

# THE HINDU

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## Historic popular mandate

IRONICALLY, IT'S AT the end of a year of unprecedented shocks to the body politic and to the morale of the people, triggering worldwide speculation about the ability of Indians to hold together and come through the crisis, that the most powerful, the most sweeping and one-sided, the most stunning mandate for one Centre and one party in the nation's history has been won. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's triumph is unique in character, scale and quality, the kind of parliamentary electoral outcome that goes beyond anything that his mother or even his grandfather was able to turn out for the Congress party and that is not going to be repeated for a while given the rules of the Indian political game. If these figures had turned up in a political novel, they would have invited perhaps critical taunts at the author's inclination for the fanciful if not for melodrama. The character of the Congress (I)'s victory in the Eighth General Elections is such as to bring the elected national political system very close to a one-party model. And the scale of the triumph is quite unprecedented in respect of the proportion of votes polled nationally by the winning party and, always disproportionate to this, the number of seats bagged. It used to be a standard observation after each of the seven general elections that the winning party was brought to power on a minority of the national vote; that routine has been upset by the latest numbers. And given the difficult-to-predict way in which votes translate themselves into seats for the winners and losers, the new figure of speech to denote a ruling party position beyond challenge in the Lok Sabha will be not two-thirds, or even three-fourths—but a four-fifths majority. The electric quality of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's political success can simply be expressed in terms of how the Opposition stands in the new Lok Sabha. For virtually all the national parties opposing the Congress (I), it has been a hard struggle towards the elementary dignity of a double digit Lok Sabha existence. The unambiguous defeat of many prominent Opposition leaders, notably the presidents of the BJP and the Janata, must intensify the feeling of decimation and demoralisation in their camp. As a State, Andhra Pradesh constitutes about the only exception to the all-India trends that show a marked preference in favour of the Congress (I) compared with the position preceding this general election. The success of the Telugu Desam leader, Mr. N. T. Rama Rao, the Chief Minister, in creating a popular wave of his own to keep the Rajiv (or Indira?) wave out of the largest of the southern States does stand out as a major political event. In West Bengal, the Left Front headed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has held its own, but not without suffering a severe erosion in its political position in the State, and especially in the urban areas. In Kashmir, the out-of-power National Conference led by Dr. Farooq Abdullah has done well, which means the minority group led by Mr. G. M. Shah, the Chief Minister, could be in trouble. But these results upvalue Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's remarkable political achievement rather than take away anything significant from it. It's a truly historic popular mandate won across-the-board, in every zone and social cross-section in a vast country that provides the world's largest electoral experience.

The 1984 verdict is dramatic confirmation of the finding of political researchers that the Indian voter is learning to exercise his or her choice in an increasingly direct, evolved and clear-cut way that gives rise to truly national patterns of political behaviour. He or she participates more directly than ever before in the electoral process and expresses a political mind sharply and decisively. Reflecting this evolved character of electoral behaviour, public opinion polls have begun to catch up with the popular mood more accurately, an observation that can be sustained by examining the results turned out by some of the major national polls this time, including the FRONTLINE-IMRB public opinion survey published in THE HINDU on the eve of the elections. But what are the qualitative factors making for the ruling party's overpowering victory in the Eighth General Elections? The most important would appear to be the powerful mass urge for keeping India united and as one, free from the dangers of internal threats such as the Punjab crisis and external aggression. This is linked up, of course, with the "sympathy factor" that has worked magically for Mr. Rajiv Gandhi—in favour of his taking over as Prime Minister after the vile and brutal slaying of his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The 1984 result expresses at one level a tremendous national mass protest against the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi by a band of anti-national, separatist terrorists. The other side of this phenomenon is the overwhelming endorsement of the son and political inheritor at the level of the common man and woman, rendering criticisms and allegations of "dynastic rule" and so forth irrelevant. Under the tragic circumstances, there was no credible Opposition challenge on a national scale. Whereas Mr. Rajiv Gandhi campaigned simply on his party's ability to hold India strong and united, the Opposition found itself performing in a cramped and inhibited way, bringing up few issues that made sense to the voters. Too much is perhaps made of the alleged disunity of the Opposition parties—this time, indices of their effective unity suggested a better prospect for them, thanks to seat adjustments, than in 1980—but there is no question that the inability of the Opposition campaigners at the national level to inspire voters with their programmes and policies explains the larger-than-life margin of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's victory. The other major point that needs to be made even now, before a new Government takes over, is that while it is a vote for rootedness and much that the people can identify with emotionally from the recent past, it must also be read as an impressive mandate for change—in the sense expectations have been aroused of a vastly improved performance from the Government.

# Cong (I) gets two-thirds majority

From G. K. Reddy

NEW DELHI, Dec. 29.

The Congress (I) has won a spectacular victory with the biggest ever majority of 378 out of total 508 seats involved in the current Lok Sabha elections, giving the ruling party an unprecedented four-fold lead over the combined Opposition, when most of the remaining results came in tonight.

A general body meeting of the Congress (I) Parliamentary Party has been called at mid-day on Monday, December 31, to formally re-elect Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as its leader, before he is sworn in as the next Prime Minister along with his new Cabinet colleagues the same afternoon.

It is considered an auspicious day for his assumption of office in his own right, so that he can begin the new year as head of a new government, along with a message of reassurance that he intends to keep his promises to the people.

New faces likely: He would be addressing the nation in a special broadcast a few days later in the first week of January, spelling out his policies and programmes in greater detail, to sustain the momentum of expectations. His informal meeting with the press today was intended only as a curtain-raiser to

prepare the country for the impending induction of many new faces into his Cabinet.

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi also indicated today that the first session of the new Lok Sabha would be called in the third week of February, but he did not say whether it would be a full-fledged budget session or just a brief one to get a vote on account.

It is quite likely that a fuller budget session will follow the Assembly polls, to be held some time in March or April, in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and possibly in Karnataka as well following State Cabinet's decision today seeking dissolution of the Assembly followed by fresh elections.

Simultaneously, plans are being drawn for reorganising the AICC (I) office to run it on more modern lines, with some degree of specialisation in different spheres, to provide the right guidance to the Pradesh Congress (I) Committees on policy matters and also establish better rapport between the central leadership and the party units in the States.

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi is also thinking of giving up the party presidency as soon as he can find a senior colleague to shoulder this responsibility, so that he could concentrate on the work of the Government.

Role for Opposition: Though the Opposition par-

ties at the national level have been thoroughly discredited by their miserable performance. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi is not writing them off as totally spent forces of no consequence with hardly any fighting spirit left in them. He is not unaware of the realities of the Indian electoral system in which even the defeated parties poll together tens of millions of votes in parliamentary or Assembly elections.

The new Prime Minister, with fewer inhibitions, does not want to make the big mistake of ignoring them to the point of leaving them with no alternative except to take the controversies from legislatures to streets. He therefore, hinted today, of his readiness to seek their cooperation in resolving major national problems like Punjab, if only a better equation could be established between the Government and the Opposition.

Poll percentage: The over-all national percentage of the voter turn-out during the Lok Sabha elections is not yet available with the Election Commission as it is yet to receive detailed figures from the returning officers in each of the 508 constituencies where polling took place.

But rough estimates indicate that it might have touched a high figure contrary to the earlier expectations. It is equally possible that the Congress (I) has

polled, for the first time, more than 50 per cent of the total votes cast in these elections.

In the first general election to Parliament in 1952, the then undivided Congress won 364 of the 489 seats with 45 per cent votes. The percentage went up to 47.8 in 1957 when the party secured 371 of the 494 seats. In 1962, the Congress won 361 seats out of 494 with 44.7 per cent votes, while in 1967 it managed to get 283 of the 520 seats with 40.8 per cent votes.

After the first Congress split, the party led by Indira Gandhi won 352 of the 518 seats in 1971 with 43.7 per cent votes, but in 1977, after the emergency, its tally slumped down to 154 out of the 542 seats on a vote of 34.5 per cent. In 1980, the Congress (I) made a remarkable recovery by bagging as many as 353 of the 542 seats with 42.7 per cent votes. It would not be surprising if in the current elections the party has secured between 45 and 50 per cent votes.

It was a day of high elation in the Congress (I) camp here since Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's personal victory in Amethi with a record margin of 3,14,878 and his chief rival, Mrs. Menaka Gandhi, losing her deposit, matched with the mood of the party's over-all performance.



Mr. Rajiv Gandhi addresses an impromptu public meeting in New Delhi yesterday. With him sharing the stage were some of the seven party victors from the nation's capital.—Wirephoto.

## Hegde seeks poll, quits

From Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, Dec. 29.

The two-year-old Janata Government in Karnataka, headed by Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde, bowed out of office today in the "democratic traditions" of the State, following the Lok Sabha poll verdict. Mr. Hegde has recommended the dissolution of the 225-member on "moral grounds" and State Assembly and fresh polls at all earliest.

The Chief Minister sent in his resignation letter to the Governor, Mr. A. N. Banerji and also forwarded to him a resolution of his Cabinet adopted at its morning session, recommending the Assembly dissolution. The gist of the Chief Minister's letter was conveyed over the wireless to the Governor, who is now away in Dharwar on tour. The Chief Minister will formally call on the Governor, after Mr. Banerji's return to the city tomorrow.

Addressing a crowded press conference later, Mr. Hegde, said apart from the "moral grounds" involved, his decision was intended to put the latest Congress (I) claims and demands for his resignation to rest.

Referring to the claim of the former Chief Minister, Mr. R. Gundu Rao that the State Government has lost its popular support, Mr. Hegde wondered whether Mr. Gundu Rao knew what was popular support. In this context, he pointed out that Mr. Gundu Rao became the Chief Minister in 1980 with the support of "defectors" and not of the people.

Now it is time to test the popular support unless Mr. Gundu Rao and his friends wanted to form an alternative government again on the strength of defectors. Mr. Hegde said. That was why he has asked for the dissolution of the Assembly, he claimed and expressed the hope that the Congress (I) leaders will accept "this invitation".

No credibility question: In his letter to the Governor, Mr. Hegde referred to the comments of certain Congress (I) leaders on the outcome of the Lok Sabha poll and said that even these elections have no bearing on the credibility of the State Government. Also his party has won four seats this time, and has polled 41.86 per cent of the votes, along with its allies compared to the lone seat it got in the 1980 elections when it polled only 22.93 per cent of the votes. Mr. Hegde said.

As such, it is clear that in no way has the credibility of the State Government suffered; nor has its popular support eroded. On the contrary, the Congress (I) has not only lost three seats to the Janata Party but there has also been a five per cent fall in the votes polled by that party this time as compared to 1980. Also, the issues in the Lok Sabha elections were national and the performance of the local Government came for popular review, only incidentally, he said.

Even then, Mr. Hegde thought that it was necessary to seek a fresh mandate of the people in keeping

with the best traditions of democracy. Therefore, he has requested that the dissolution of the State Assembly be ordered immediately, in accordance with the Cabinet decision, so that the Election Commission could fix an early date for the election, Mr. Hegde said.

The Chief Minister also told the Governor that since he took the decision to recommend dissolution on moral grounds, he thought he should not continue in office. He would, therefore, tender his resignation, Mr. Hegde said and thanked the Governor for the courtesy and cooperation extended by him, during his tenure.

It is now for the Governor to act on the resolution, exercising his discretion. If the Cabinet's advice is accepted, it is presumed that elections might be clubbed with the bunch of Assemblies going to the polls in March.

Congress (I) not for forming Govt.: The dominant view held in the Congress (I) is that if the Hegde Government resigns, the party should eschew the temptation to form an alternative Government, to avoid any truck with "defectors". It is pointed out that the party paid a heavy price for forming a government of "defectors" under Mr. R. Gundu Rao in January 1980, when the late Devaraj Urs resigned after the 1980 Lok Sabha mid-term poll.

Mr. Gundu Rao yesterday demanded that the State Government should quit following the Lok Sabha verdict. None on behalf of the party, until now, has talked about the prospects of the Congress (I) forming an alternative Government.

Public image of Hegde: According to party sources, one of the reasons favouring the resignation was the concern of the party to protect the high public image of Mr. Hegde. The all-India election picture was also taken into consideration.

Another factor which is stated to have weighed with the Hegde Ministry was the defeat of five Ministers in Lok Sabha constituencies. Only one Minister, Mr. V. S. Krishna Iyer, got through from the Bangalore South constituency.

Mr. Hegde himself viewed the resignation of his Government in the context of his party's commitment to value-based politics and said the nationwide voting pattern was, indeed an unprecedented sweep (for the Congress-I). In that context, he said, the performance of the Janata Party in Karnataka must be considered highly creditable.

Mr. Hegde, however, pointed out that the Telugu Desam and the National Conference of Dr. Farooq Abdullah have fared well in Andhra Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir respectively and that the Congress (I) failed to make a dent in the two States. These two regional parties escaped the Congress (I) sweep while all the national Opposition parties were not spared. He bowed to the verdict of the electorate, Mr. Hegde said.

In the 225-member Assembly the Janata Party, though in a minority with 102 seats, is supported by the 18-member BJP, and three members each of the CPI and of the CPI (M). The Congress (I) has a strength of 87.

Informal talks with allies: Page 12

## Ruling party stays unstoppable

NEW DELHI, Dec. 29.

The Congress (I) today outstripped all previous electoral records by capturing 394 seats in the Lok Sabha, more than what it had won in 1980 and well above the two-thirds majority.

With 14 seats of the 508 polled still to be declared, the party maintained the winning average of over 80 per cent which should take it to a massive three-fourths majority in the eighth Lok Sabha.

The partywise breakup of the remaining seats filled is CPI (M) 14, Janata party 10, BJP two, Congress (S) four, DMKP three, CPI five, Telugu Desam 27, AIADMK 12, DMK one, Congress (I) one, and Independents and others 21.

The previous largest majority was 371 seats which Jawaharlal Nehru secured in the 1957 elections to a 494-member House.

The majority obtained by the Janata party in 1977 was 302.

The party made a near clean sweep of the Hindi belt—it won 82 of the 84 seats in U.P.—and staged a comeback in Karnataka. It retrieved some ground in Andhra Pradesh and re-established itself as a factor in Tamil Nadu.

First time over 50 per cent: The scale of victory and impressive winning margins of the Congress (I) candidates would show that for the first time in its history, the party would be getting around 50 per cent of the popular vote.

The bulk of the Congress (I)'s gains of 72 seats of the first 348 seats declared had been wrested from the Janata, the Communist parties and the BJP, in that order.

Telugu Desam's gain: A PTI-CMC computer analysis showed that the Congress lost 37 of the seats it had previously held, the bulk to the regional Telugu Desam party; the other gainers being AIADMK, BJP, CPI (M), DMKP, Janata and Independents. The party's net gain thus was 35.—PTI, UNI.

Mr. D. N. Reddi of the Telugu Desam is leading by about 25,000 votes over his nearest Congress (I) rival, Mr. Kandula Obul Reddi, in the Cuddapah parliamentary constituency.

Lok Sabha results: Pages 2, 3, 5  
Tamil Nadu Assembly results: Page 4  
Other election reports: Pages 12, 16

## Party position.

Lok Sabha	
Total seats	508
Results declared	494
Congress (I)	394
CPI (M)	14
DMKP	3
Janata	10
BJP	2
CPI	5
Congress (S)	4
Telugu Desam	27
AIADMK	12
DMK	1
Others	17
Independents	5

Andhra Pradesh: Seats declared 39; Congress (I) Six; Telugu Desam 27; CPI one; CPI (M) one; BJP one; Janata one; Congress (S) one; Majlis one.

Bihar: Seats declared 53; Congress (I) 48; CPI one; Congress (I) one; DMKP one; Janata one; Independent one.

Gujarat: Seats declared 24; Congress (I) 22; Janata one; BJP one.

Himachal Pradesh: Seats declared: three; Congress (I) three.

Maharashtra: Total seats 48; Seats declared 48; Congress (I) 43; Janata one; Congress (S) two; PWP one; Independent one.

Madhya Pradesh: Seats declared 39; Congress (I) 39.

Orissa: Total seats 21; Seats declared 21; Congress (I) 20; Janata one.

Rajasthan: Total seats 25; Seats declared: 25; Congress (I) 25.

Tamil Nadu: Total seats 39; Seats declared 38 (countermanded one); Congress (I) 25; AIADMK 12; DMK one.

Tripura: Total seats two; Seats declared two; CPI (M) two.

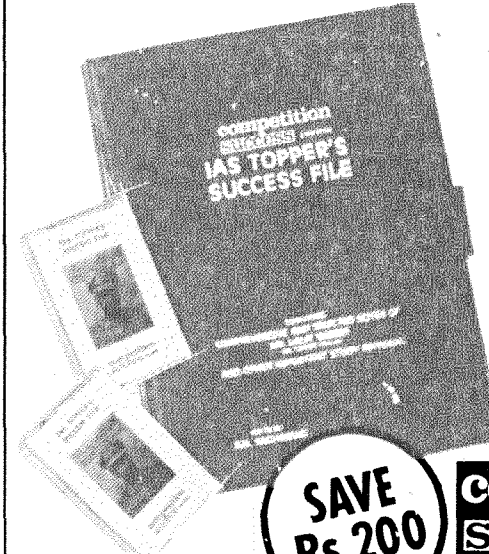
U.P.: Total seats 85 (one countermanded); Seats declared 84; Congress (I) 82; DMKP two.

West Bengal: Seats declared 33; CPI (M) 16; Congress (I) 12; CPI two; FB one and RSP two.

## Final party position

Tamil Nadu Assembly	
Total seats	232
Seats declared	133
AIADMK	20
DMK	62
Congress (I)	3
Janata	3
CPI (M)	5
CPI	2
Others	7

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## Centre may let him have his way

From G. K. Reddy

NEW DELHI, Dec. 29.

The Centre which had some inkling since yesterday of the impending decision of the Karnataka Cabinet to recommend dissolution of the Assembly before submitting its resignation, does not intend to come in the way of the Governor's acceptance of this advice following established practice.

The current mood in higher Congress (I) circles here is to abide by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's new policy of avoiding undue Cen-

tral interference in the States as one way of improving Centre-State relations.

It was quite significant that in his informal talk with the press at mid-day today about the time the Karnataka Cabinet was deciding to seek dissolution, the Prime Minister stated quite categorically that he would not repeat the mistakes of the Janata Government in 1977 and later of the Congress (I) in 1980 in dismissing so many State Governments in the wake of parliamentary elec-

tions

The report of the Governor, Mr. A. N. Banerji, has not been received in Delhi until late tonight. But if he has accepted the resignation of Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde's Cabinet, then he will have to recommend imposition of President's rule for a period until the Assembly elections.

It remains to be seen whether the Governor concedes Mr. Hegde's claim that his Government had the majority when it decided to recommend dissolution of the Assembly today, and if so, whether he was

obliged to act on this advice in accordance with established conventions. An entirely different situation would arise if he questioned this claim and decided to ignore the request for dissolution but accepted the resignation.

The present mood at the Centre is not to get involved in such a controversy at a time when it is keen on concentrating on more positive issues to open the way for better Centre-State relations. It is, therefore, considered more likely that Karnataka would also be going to the polls along with Andhra and other States soon.