13, 1998, the Supreme Court left the *status quo* in favour of the press — and not the Election Commission. The findings of opinion as well as exit polls were duly published. With the EC re-issuing its banning guidelines on August 20, 1999, in honour of the 13th general election and with *Frontline* and the other publications challenging them, the matter was dramatically resolved with the EC informing the Supreme Court that it had decided to "recall" the guidelines. But this was not before its case faded away in the face of the objection that the guidelines were legally unsustainable because they violated Article 19(1)(a) and also "because there is no power or authority with the Election Commission to gag the media in this manner." In fact, in its oral observations, the Constitution Bench that heard the matter made light of the contentions in favour of enforceability of the guidelines, calling attention to the absence of "any teeth" or legal basis for enforcement against "third parties" such as the media and the public (as distinct from political parties, candidates, and state authorities involved in the conduct of elections). Interestingly, the Bench observed for the benefit of the EC: "At the end of the day, you may go with a perception that you have far less powers than the public perception."

What must be recognised before a mess is made is that the sweeping attempt to give opin-

ion and exit polls a bad name and to suggest that such exercises detract from the freedom of democratic choice, especially given the mix of mass poverty, huge illiteracy, and multi-party democracy, is intellectually reactionary. Opinion and exit polls and psephology — the discipline that attempts to study electoral behaviour scientifically — have over the past two decades made a qualitative difference to our knowledge of the Indian political process. They have the potential to deepen our understanding by presenting systematically ascertained views and preferences of various constituent sections of society on political parties, candidates, and issues. At their best, when they are conducted honestly, transparently and on the basis of the principles of statistical science and a rigorous methodology, polls can serve as an antidote to partisan propaganda and baseless claims made on various sides. The carefully qualified, nuanced, and understated presentation and analysis of the findings of polls by those of the calibre of Prannoy Roy and Yogendra Yadav, who has been contributing regularly to *The Hindu* and group publications, is an example of the insight-providing and educative role of scientific polling and psephology.

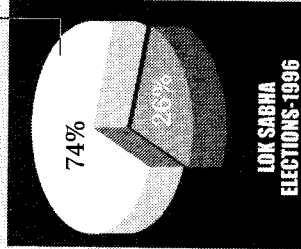
It is true that pre-election public opinion surveys and exit polls can be and are abused for partisan political ends. Many of these polls fail to provide the reader with the minimum disclosure of technical and methodological information required by the code of conduct supposed to apply to both the polling agencies and the news publications using their services. It appears that a number of poll analysts and commentators do not care, or seem unable, to distinguish between *per cent* and *percentage points* while discussing electoral change and comparative electoral performance. Then there is the special problem posed by a first-past-the-post system under conditions of tremendous electoral diversity, unevenness, and complexity — the problem of converting shares of the popular vote into seats while making predictions. Some seat predictions made by pollsters for Indian elections have nothing to do with statistical science and represent only plausible guesswork at best; with tall claims made and the methodology and formulae of share-of-the-vote to seat conversion sought to be passed off as trade secret, such exercises can degenerate into pseudo-academic sharp practice. But then who is to vouchsafe the veracity of election-related claims made by political parties, ideologues, propagandists, spin-doctors, political hucksters, and loose cannons, not to mention astrologers? The EC's logic would require banning them all in the interest of unmediated free choice!

Finally, there is solid research (see Yogendra Yadav's article in *The Hindu* today) that answers the instrumentalist objection that the publication of polls influences and distorts electoral behaviour. What the research suggests is that there is no need to exaggerate the direct impact of opinion and exit polls on mass voting behaviour. In fact, pollsters need to feel humble in the face of survey findings that awareness of their efforts among voters is fairly low; that even informed voters deny that the polls have any significant influence on their voting behaviour; and that what effects there are tend to cancel themselves out. Thus, if there is any kind of 'bandwagon' effect, there is also an 'underdog' effect that energises those swimming against the political current to bring out their supporters in larger numbers and put up a more determined fight. In short, contrary to Election Commission-led fundamentalism on the subject, it is clear that under Indian conditions the publication of opinion and exit polls cannot possibly make anything more than a marginal difference to how the masses vote. To promulgate a ban would be constitutionally outrageous — and an egregious insult to the political intelligence of India's 670 million voters.

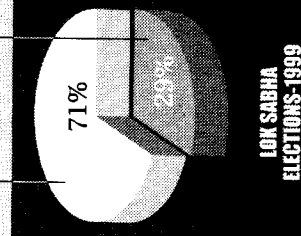
Low awareness, marginal effect of opinion polls in the national elections

An overwhelming majority did not know anything about opinion polls

Awareness made by election surveys...

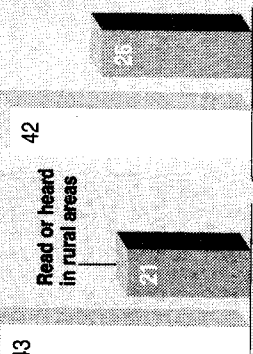


Read or heard about these



Awareness of opinion polls etc. was mostly confined to urban centres

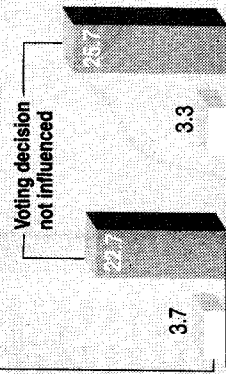
Figures in %



LOK SABHA ELECTIONS-1999

An overwhelming majority of those who knew were not influenced by the surveys

Figures in %



LOK SABHA ELECTIONS-1999

Source: National Election Study 1996 and 1999, post-poll surveys, CSDS. The surveys were carried out after the elections were over, among 9614 and 8133 respondents respectively, spread across in each case in 108 Lok Sabha constituencies all over the country. In both these surveys, the respondents were asked if they had heard or read about surveys and forecasts carried by newspapers and magazines etc. and whether it had any effect on their decision to vote.

During Delhi elections, awareness and effect were high, but not in one direction

High awareness of forecasts made by election surveys...  
Read or heard about 41%

Three-fourths of those who knew were not influenced by the surveys

Voting decision influenced 10.2%  
Voting decision not influenced 30.8%

Those who were influenced, changed their vote in different directions

Shifted from BJP to Congress 5.3%  
Shifted from Congress to BJP 4.9%

Net gain for the Congress  
...and thus the net effect was negligible 0.4%

Source: HT-CSDS Delhi Survey. The survey was carried out among 2452 respondents in all the 70 assembly constituencies of Delhi a week before the day of polling.

# The case against banning exit and opinion polls

There is a clear case for trying to improve the quality of opinion polls and forecasting, which have not seen much innovation since the 1980s. But, a legal ban, unfortunately, does not achieve that, writes Yogendra Yadav.

is whether such a law, if enacted, would not violate the fundamental right to freedom of expression. There is indeed a strong argument here and this may well be a clincher in the legal battle that is bound to follow any attempt to ban opinion polls.

Valid and powerful as these arguments are, these do not convince an ordinary citizen. The debate on this question must address the simple and non-legal question raised by the political class: are opinion polls good for the functioning of democracy? Do opinion polls influence how the people vote in a way that is illegitimate or unfair? Won't a ban on opinion polls produce a better and more equitable climate for political competition? These questions need to be addressed openly and with the help of all the evidence at our command. Let us ignore the ill-informed accusations and hostility expressed by the political class and examine these points at their logical best.

The position that opinion and exit polls are bad for our democracy rests on the following chain of arguments, of which each step appears plausible. One, media-driven opinion polls and forecasts based on these are widely noted by the public at large. Two, following from the first, these polls therefore influence the process by which people make up their mind about who to vote for. Three, this influence is either illegitimate, for most of the forecasts are not correct, or undesirable anyway as it adversely affects the level-playing ground in politics. Not everyone makes all the three arguments. And not every critic of the impact of opinion polls questions the professional integrity of the pollsters. Yet all these are arguments that are widely deployed and need to be looked at one by one.

Fortunately, some of these admit of a straightforward factual answer. And we have fairly reliable evidence to do so. The National Election Study

in a close contest.

We must therefore look at the final set of evidence, about what exactly happens when people get influenced by opinion polls. The popular belief is that knowledge about opinion polls can produce only one consequence: people tend to go with the *hauz* (wind). Research all over the world suggests that while polls do create a 'bandwagon effect', they could also create an 'underdog effect', or produce a sympathy factor for the reported loser. The CSDS study in the recent Delhi election tested this question in an ideal condition. The setting was metropolitan and the media exposure quite high: 41 per cent of the respondents knew about surveys and forecasts made by the media. One-fourth of them, about 10 per cent of the total electorate, said they were influenced by the forecasts. And this was a wave election: all the surveys were forecasting a sweep for the Congress. It was thus an ideal case to test if the Congress benefited from a 'bandwagon effect' created by media forecasts. The evidence negates this hypothesis. The 10 per cent influenced by the polls were almost equally split: half of them switched from the BJP to the remaining half switched in favour of the perceived loser, the BJP. The net effect was negligible. Now, this is not decisive evidence and more research is necessary before we reach firm conclusions. But *prima facie*, there seems to be little evidence to support the largely held view that the party that is shown to be the winner in the polls derived huge advantage from this.

To be fair, this does not exhaust or meet all reasonable suspicions and objections to opinion polls. It could be said that what look like small percentages nationally could be quite a large number of persons in specific areas and constituencies. It could al-

so be argued that while the effect of the polls is quite limited on the public at large, its effect on the morale of the party workers is quite strong and must be considered. Someone else could argue that while all this applies to opinion polls done before the elections, exit polls are in a class by themselves, specially in our country where they are carried out when some parts of the country are still to go to the polls. These are not irrelevant or unreasonable objections. And these cannot be met only by the evidence supplied so far.

These questions invite us to look at larger issues that go beyond numbers. First, if one grants that opinion polls and exit polls can have an effect on some crucial areas and sections during the elections, it still remains to be seen if the effect is illegitimate or unfair. After all, every election result is always influenced by the voters' sense of who is going to win. And they rely on all kind of evidence to sense this: news reports, gossip, personal information and guesswork. What is wrong if they get more systematic information, something that is available to, and is used by, all the political parties? To my mind one can object to this only if there is some reason to believe that the forecasts made by the media are systematically biased and manipulated.

That brings me to the final point about the accuracy and professionalism of opinion polls in the country. This is not the place to get into a detailed assessment of the accuracy or otherwise of opinion polls in India, but let me just note that contrary to popular impressions the overall record of Indian pollsters is not bad by international standards. Of late we have seen some really bad forecasts, but these have been cases of poor professionalism and not of political manipulation. By and large, most of the agencies and media houses involved in this exercise have

Graphic by Varghese Kallada

## Ordinance dilemma as EC takes safe option

# Exit poll enters govt court

RADHIKARAMASESHAN  
AND MONOBINA GUPTA

**New Delhi, April 7: The Election Commission has asked the government to explore the possibility of banning opinion and exit polls, adding momentum to a concerted campaign launched by all political parties 24 hours ago.**

Official sources said the commission has asked whether the government could consider some kind of "legislative change" in accordance with the views expressed at yesterday's all-party meeting.

Citing unhealthy impact of opinion and exit polls on the electorate, political parties had closed ranks and demanded a ban. The Election Commission had proscribed such polls in 1998 but the Supreme Court had lifted the ban.

Keen to avoid a replay in the court, the government is considering an ordinance. But the sources stressed that no final decision has been taken.

Attorney-general Soli Sorabjee reportedly consulted law ministry officials after the commission's communiqué reached the government.

The sources said the government's prime consideration was to ensure that the eventual decision would be in line with Article 19 (a) of the Constitution, which guarantees right to freedom of speech and expression.

"The government is seriously looking at the constitutional compatibility of any option with 19 (a)," an official said. If, for instance, an ordinance is seen to be going against the clause, the matter is likely to be referred to the cabinet, the sources added.

They feel that though the political establishment had unanimously favoured a ban, a move

from the government may be perceived as "direct intervention" on the right to information and could end up being counter-productive if it was challenged in a court of law.

The issue also involves the question of "propriety" in effecting a "legislative change" in the middle of elections on a subject directly relating to the exercise of franchise.

BJP sources are of the view that the best way out would have been for the commission to issue a fiat or for political parties to evolve a consensus on opinion polls and adhere to its spirit.

The ruling establishment also fears an uproar in the media and among the pollsters. Eminent psephologists have already opposed the ban, saying there is little evidence to prove that opinion polls have an impact on voting behaviour and pointing out that the issue involves the right to information.

The commission has asked the government to take a decision because the panel is not keen on getting into another legal wrangle.

While overturning the earlier ban, the Supreme Court had said the ban infringes on the right to freedom of expression and the right to information.

The commission is already under pressure from the Supreme Court which has asked the panel to formulate guidelines for monitoring all direct and indirect political advertisements on television channels.

Before the directive came, the commission wanted the information and broadcasting ministry to take the responsibility of monitoring the advertisements.

The ministry, however, maintained that it was the duty of the commission to monitor the advertisements during the time of elections.



# 'Ticket splitting' is a serious possibility

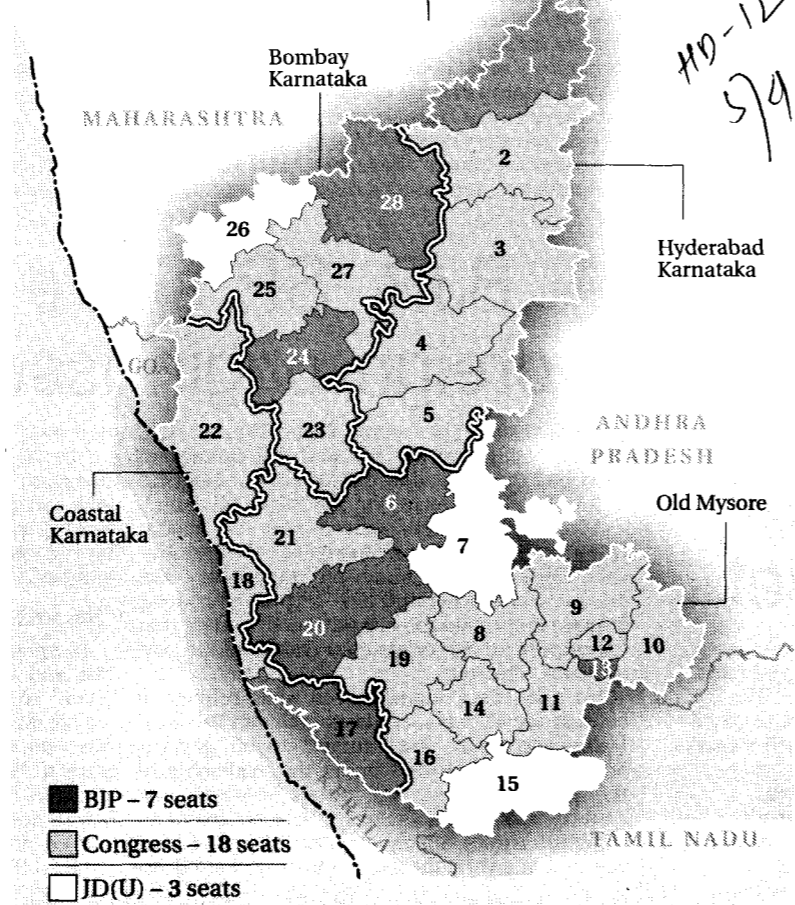
While the Lok Sabha elections may be reduced to a direct contest between the Congress and the BJP, the Assembly polls may turn out to be different, writes **Yogendra Yadav**

In Karnataka, the BJP has been knocking on the doors of power for well over a decade now. Karnataka was the first State in south India where the BJP achieved a breakthrough, way back in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections. Since then it has stagnated, if not retreated, much to the frustration of its national leadership. This time the party is not taking any chances and is making an all-out bid for power in the State Assembly elections; or at least for a clear dominance in the Lok Sabha contest in the State. If this final assault succeeds, it may lead to long-term changes in the State's politics, paving the way for a two-party system. If the assault does not succeed, it may be a serious setback to the BJP and can put the party behind by several years.

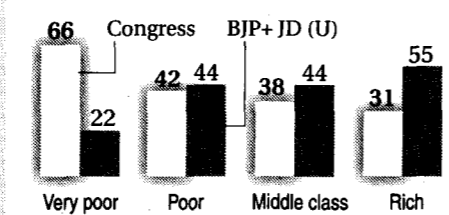
The Congress and the Janata Dal have successfully kept the BJP at bay during this period. Although the BJP won only 4 Lok Sabha seats in the 1991 election, it secured 29 per cent of the votes in the State, pushing the Janata Dal to third place. Then came the Assembly elections of 1994, when the Janata Dal came back to power and the BJP took the second place with 40 seats, pushing the Congress to third spot. The Lok Sabha elections in 1996 echoed the previous Assembly elections, as the JD took 16 seats and the BJP failed to push home its advantage. Realising that it was stagnating, the BJP allied with Ramakrishna Hegde's Lok Shakti in the 1998 Lok Sabha election and marginally improved its position. Yet the expanded alliance proved to be a liability in the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections of 1999 as the Congress captured power this time winning 18 seats in the Lok Sabha and 132 in the Assembly. The BJP and the JD (U) did pick the remaining 10 Lok Sabha seats and finished second in the Assembly, but they knew that they had messed up again.

An organisational failure, coupled with an inability to understand the social chemistry of the State, has prevented the BJP from building on its early success. Karnataka was one of the last States to see the end of the one-party dominance of the Congress and one of the few States where the rainbow coalition woven by the Congress in the 1970s has not become politically irrelevant. Through the 1990s, the Congress has continued to be the overwhelming choice of the Dalits, Muslims and the OBCs, plus the poor, cutting across the caste divide. The solid support from these sections could be combined with support from one of the dominant peasant castes to manufacture a majority. The Janata Dal, on the other hand, drew upon a strong base among the dominant peasant castes and combined it with some support from the OBCs and the Dalits. The BJP made its entry by focussing on the upper castes and then the Lingayats.

## KARNATAKA Lok Sabha-1999

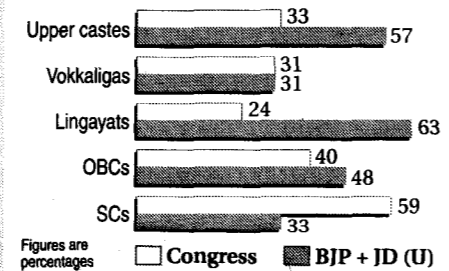


The poorer the voter, the more solid was the support for the Congress



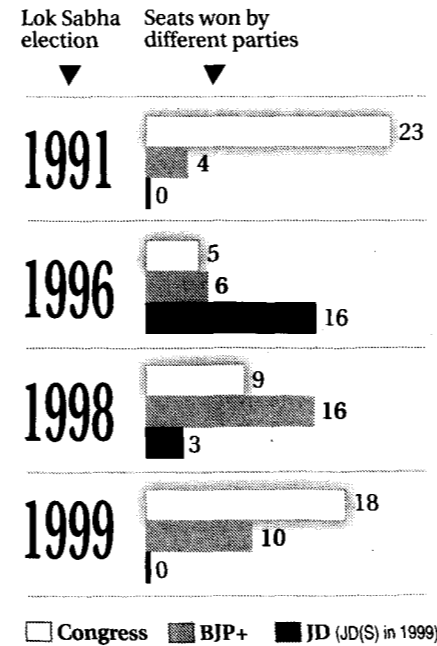
Figures are percentages. Source: CSDS Post Poll Survey 1999

This time, Lingayats swing towards NDA while Vokkaligas stand divided



Figures are percentages. Source: NDTV - Indian Express - AC Nielsen Pre-poll survey, March 2004

BJP rising at the expense of the Janata Parivar



Note: The BJP had an alliance with Lokshakti in 1996, and with JD (U) in 1999.

Graphics by Varghese Kallada

The social map of voting behaviour was reflected in the geographical division of votes. The Congress has been quite evenly spread through the four political regions of the State. The Janata Dal always drew much of its success from the old Mysore region dominated by the Vokkaligas. The split in the Janata Dal has meant that the former Prime Minister, Deve Gowda's JD (S), does not get much support from north Karnataka. The BJP's stronghold has been coastal Karnataka, where the social equations are very different from the rest of Karnataka. It subsequently targeted the two regions of northern Karnataka, Hyderabad-Karnataka and Bombay Karnataka,

where its votes have registered an increase since 1991. As yet it is not clear if the BJP has a strategy to win the Vokkaligas in the old Mysore region.

This time the BJP has come up with a strategy to address many of its known weaknesses. The leadership vacuum has been addressed by changing the State party president, shifting the former Union Minister Ananth Kumar to take over the State party and by inducing a series of defections. The entry of the former Chief Minister, S. Bangarappa, a prominent figure from the OBC community, into

## BATTLEGROUND

Northeast. The BJP is also trying hard to capture the Lingayat votes after the demise of Mr. Hegde, who though not a Lingayat, wielded considerable influence in the community. The State has witnessed a marked rise in communal temperature, with the Sangh Parivar actively stoking it. The BJP is likely to be the beneficiary

of this rise in communal feeling. The evidence from recent surveys shows that the BJP can expect overwhelming support from the upper castes, as well as the Lingayats. Its vote share among the OBCs has also shown a clear upward trend and points to the success of the strategy of incorporating OBC leaders.

The Congress depends on largely on its Chief Minister to win this election for it. The Chief Minister, S. M. Krishna has managed to neutralise most of his rivals. The Congress suffers from a lesser degree of factionalism than the BJP, which till recently

suffered defections and serious infighting, especially after the 1999 elections. The status of Bangalore as an IT city has helped boost Mr. Krishna's image as a dynamic and modern Chief Minister. Mr. Krishna has changed his Assembly constituency from his home turf, Maddur in Mandya district, to Chamarajpet in Bangalore city. But it is not clear how much this will help him outside the urban areas. The State Government's handling of the severe drought in most districts has left a lot to be desired and given the BJP an election plank. The Congress Government has not covered itself with glory in trying to capture the sandalwood smuggler Veerappan or in dealing ef-

fectively with the emerging naxalite problem in the forest areas of the State. Mr. Krishna may also face some serious questions on the handling of the Cauvery water dispute with Tamil Nadu. Survey evidence shows that while the Dalits and the Muslims continue to be with the Congress, it is not doing very well among the OBCs and the Vokkaligas. The third player in the race is the JD (S) led by Mr. Gowda. A major player in Karnataka politics for nearly two decades, the party was nearly decimated in the 1999 elections, with Mr. Gowda himself being defeated in the Lok Sabha elections. Mr. Gowda did win a subsequent by-election from Kanakapura, but that was due to the helping hand extended by the JD (U). The JD has a reputation in Karnataka of rising from the ashes. But this time it is going to be more difficult than ever before. The Janata family stands fragmented and absorbed by the Congress and the BJP. With the death of Mr. Hegde and the former Chief Minister, J. H. Patel, the JD (U) found itself leaderless, but Mr. Gowda could not capitalise on this. Recently a bulk of the JD (U) MLAs crossed over to the Congress and the rump JD (U) has entered into a coalition with the BJP on less than respectable terms. The JD (S) is clearly unable to recreate the social coalition of the Janata Dal and remains Mr. Gowda's political faction with dwindling support among the Vokkaligas in old Mysore. In fact, the survey evidence points to a three-way split of the Vokkaliga vote, with Mr. Gowda getting only one-third of this traditional vote bank.

In the Lok Sabha elections, the contest may well be reduced to a direct contest between the Congress and the BJP. The contest at the Assembly level may turn out to be different. Karnataka has a history of 'ticket splitting', with voters changing their preferences from Lok Sabha to the Assembly elections. The famous instance of Mr. Hegde reversing a humiliating defeat in the 1984 Lok Sabha election by winning the mid-term Assembly poll within a few months is a political legend in Karnataka. In the last elections too, the Karnataka voters displayed divergent preferences in the Lok Sabha and the Assembly elections. The BJP and its allies did much worse in the Assembly elections. The CSDS survey showed that the Congress could retain nearly 79 per cent of its Lok Sabha votes at the Assembly level. The retention rate of its main rival, the BJP-Janata Dal (United) alliance, was much lower at 68 per cent. Ticket splitting is a serious possibility this time too. The polls forecast a better show for the BJP at the Lok Sabha level than at the Assembly level. Earlier the Congress used to benefit from ticket splitting at the national level, now its advantage lies at the State level.

The electoral equations also favour the Congress in the Assembly elections. If we start with the seat position in 1999, a modest swing of 2 per cent against the Congress will split the Lok Sabha seats from the State equally between itself and the NDA. At the Assembly level, however, a swing of 2 per cent against the Congress will leave it only 5 seats short of a majority with the BJP considerably behind. The BJP and its allies will need a swing of 8 per cent against the Congress to come close to forming the Government. The JD (S) may continue to be a player at the State level and benefit from the anti-Congress vote in the southern region. If it improves upon its tally of 10 in the last Assembly election, it may well be a critical bloc in the event of a hung Assembly.

## SO THEY SAID

"I advise all in [the] Congress, [the] BJP and [the] Left parties to exercise restraint and conduct a dignified campaign based on issues of national importance."

M. Venkaiah Naidu  
BJP president

"The use of indecent and low-level talk is a well-thought-out and well-planned strategy by [the] BJP top brass."

Abhishek Singhvi  
AICC spokesman

"There is no soft corner for Mulayam Singh Yadav."

L.K. Advani  
Deputy Prime Minister

"We are not marketing Vajpayee as a brand. The country has adopted him as a symbol of progress and economic development."

Jaswant Singh  
Finance Minister

## Ruined by imports, garlic farmers turn ire on BJP

Sujay Mehndia  
KULLU VALLEY

Jeet Ram is a distressed man; hit by unprecedented imports of garlic in the past few years, the farmer says he has fallen upon hard times. His anger is mainly directed against the NDA Government at the Centre; and the BJP candidates in Himachal Pradesh's garlic farming areas may pay a big price because of what Jeet Ram and other garlic farmers perceive as the Government's neglect of their interests. "The past few years have been very punishing. Exploitation by the market forces combined with the invasion of garlic from China has ruined us. Our earnings have fallen drastically and I have fallen on bad days. There is little help forthcoming from the authorities. It has certainly been the worst period of my life," rues Jeet Ram, a resident of Seeri village in Kullu Valley in Himachal Pradesh.

Jeet Ram is not the only victim of liberalisation and economic reforms. His fellow farmers have also suffered irreparable harm due to the import of garlic from China. The Chinese variety, though priced higher than the "desi variety", is much sought after due to its better quality, packing and grading. The farmers of Kullu, Solan, Sirmour and Sainj areas, where garlic is grown, now accuse the NDA Government of allowing imports without providing adequate protection to the interests of the domestic farmers. The market downturn has ruined many families and forced them to look for other alternatives to survive.

Such has been the downfall in the garlic trade that the production levels in Himachal Pradesh have gone down and output is on the decline.

The ire of these farmers is likely to be taken out on the BJP candidates from Shimla and Mandi Lok Sabha seats in the polls, where the bulk of garlic farming is done. The farmers are also sore at the fact that even the present Congress Government has not done much to help them and plan to confront the political parties with their demands during the election campaign. In fact, farmers see the elections as some sort of bargaining chip where they can try and ex-

## OFFTRACK

tract promises from the Government for a better future.

"All this has been the result of the faulty policies of the Central Government. The farmers continue to suffer at the hands of middlemen but there is this talk of farmers having benefited immensely by the liberalisation policies. The unabated imports from China have badly affected the earnings of the farmers and the price for their produce has come down by almost half during the past three years," says Raj Kumar, a garlic farmer of Pandhari village in Sainj Valley. Interestingly, the farmers from Himachal Pradesh earlier used to send their produce to Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. It used to fetch them a price of around Rs. 25 to 40 per kg in the open market. However, this did not

last long and the prices slipped to Rs. 10 per kg two years ago. Earlier, around 1,500 truckloads of "garlic" were exported from the State with each truck carrying about 100 quintals of the commodity. Around 300 to 400 truckloads of seed were retained by the farmers for sowing the new crop. However, this year the output is expected to come down drastically and the price is also not expected to go beyond Rs. 15 to Rs. 18 a kg, according to Daljit Singh of the Bhartiya Kisan Manch.

Farmers complain that there was very little help forthcoming from the Government and unlike apple and kinnow, for which the Government had a market intervention scheme, no such mechanism exists for the garlic farmers.

The big markets in Delhi, Mumbai and other cities have now been flooded with Chinese garlic, which is sought after despite being a bit expensive. Says the Chairman of the Himachal Pradesh Agriculture Marketing Board, Satya Prakash Thakur: "The Himachal Pradesh Government is preparing to give better facilities to farmers during this season. More needs to be done to give the garlic growers of the hill State their due. It is unfortunate that the NDA Government has not raised the custom duties on import of such products to protect the interests of the domestic farmers."

Nevertheless, the immediate future does not look too bright for the garlic farmers who are now being forced to adopt other means or switch to farming of other products to survive in the farming sector.

## REGIONS

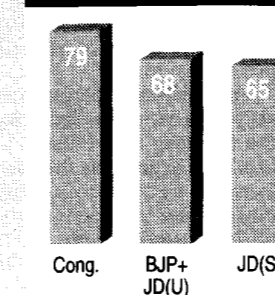
- Hyderabad Karnataka**
1. Bidar
  2. Gulbarga
  3. Raichur
  4. Koppal
  5. Bellary
- Old Mysore**
6. Davangere
  7. Chitradurga
  8. Tumkur
  9. Chikballapur
  10. Kolar (SC)
  11. Kanakapura
  12. Bangalore North
  13. Bangalore South
  14. Mandya
  15. Chamarajanagar
  16. Mysore
  17. Hassan
  18. Chikmagalur
  19. Shimoga

- Coastal Karnataka**
17. Mangalore
  18. Udipi
  22. Kanara

- Bombay Karnataka**
23. Dharwad South
  24. Dharwad North
  25. Belgaum
  26. Chikkodi
  27. Bagalkot
  28. Bijapur

Congress transferred more of its Lok Sabha votes at Assembly level than its rivals

Vote transfer rate



Note: Vote transfer refers to the proportion of the party's votes in the Lok Sabha poll who also voted for the same party in the Assembly poll. Source: CSDS, National Election Study, Post Poll Survey 1999.

A small swing against the Congress in the Lok Sabha polls benefits BJP...

What would be the result this time in case...

Scenario	Congress	NDA
...there is a swing of 2% against Congress	14	14
...there is a swing of 4% against Congress	10	18
...there is a swing of 6% against Congress	7	21

...but only a huge swing would put the BJP-JD (U) in power at the State level

What would be the result this time in case...

Scenario	Congress	BJP + JD (U)
...there is a swing of 2% against Congress	107	71
...there is a swing of 4% against Congress	87	85
...there is a swing of 6% against Congress	70	97
...there is a swing of 8% against Congress	53	111

Note: The results of the Assembly elections 1999 is the starting point of this calculation. Calculating one percentage point swing against the Congress means deducting it from the Congress' vote share in each constituency and its reallocation to non-Congress parties in proportion to their strength. The votes of the JD(U) candidates where they contested against BJP candidates have not been included in the votes of the BJP-JD (U) votes.

Congress votes spread evenly across all the regions of the State

Regions	Assembly seats	Congress		BJP + JD(U)		JD(S)	
		Seats won	Vote share	Seats won	Vote share	Seats won	Vote share
Hyderabad Karnataka	40	27	42.8	10	35.8	3	9.9
Bombay Karnataka	48	29	40.8	11	35.3	2	7.2
Old Mysore	112	61	39.4	33	31.9	5	13.2
Coastal Karnataka	24	15	45.7	7	42.5	0	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10.4</b>

Note: Based on party performance in the 1999 Assembly elections. The vote shares for the BJP and the JD (U) includes the votes of both the parties in the 37 constituencies where they put up candidates against each other.

## CANDIDATE WATCH

Rahul Gandhi, Congress candidate, Amethi

Any other budding politician his age taking his first tentative steps into electoral politics would have come with family in tow. But this was evidently a luxury the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family could ill-afford as he arrived in Amethi to take charge of a constituency that has been held by both his parents and uncle in the past. Such was the need for Rahul Gandhi to step out of the shadow of his mother, Sonia Gandhi, and younger sister, Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra. The maximum he allowed himself was to have his sister see him off at the Delhi airport.

Till then an "enigma-of-sorts", Mr. Gandhi took his time opening up. As his motorcade entered Amethi at Chhilo village, the reticence associated with him was well in place. He made a feeble bid to step out of the Quails — apparently, a personal choice — but ostrich-like decided to just wade out from the window. As the motorcade proceeded towards Munshiganj — where the family sets up base whenever in the area — the 33-year-old gained in confidence.

Refusing to be hurried to his political baptism, Mr. Gandhi gradually began stepping out of his vehicle — the stops became more frequent as the day proceeded — mingling with the crowds and obliging byte-hungry journalists. He walked into a tea-stall and sipped the brew from a kulhar (earthen glass), hitched himself up on to his vehicle so that all present could catch a glimpse of "Rahul Bhaiyya," sat chatting arm-in-arm with an old lady for several minutes, held a bawling, scruffy child in his arms, picked up a shoe that slipped off a journalist's feet in the melee, allowed himself to be touched and hugged at will, ... without once showing any discomfort at this brush with the India that sweats and lives in grime.

If at all he looked uncomfortable with the adulation or irritated with all the attention, it was when

persons older than him sought to touch his feet and journalists came between him and the people. Still, within an hour, he had both Amethiwas (locals of Amethi) and scribes hanging on to his every word. The fifth generation member of one of the most enduring dynasties of modern history had arrived. And, he came well prepared.

Though the criticism about dynastic politics had forced him to leave his "family baggage" behind on his maiden visit to Amethi as a politician, Mr. Gandhi did not bat an eyelid to comparisons with his father, Rajiv Gandhi, or the manner in which people mixed up their names. "My father is my hero; I am my father's son. Why should I mind if people see him in me?" He melted into the crowds and gave all the right "sound bites" and indicated that his joining the Congress at this juncture was not a knee-jerk reaction to the death knell that has been sounded on the party. "It has been on my mind for 13 years, and, yes, politics is in my blood. I grew up seeing my grandmother and watched my father take to politics. Whatever people may say about us, we will not be provoked and we are not afraid to walk alone."

Well-tutored, cynics will say. Even so, "a good and quick learner" is the counter to those who see no wrong in Mr. Gandhi taking to electoral politics. Either way, with both Amethi and neighbouring Rae Bareilly being family strongholds, the going was not expected to be tough for the public school and Harvard-Cambridge-educated wannabe parliamentarian. Still, if his dishevelled state was anything to go by, the metamorphosis of Raul Vinci — the pseudonym this SPG-protégée used in Cambridge as a security cover to lead a normal student's life — to "Rahul Bhaiyya" appeared complete.

— Anita Joshua

Congress projected to drop under 100

# Survey sees Atal win by whisker

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 3: The National Democratic Alliance is predicted to retain power at the Centre. Only just.

An opinion poll — *Pehli Tasveer Chunav 2004* — conducted by the Star News channel projects 277 seats for the NDA, only a shade over the magic mark of 273 and not enough for its poll strategists to feel safe. The prediction is in a range of 271 to 283.

The survey bodes ill for the Congress. The party, which lost its hold over power in May 1996, is projected to drop below 100. The seat projection is 92, a drop of 20 from its 1999 tally.

As against a drop for the Congress, the BJP is predicted to improve its 1999 tally of 182 by 29 seats, exceeding the 200-mark for the first time. The projected tally is 211 seats.

The bad news for the BJP is that its allies would fare poorly, because of which the NDA's overall number could drop by around 20 seats, compared to the 300 it won in 1999. From 118 seats in 1999, the BJP's allies are projected to have a combined total of 66. But for the gains the BJP is projected to make, the NDA might well have surrendered its majority with the allies losing 52 seats.

Ironically, while the Congress is not expected to do well at all, its allies would fare better, push-

9.6/2004 5.1/4

	STAR News	Zee	Outlook
NDA	277	265+	280-290
Cong & allies	164	196+	159-169
Others	102	75	89-99
	India Today	Express-NDTV	
NDA	330-340	287-307	
Cong & allies	105-115	143-163	
Others	95-105	90-100	

ing the combined tally up to 164.

Outside the two main groupings, others like the Left, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party are projected to command a combined strength of 102 in the new Lok Sabha.

The Left parties are expected to improve their tally in Bengal and Kerala. In Bengal, the Left Front is projected to win 34 seats by wresting four from the Trinamul-BJP combine and one from the Congress. In Kerala, the Left Democratic Front is expected to bag 13 of the 20 seats, snatching four from the Congress-led combine.

The NDA is projected to lose heavily in Tamil Nadu and Bihar. In certain other states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Jharkhand its losses will be substantial. In Orissa and Delhi, the losses will be moderate.

To an extent, the losses will be offset by the projected big wins

in Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam and Chhattisgarh. The gains, however, will be overwhelmingly for the BJP and all at the Congress' cost.

While the largest improvement is expected to be in Karnataka in a drubbing for the Congress, in Uttar Pradesh, it is expected to retain its top position with a marginal improvement of five seats.

Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi, too, is projected to raise its tally to 30, an increase of four seats over 1999.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee is the single biggest trump card for the BJP, though it is not helping the NDA allies. Half of the electorate is shown as favouring Vajpayee's return as Prime Minister.

The survey, done for Star News by C Voters, involved interviews with over 12,000 people spread across 120 constituencies.



# Right move

## CEC move for free & fair poll in Bengal

The CEC's decision to bring in Bengali-speaking officials to conduct elections in West Bengal is commendable but not a guarantee of free and fair Lok Sabha polls in the state. The measure does not go a long enough distance to create a level playing field for all contestants; nor inspire the required confidence among voters to exercise their franchise freely and fairly. Although induction of outside officials may address, albeit significantly, the issue of rigged elections, it will not deal with the serious problem of terror unleashed before, during and after polls which has been so effective in influencing the outcome in a large number of constituencies since 1972 elections. If the CEC is to succeed, he must refuse to be content with half measures and insist on being prepared to go the whole hog. West Bengal enjoys the dubious distinction of returning unopposed thousands of Marxists in local body elections and opposition candidates are attacked and physically prevented from filing their nominations. Neither Marxists nor poll officials will admit to what has happened. The role of some key IPS officers, three of whom have just been transferred by the CEC for their highly controversial past, and also of some district magistrates and sub-divisional officers has lent the administration such a partisan image that voters have begun to lose faith. As returning officers DMs tend to ignore even the most serious complaints. On election day complaints, howsoever genuine, are ignored. Central forces are kept far away from sensitive booths. The role of several poll observers has been no less dubious. They prefer to stay in "unknown" locations and on the polling day watch videos. They are invisible in constituencies they are to oversee.

Results are predictable. Marxists polled between 99 and 100 per cent where Opposition got a single percentage or no votes at all. In assembly elections Marxists have won by ridiculous margin of 110,000 votes which Alimuddin hails as a historic people's verdict. Already a large section of voters have begun to lose faith in the ballot box because of the farce in the name of elections. If this trend continues elections in West Bengal will lose their relevance.

THE STATESMAN

2 MAR 2001

# হেমা বি জে পি-তে, রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে নালিশ জানাবে কংগ্রেস

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১৯ ফেব্রুয়ারি— বলিউডের তারকাদের দলে নেওয়া নিয়ে বিজেপি ও কংগ্রেসের মধ্যে প্রবল কাঁজিয়া শুরু হল। আজ 'ড্রিম গার্ল' হেমা মালিনী আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে বিজেপি'তে যোগ দিয়েছেন। কংগ্রেস এ নিয়ে রাষ্ট্রপতি আব্দুল কালামের কাছে নালিশ জানাতে চলেছে।

হেমা মালিনী রাজ্যসভার মনোনীত সদস্য। কংগ্রেসের অভিযোগ, মনোনীত সদস্যর এই ভাবে দলে যোগ দেওয়ার অর্থ রাষ্ট্রপতির মর্যাদাহানি। কোনও সদস্যের এটা করা উচিত নয়। অথচ হেমা মালিনী করেছেন। রাষ্ট্রপতিকে কংগ্রেস বলবে, এই প্রবণতা বন্ধ হওয়া দরকার। কোনও একটি বিশেষ ক্ষেত্রে অবদানের জন্য বিশিষ্ট ব্যক্তিকে রাষ্ট্রপতি রাজ্যসভায় মনোনীত করেন। সেই ব্যক্তিত্ব যদি পরে রাজনৈতিক দলে যোগ দেন তা হলে সেটা অন্যায্য।

বিজেপি সভাপতি বেঙ্কাইয়া নাইডু এর মধ্যে কোনও অন্যায্য দেখতে পাচ্ছেন না। তাঁর পরিষ্কার বক্তব্য, সংবিধান অনুযায়ী, মনোনীত হওয়ার ছ'মাসের মধ্যে কেউ রাজনৈতিক দলের সদস্য হতে পারেন। হেমা মালিনী ছ'মাসের মধ্যেই বিজেপিতে যোগ দিচ্ছেন। ফলে সংবিধান অনুযায়ী তিনি এই কাজ করতেই পারেন। হেমা মালিনীও জানিয়েছেন, বিজেপি সদস্য হিসাবে রাজ্যসভায় তিনি এ বার থেকে দলের নির্দেশ মেনেই চলবেন।

কংগ্রেসের অভিযোগ শুধু এটাই নয়। দলের মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মার বক্তব্য, বেঙ্কাইয়া, প্রমোদ মহাজন ফি দিনই বলিউডের কাউকে না কাউকে দলের সদস্য করছেন। এঁদের মধ্যে সুরেশ ওবেরয়ের মতো অনেককেই প্রতিটি নির্বাচনের আগে সদস্য করায় বিজেপি। শর্মার মন্তব্য, "যাঁদের আমরা ১৯৯৬, '৯৮, '৯৯ সালে বিজেপি সদস্য হতে দেখেছি তাঁদেরই আবার সদস্য হতে দেখছি। ওঁরা তো আমাদের স্মৃতিকেও চ্যালেঞ্জ জানাচ্ছেন।"

কিন্তু বিজেপি নেতাদের বক্তব্য, এর আগে এই তারকারা অনেকেই বিজেপি'র হয়ে প্রচার করেছেন ঠিকই, কিন্তু কেউ দলের সদস্য হননি। আজ হাঙ্কা সবুজ শাড়ি পরা হেমা মালিনীও বলেন, "আমি সব সময়ই বিজেপি'র সঙ্গে থেকেছি। প্রচার করেছি। কাজের চাপে দলে আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে যোগ দিতে পারিনি। আমি বিজেপি'র মতাদর্শ পছন্দ করি। বাজপেয়ীকে শ্রদ্ধা করি। প্রচুর কাজ করব।" সদস্য হওয়ার পর ওবেরয়ও বলেছিলেন, এতদিন প্রচার করে এসেছেন। এ বার তিনি সদস্য হলেন।

আপনি কি ভোটে দাঁড়বেন? প্রশ্ন শুনে একটু থেমে হেমা বলেন, "দাঁড়াতেও পারি। দল যা বলবে তাই করব।" অকালি দল চায়, হেমা'কে হোশিয়ারপুর থেকে দাঁড় করাও বিজেপি। বিজেপি'র রাজ্য শাখা চায় না। রাজ্যে দলের ভাগে তিনটি আসন। একটিতে আছেন বিনোদ খন্না। আরেকটি যদি হেমা দখল করে নেন, তা হলে বিজেপি'র অন্য নেতাদের আর ভোটে লড়া হবে না। ধর্মেন্দ্র কি এ বার বিজেপি'তে যোগ দেবেন? প্রশ্নটা ওঠার পর হেমা'র আগেই বেঙ্কাইয়া বলে দেন, "আমি কিছু জানি না।"

তবে হেমা'কে কিছুটা অপ্রস্তুত করে দেন প্রমোদ। সদস্যপত্রে সই করার পর প্রমোদ তাঁর হাতে পাঁচ টাকার নোট গুঁজে দিয়ে বলেন, "এই একদিনই আমরা সদস্যচাঁদা হিসাবে সামান্য টাকা পাই। আপনি পরে আমাকে এই টাকাটা দিয়ে দেবেন।" অপ্রস্তুত হেমা হেসে ফেলে বলেন, "আমি আগে জানতাম না।" রশিদ হাতে নিয়ে ফের হেসে হেমা বলেন, "এটাই কী সদস্য হওয়ার একমাত্র প্রমাণপত্র।" হেমা'র সঙ্গে আজ লোকজনশক্তি সাংসদ চন্দ্রবিজয় সিংহও বিজেপি'তে যোগ দেন।

এ দিকে, জয়ললিতার সঙ্গে আসন সমঝোতা হলেও এ ডি এম কে নেত্রীর জেদের কাছে নতিস্বীকার করায় বিজেপি পুদুমকোট্টাই আসনটি পায়নি। এখানেই কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রী থিরুভাক্সারাসু প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা করেন। বেঙ্কাইয়া জানিয়েছেন, থিরুভাক্সারাসুকে রাজ্যসভায় আনা হবে।

# EC for polls from April 15

Rajnish Sharma  
New Delhi, February 4

THE ELECTION Commission is planning to initiate the exercise for the Lok Sabha polls with first phase of polling starting on April 15. The EC, sources added, was working on a schedule where the polls, to be conducted in four phases and the counting, will be completed by May 5.

"We hope that the structure of the new government at the Centre will be clear by May 7," a source pointed out. The Commission started the exercise for preparing the tentative poll schedule following the meeting of the state chief electoral officers where poll arrangements ranging from availability of EVMs and revision of electoral rolls were discussed.

Since the Lok Sabha polls have been clubbed with Assem-

bly elections in Andhra, the entire exercise has to be completed by May 13, by which time the new Assembly has to be constituted in the state. "We will meet this deadline very comfortably. In fact, the election process will be over much before this," a senior EC official pointed out.

The EC has already decided not to disrupt the schedule for school examination, which according to EC's feedback will continue till April 7. Sources said the Commission has already indicated to the government that the poll process could not be started before April 7.

Sufficient EVMs, EC sources said, will be available by April 15. This is the first time that only EVMs are to be used across the country both for LS and Assembly polls. Sources said the EC anticipates Karnataka might go for early Assembly polls.

২০ এপ্রিলের আগে ভোট শুরু নয়

# কমিশনের মনোভাবে ফ্যাসাদে বিজেপি

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল • নয়াদিল্লি

৩১ জানুয়ারি: ভোট কবে হবে?

প্রশ্নটি নিয়ে খোদ বাজপেয়ী সরকারই এখন ফ্যাসাদে।

নির্বাচনের দিনক্ষণ স্থির করতে কমিশনের প্রথম বৈঠকটি হবে ৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি। কিন্তু কমিশনের পক্ষ থেকে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়কে আজ ঘরোয়াভাবে জানিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে, ২০ এপ্রিল থেকে ১১ মে-র মধ্যে ৪টি পর্যায়ে ভোট সম্ভব। তার আগে ভোট করা যাবে না। আনুষ্ঠানিকভাবে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে কমিশন সনিয়া গান্ধীর কংগ্রেস এবং অন্যান্য রাজনৈতিক দলের মতামতও এই ব্যাপারে গ্রহণ করবে। কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব চাইছে ভোট এপ্রিলের শেষের দিকেই হোক। এই সময়টা পেলে সনিয়া গান্ধী জোট রাজনীতিতে অনেকটা এগিয়ে যেতে পারবেন। কেননা এখনও মায়াবতী, করুণাকরন এবং শরদ পওয়ারের সঙ্গে আসন সমঝোতা নিয়ে বোঝাপড়া চূড়ান্ত করতে আরও কয়েক সপ্তাহ লাগবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। বি জে পি-র এক প্রতিনিধি দল কিন্তু গত কালই কমিশনের সঙ্গে দেখা করে মার্চের শেষেই ভোট করার দাবি জানিয়েছেন।

বি জে পি শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব কমিশনের এই অনমনীয় মনোভাবে বেশ অস্বস্তিতে পড়ে গিয়েছে। বি জে পি-র এক নেতার মন্তব্য, ভোট যদি মার্চের শেষে না-হয়, তবে এত তাড়াহুড়ো করে লোকসভা ভাঙার দরকারটা কী ছিল। মার্চের শেষে যাতে ভোট করা সম্ভব হয় তাই ৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি লোকসভা ভাঙার সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছিল। লোকসভা ভাঙার বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারির পর কমিশনকে ন্যূনতম ৪৫ দিন সময় দিতে হয়। আর এই কারণেই প্রধানমন্ত্রী তাঁর বিদেশ সফর বাতিল করে দিলেন। মূলত উপপ্রধানমন্ত্রী লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী এবং দলের সভাপতি বেঙ্কাইয়া নাইডুর চাপেই এ ব্যাপারটি মেনে নিতে বাধ্য হন প্রধানমন্ত্রী। তাঁর ইচ্ছা ছিল তাইল্যান্ড আর অস্ট্রেলিয়া সফর সেরে দেশে ফিরে লোকসভা ভাঙার সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হোক। সেক্ষেত্রে ১৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি লোকসভা ভাঙা যেতে পারত।

নির্বাচন কমিশন প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সচিবালয়কে জানিয়েছে, ২৫ মার্চের মধ্যে তাঁরা ভোটের তালিকা সংশোধনের কাজ শেষ করে ফেলবে। এই তালিকা তৈরি হওয়ার পর ৩ সপ্তাহ সময় দিতে হবে কমিশনকে। বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি, মনোনয়নপত্র দাখিল এবং কুটিনির কাজ এর মধ্যে তারা সেরে ফেলতে পারবে বলে কমিশন জানিয়েছে। এই যুক্তিতেই কমিশন প্রথম থেকে বলে আসছে, ১৫ এপ্রিলের আগে ভোট করা সম্ভব নয়। কমিশন সূত্রে বলা হচ্ছে ২০, ২২, ২৮ এপ্রিল এবং তার পর ৪ মে পর্যন্ত ভোট হতে পারে। ১০, ১১ মে-র মধ্যে ভোটের ফলাফল প্রকাশিত হয়ে যাবে। তার পর ১৩ মে নতুন সরকার শপথ গ্রহণ করবে।

ঘরোয়াভাবে জানানো এই নির্ধক্ট শুনে বি জে পি শিবিরে বিনা মেঘে বজ্রপাত হয়েছে। মুখ্যনির্বাচন কমিশনার জে এম লিংডো অবসর নেন ৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি। তার আগেই নির্বাচনের দিনক্ষণ নিয়ে যে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত হয়ে যাবে, তা নাও হতে পারে। কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব গোপালস্বামীও নির্বাচন কমিশনের অন্যতম সদস্য হিসাবে যোগ দেবেন ৭ ফেব্রুয়ারি। সেদিনই কৃষ্ণমূর্তি মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনারের দায়িত্বভার গ্রহণ করবেন। লিংডো চলে গেলেও কৃষ্ণমূর্তি মনে করছেন, ভোট ২০ এপ্রিলের আগে করা কঠিন। বি জে পি কিন্তু কৃষ্ণমূর্তির উপর এখনও চাপ সৃষ্টি করছে যাতে তিনি মার্চ মাসের শেষেই ভোট করেন। আর একটি যুক্তি রয়েছে কমিশনের ঝুলিতে। গোটা দেশের পরীক্ষা শেষ হতে হতেও এপ্রিলের দ্বিতীয় সপ্তাহ গড়াবে। পরীক্ষা চলার সময় ভোট না হওয়াই বাঞ্ছনীয়।

লোকসভার পাশাপাশি অন্ধ্র এবং ওড়িশায় বিধানসভা নির্বাচন হবে। কনটিকেও সরকার ভোট করার কথা বলেছে। মহারাষ্ট্র, হরিয়ানার ভোট নিয়েও জল্পনা চলছে। নির্বাচন কমিশনারের কাছে এটাও একটা বাড়তি দায়িত্ব। স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব গোপালস্বামী এখন থেকেই কমিশনকে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, আধা সামরিক বাহিনী মোতায়েন করার সব কাজ সারা। কোনও সমস্যা নেই।

1 FEB 2004

# ভোটারের জন্য বিশেষ সফর বাতিল অটলের

জাতীয় স্তরে  
এনডিএ-কে  
পূর্ণ সমর্থন  
পূর্ণ সাংমার  
গৌতম হোড ● নয়াদিল্লি

কে প্রধানমন্ত্রী,  
ভোটার আগে  
সনিয়া প্রচার  
চাইছেন না  
অগ্নি রায় ● নয়াদিল্লি

## জঙ্গনের অবসান, কমিশনের প্রধান কৃষ্ণমূর্তিই

১৯ জানুয়ারি- ১৯

মধ্যে অনেক কম দিনের ব্যবধান রাখতে পারে কমিশন। অতএব, এখন দেখার, নতুন নির্বাচন কমিশন রীতিনীতি মানে, নাকি আইনের ফাঁক দিয়ে ক্ষেত্রীয় সরকারের মজিমাকিফ ভোট করবে?

লোকসভা নির্বাচনের মুখে কে নির্বাচন কমিশনার হবেন, তা নির্ধারণ করতে এখনই সঙ্কটমুক্তি নির্ধারণ করা হবে।

সপ্তাহের আগে ভোট করানো অসুবিধাজনক। দায়িত্ব নেওয়ার আগে কৃষ্ণমূর্তির বক্তব্য হচ্ছে, ভোটার তালিকা ও সচিব পরিচয়পত্র তৈরির কাজ কতটা হয়েছে, তার নিরিখেই ভোটের দিনক্ষণ নির্ধারণ করা হবে।

এ দিকে, বাজপেয়ী বিদেশ সফরে যাবেন কিনা, তা নিয়ে দলে বিরোধ দেখা দিয়েছিল। ভোট এগিয়ে আনতে সংসদের অধিবেশন ডাকা হয়েছে ২৯ তারিখ থেকে। ৫ তারিখ পর্যন্ত চলবে সংসদ। তার মধ্যে ভোট জমা আটকানোর পাশ করানো হবে।

কমিশনের প্রধান কৃষ্ণমূর্তিই ভোট করানো হবে।

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# PM foreign visit trips up on early elections

2011  
RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Jan. 19: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has called off his overseas trips early next month to press ahead with the agenda of early elections, possibly by late March or early April.

Vajpayee was scheduled to leave for Thailand on February 8 to attend a regional summit and proceed to Australia from there.

BJP sources said the Prime Minister cancelled the trips because "being out of the country for a whole week when everybody is in election mode will not send a positive signal". "The Prime Minister has made up his mind on early elections. Naturally he would like them to be held at the earliest," a source added.

With the summit out of the way, Vajpayee may recommend dissolution of Parliament either on February 5 or 6 after the vote-on-account is passed.

BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan said in Mumbai the party would press for general

## RAPID ACTION

- PM cancels foreign visit, BJP wants polls as early as possible
- Poll panel member T.S. Krishnamurthy named chief election commissioner
- Sangma and his forum declare support to NDA
- Sonia tinkers with team. Ambika Soni loses charge of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan but stays in Sonia's inner circle
- Mahajan keeps Maharashtra pot astir, says Pawar could join NDA after polls
- Jayalalithaa says she is not in race to be PM

elections "as early as possible". He added that a delegation of BJP leaders would meet the chief election commissioner (CEC) — T.S. Krishnamurthy was today named to succeed J.M. Lyngdoh — to put forth this demand.

Krishnamurthy is expected to take charge on February 8.

Sources said the impetus for an early election got strengthened for three reasons: one, the fear that the longer the uncertainty, the greater the chances of the Congress enlarging its alliance; two, to not allow the "feel-good-feel-great" theme to lose sheen; and three, the perception that the "pro-BJP" mood in cruc-

ial BJP-ruled states like Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh may start dissipating.

Starting with a luncheon meeting he had with deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu, Vajpayee, who generally remains aloof from party matters, signalled a change by plunging into political and organisational nitty-gritty.

Sources said the trio discussed alliances, states where Assembly and Lok Sabha polls could be held simultaneously, the new CEC's appointment and the possible election schedules. The decision to drop the foreign trips was apparently taken at the meeting.

The sources said the leaders sounded positive about a prospective tie-up with Jayalalithaa in Tamil Nadu. They also believe Nationalist Congress Party leader P.A. Sangma's entry will strengthen the NDA in the Northeast. The seven northeastern states together contribute 25 seats and the BJP feels it can build a formidable block there with four or five of its own and Sangma chipping in with 10 to 14.

It appears the BJP's blueprint of holding simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in as many states as possible may not fructify. Only Andhra Pradesh and Orissa seem prepared. Mahajan said a decision on dissolving the Orissa Assembly could be taken by January 28.

Earlier, the BJP wanted Assembly polls in Karnataka and Maharashtra as well since the life of the Houses there would expire in October. But the Karnataka chief minister has ruled out the possibility, while the consolidation of the Congress-Sharad Pawar alliance ensures continuation of the Maharashtra coalition. (See P 6)

THE TELEGRAPH

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# ১০ মার্চ ভোট, ইঙ্গিতে বি জে পি

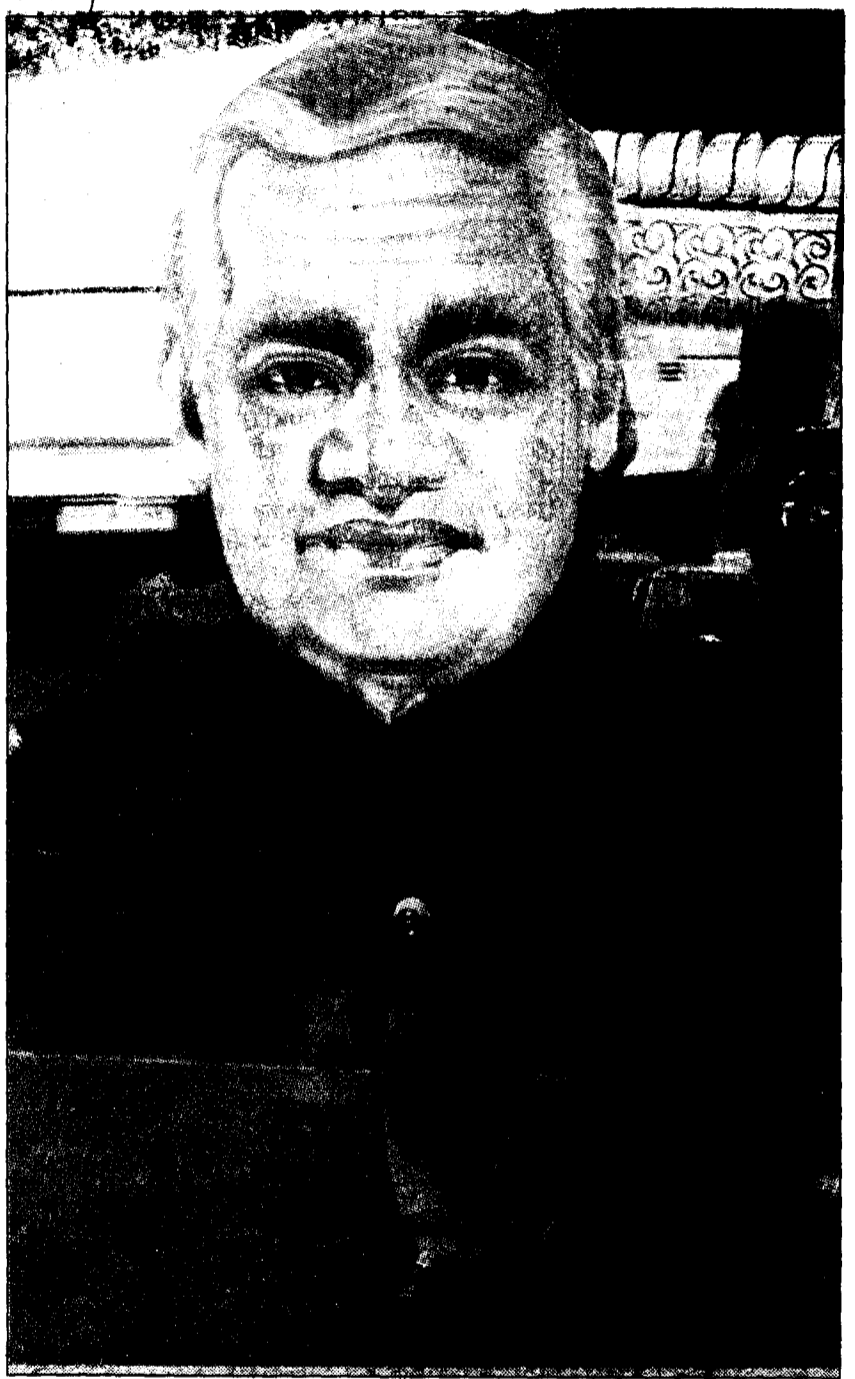
১০/৩/০৪

১০/৩/০৪

১০/৩/০৪

দেবাক্ষর রায়, হায়দরাবাদ

১০ জানুয়ারি— হিন্দু পঞ্জিকার তিথি-নক্ষত্র মেনে লোকসভা দখল অভিযানে নামছে বি জে পি। ১৪ জানুয়ারি মকর সংক্রান্তিতে সূর্যের উত্তরায়ণ শুরু। ওই দিনই দক্ষিণ ভারতের জনপ্রিয় উৎসব পোঙ্গল। সেদিনই ত্রয়োদশ লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার সম্ভাব্য তারিখ ঘোষণা করা হবে। চতুর্দশ লোকসভা গঠনের কাজও শুরু হবে সেই মকর সংক্রান্তির 'পূণ্য' তিথিতে। লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার ৪৫ দিনের মধ্যে সাধারণ নির্বাচন চায় বি জে পি। সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রমোদ মহাজনের সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে বি জে পি-র 'মিশন ২০০৪'-এর কর্মসূচি একরকম স্পষ্ট হয়ে উঠল। ঠিক কবে লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়া হবে, এ প্রশ্নের সরাসরি উত্তর এড়িয়ে মহাজন মকর সংক্রান্তির দিনটি যে রাজনৈতিকভাবে অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সে কথা বুঝিয়ে দিলেন। সূর্যের উত্তরায়ণের সঙ্গে মিলিয়ে দিলেন বি জে পি লোকসভা দখল অভিযানকে। অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশ ইউনিয়ন অফ ওয়ার্কিং জার্নালিস্টসের উদ্যোগে আয়োজিত সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে প্রমোদ মহাজন বললেন, আশা করা যায় মার্চের মধ্যেই নির্বাচন পর্ব চুকে যাবে। ভাইসরয় হোটেলের আগামী কাল শুরু হচ্ছে বি জে পি-র কর্মসূচির দু-দিনের অতিগুরুত্বপূর্ণ বৈঠক। সেই বৈঠকেই লোকসভা ভাঙার দিনক্ষণ চূড়ান্ত হবে। নির্বাচনী রণনীতি স্থির হবে। সুতরাং আগেভাগে প্রমোদ মহাজনের পক্ষে নির্দিষ্টভাবে কিছু বলা সম্ভব নয়। তাই তাঁকে সম্ভাবনার পথ খোলা রেখে প্রশ্নের জবাব দিতে হল। তিনি বললেন, যদি জানুয়ারির শেষে বা ফেব্রুয়ারির গোড়ায় লোকসভা ভেঙে দেওয়া হয়, ১৫ ফেব্রুয়ারি নির্বাচনের দিনক্ষণ হতে পারে। ১০ মার্চ ভোট গ্রহণের কাজ শুরু হলে মার্চের মধ্যেই নির্বাচন প্রক্রিয়া শেষ হতে পারে। তবে আমরা নির্বাচন কমিশনের ওপর কোনও সিদ্ধান্ত চাপিয়ে দিতে চাই না। আমরা চাই যত দ্রুত সম্ভব চতুর্দশ লোকসভা গঠনের কাজ শুরু হোক এবং সূষ্ঠু ও অবাধ নির্বাচনের মাধ্যমে জনগণের সরকার গঠিত হোক। লোকসভা ভোট কেন এগিয়ে আনা হচ্ছে? এ প্রশ্নে প্রমোদ মহাজন বলেন, নির্ধারিত সময় হল সেপ্টেম্বর। কিন্তু ওই মাসটা ভোটের পক্ষে খুব খারাপ। দেশের বহু এলাকায় তখন পুরোদমে বর্ষা। আমরা মনে করি, ভোটের পক্ষে সেরা সময় ফেব্রুয়ারি। যেহেতু ফেব্রুয়ারিতে ভোট করা সম্ভব হবে না, তাই চাইব যত তাড়াতাড়ি সম্ভব ভোট হোক। আরেকটি প্রশ্নের উত্তরে বি জে পি সাধারণ সম্পাদক বললেন, মূল তিনটি ইস্যুতে আমরা ভোটে লড়ব। নেতৃত্ব, স্থিতিশীলতা ও উন্নয়ন। অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী এখন দেশের শ্রেষ্ঠ নেতা। ওঁর সঙ্গে সোনিয়া গান্ধীর তুলনাই হয় না। এদিকে অটল-বরণে হায়দরাবাদ শহর আলোয় ভাসিয়ে দিয়েছেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী চন্দ্রবাবু নাইডু। রাতের শহর দিনের মতোই উজ্জ্বল। রাজভবন ও ভাইসরয় হোটেলের লাগোয়া এলাকা আলো দিয়ে সাজিয়েছে সরকার। বেশিরভাগ আইল্যান্ড নানা রঙে রঙিন করা হয়েছে। ভাইসরয় হোটেল দুর্গের চেহারা নিয়েছে। এখানেই বসছে বি জে পি-র কর্মসূচির বৈঠক। আগামী কাল থেকে বহু পথে স্বাভাবিক যান-চলাচল নিষিদ্ধ। রাজভবন ও ভাইসরয় হোটেলের সংযোগ সড়ক এখন নিরাপত্তা বাহিনীর দখলে। হায়দরাবাদের পশ্চিমাঞ্চলের পুলিশের হাতে বাজপেয়ী ও আদবানির যাতায়াত নিষিদ্ধ করার দায়িত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছে। ভি ভি আই পি-দের চলাচল নিরূপদ করতে বিশেষ পুলিশ বাহিনী আনা হয়েছে। অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশ বি জে পি-র সভাপতি এন ইন্দ্রসেনা রেড্ডিকে কারা নাকি প্রাণনাশের



বি জে পি চলল ভোটে। হায়দরাবাদে। ছবি: এ এফ পি

AAJKAL

11 JAN 2004