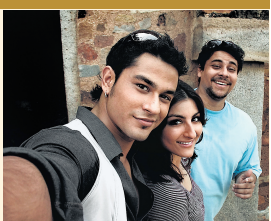


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# India gives Congress & UPA a clear mandate

## Sonia says Manmohan will be Prime Minister; L.K. Advani offers to quit as leader

Harish Khare

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian National Congress and its allies stormed back to power in the Lok Sabha on Saturday as the country's voters decisively indicated their preference for a stable government in New Delhi. Manmohan Singh, who is set to be Prime Minister again, said: "The people of India have spoken, and spoken with great clarity."

At the end of the day the Congress and its working allies in the United Progressive Alliance were within shouting distance of a majority. The allies are the Nationalist Congress Party, the All India Trinamool Congress, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the National Conference and the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen.

The Congress on its own was set to cross the 200-seat mark, a happy denouement that seemed to be beyond the wildest expectations of many of its leaders. It is for the first time since 1991 that it has tasted this kind of success nationally. Dr. Singh will be the first Prime Minister since Jawaharlal Nehru to be voted back after a five-year term.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi was quick to dispel any doubts about Dr. Manmohan Singh being the choice as the next Prime Minister. As soon as the extent of the Congress success became known, there was a clamour that Rahul Gandhi deserved to be Prime Minister. Before the trend caught on, it was firmly and unequivocally made clear that Dr. Singh remained the prime ministerial mascot.

### Graceful BJP

The principal Opposition party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, that led the National Democratic Alliance, came a



**WINNING COMBINATION:** Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, along with Congress president Sonia Gandhi, addresses a press conference at her residence in New Delhi, after the party's victory in the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. — PHOTO: SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

distant second. But in its moment of adversity it was graceful in conceding defeat and acknowledging that the UPA had a renewed mandate to govern. L.K. Advani, projected by the BJP as the "prime minister in waiting," was quick to offer to step down as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

### Left fortunes

The Left-led Third Front saw its fortunes vastly diminished, including in its traditional strongholds in Kerala and West Bengal. Of the constituents of the Fourth Front, only the Samajwadi Party

managed to notch up an honourable tally. Lalu Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal and Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party suffered embarrassing defeats.

Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party, which had hoped to play king-maker in the new government formation, was stopped in its tracks as both the Congress and the BJP did surprisingly well in Uttar Pradesh.

The clear mandate brought a sense of relief and reassurance in official and political circles, which were bracing for a fractured-verdict situation. Various "fronts" had

even suggested to the Congress that the prime ministerial post was a subject of negotiation.

The clean verdict spared the Congress, as well as others, the agony of a spell of horse-trading and bargaining for portfolios.

According to authoritative sources, the Congress is not too keen to invite into the Cabinet those partners who had parted company with it on the eve of elections — the SP, the RJD and the LJP.

### Assembly outcomes

Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Sikkim, which simultane-

ously had Assembly elections, also saw clean mandates, and these outcomes also spelt governmental stability.

Strong and performing regional leaders helped their respective parties to post decisive victories: Naveen Patnaik in Orissa, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy in Andhra Pradesh, Narendra Modi in Gujarat, Y.S. Yeddyurappa in Karnataka, Shivraj Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh, Nitish Kumar in Bihar and B.S. Hooda in Haryana.

The performance of the Congress in Andhra Pradesh in the Lok Sabha elections proved a game-changer. The

| Verdict 2009: Party position - 7.00 p.m. |            |            |       |
|--|------------|------------|-------|
| Party                                    | Seats Won  | Leads      | Total |
| Congress                                 | 112        | 94         | 206   |
| BJP                                      | 73         | 43         | 116   |
| CPI(M)                                   | 13         | 3          | 16    |
| CPI                                      | 2          | 2          | 4     |
| RJD                                      | 0          | 3          | 3     |
| NCP                                      | 5          | 4          | 9     |
| BSP                                      | 11         | 10         | 21    |
| SP                                       | 9          | 14         | 23    |
| BJD                                      | 0          | 14         | 14    |
| DMK                                      | 13         | 5          | 18    |
| AIADMK                                   | 6          | 3          | 9     |
| JD(U)                                    | 5          | 16         | 21    |
| TRINAMOOL                                | 7          | 12         | 19    |
| SHIV SENA                                | 7          | 4          | 11    |
| Others                                   | 34         | 19         | 53    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                             | <b>297</b> | <b>246</b> |       |

Total seats: 543

party recovered lost ground in Tamil Nadu. It surprised itself with a remarkably robust tally in Rajasthan. And, along with Mamata Banerjee it walked away with the lion's share of seats in West Bengal. Mr. Manmohan Singh is ex-

pected to submit the resignation of his Council of Ministers on Sunday. The Congress Working Committee is scheduled to meet on Sunday. A meeting of the Congress' working allies is scheduled the same day. On Monday the Congress Parliamentary Party will meet to re-elect its leader.

### The veterans

The 15th Lok Sabha will be dominated by a clutch of new but senior parliamentarians: Jaswant Singh, Murli Manohar Joshi, Sushma Swaraj, Rajnath Singh, all from the BJP.

A.R. Antulay, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Renuka Choudhary were among the senior Congress Cabinet Ministers to lose the elections. Home Minister P. Chidambaram barely managed to escape defeat, making it only in a recount.

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More reports on Pages 8, 9,  
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Detailed results on Page 12**

## Advani firm on quitting

Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI:** BJP leader L.K. Advani on Saturday evening offered to resign as Leader of the Opposition in the 14th Lok Sabha.

However, general secretary Arun Jaitley later told reporters that members of the board tried to persuade him not to insist on doing so, but he remained firm. The board then asked party president Rajnath Singh to talk to him privately to make him change his mind.

By offering to quit, what Mr. Advani indicated was that when the new parliamentary party of the BJP meets in a few days, it should elect a new Leader of the Opposition.

With Mr. Rajnath Singh set to hold the position of party president at least till the end of 2009, the names of Sushma Swaraj and Murli Manohar Joshi, who will both be members of the Lok Sabha, are expected to be considered for the position of Leader of Opposition.

## Congress sweeps Delhi

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar

**NEW DELHI:** The Congress trounced its arch rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party, in all the seven Lok Sabha from Delhi. The party that registered a record third consecutive win in the Delhi Assembly elections winning 43 of the 70 Assembly seats only six months ago, bettered even that performance winning in 68 Assembly segments this time.

Three of the seven Congress candidates won by a margin of over 2 lakh votes.

The Bahujan Samaj Party that has made its presence felt in Delhi in recent years -- having won 17 councillor posts in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi elections in 2007 and winning two Assembly seats in 2008 -- fared poorly after its candidate from North-East Delhi retired in favour of the Congress candidate in the run-up to the polls.

The margin of victory for the Congress was the highest in East Delhi where Delhi Chief Minister's son and sitting MP Sandeep Dikshit defeated his BJP rival Chetan Chauhan by 2,41,053 votes.

In North-East Delhi Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president J. P. Agarwal, not only won the seat by the second highest margin of 2,22,243 votes but also through his 'masterstroke' of getting Haji Dilshad Ali of the BSP to retire in his favour, ensured that people, particularly Dalits and Muslims, lost faith in that party all over Delhi and voted en masse for the Congress.

Union Minister Kapil Sibal of the Congress defeated his BJP rival and municipal councillor Vijender Gupta by



**ONE GRAND PARTY:** Laddoos all the way outside Congress president Sonia Gandhi's 10 Janpath residence in New Delhi on Saturday. — PHOTO: SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

2,00,710 votes, following a high decibel contest that saw both the candidates levelling allegations and counter-allegations against each other.

Union Minister of State and Congress candidate from New Delhi Ajay Maken who was pitted against BJP candidate and party national general secretary Vijay Goel posted a huge win by 1,87,809 votes riding mainly on the plank of the image of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his own work on the new Master Plan for Delhi through which relief had been provided to people from sealing and demolition.

Krishna Tirath won from the North-West Delhi reserved constituency by an almost similar margin of 1,84,433 votes defeating her BJP rival and former Delhi Mayor Meera Kanwaria.

Mahabal Mishra of the Congress, who was considered by many to be the weakest candidate of the seven, also proved his critics

wrong by defeating senior BJP leader Jagdish Mukhi by a margin of 1,29,010 votes in West Delhi. Considering that this was the only seat where the BJP polled more than the Congress in the Assembly elections, Mr. Mishra did extremely well, winning in nine of the 10 Assembly segments.

Finally in South Delhi, where like North-East Delhi the Congress replaced its candidate Sajjan Kumar with his brother Ramesh Kumar, the change did not affect the party's fortune. And Mr. Ramesh Kumar won comprehensively by a margin of 93,219 votes against his BJP rival and MLA Ramesh Bidhuri.

Later in the day, Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit thanked the people of Delhi for voting for the Congress. "People have begun to understand what good governance is all about," she said, expressing confidence that coordination between the Delhi government and the Centre would improve further.

## Congress retains power in A.P.

**UPA wins 33 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats**

S. Nagesh Kumar

**HYDERABAD:** Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy is all set to become Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh for a second consecutive term after he led the Congress to a comfortable majority in the Assembly and a spectacular victory in the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday.

Belying all predictions except Dr. Reddy's own, the ruling Congress won 155 out of the 294 Assembly seats besides delivering to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) a large contingent of 33 MPs from out of 42 Lok Sabha seats in the State. The results came as a severe setback to the Telugu Desam Party and its president N. Chandrababu Naidu who had hoped to return to power riding on the back of the four-party grand alliance he forged with the aim of defeating the Congress. Mr. Naidu improved his

party's tally of Assembly seats from 47 in 2004 to 93 now and MP seats from five to six but the alliance as a whole was rejected as it was replete with contradictions. The Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) proved to be a drag on the alliance as it could win only 10 of the 48 Assembly seats it contested while the CPI won four and the CPI (M) only one. The Left parties drew a blank in the four Lok Sabha seats they contested and the TRS could win just two.

Film star K. Chiranjeevi's Praja Rajyam also received a shock as it could win only 18 Assembly seats while the party chief himself lost the Palacole Assembly constituency though he won the Tirupati seat. Mr. Rajasekhara Reddy called on Governor N.D. Tiwari at the Raj Bhavan to stake claim to form the government.

## BJD landslide in Orissa

Prafulla Das

**BHUBANESWAR:** The Biju Janata Dal, headed by Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, registered a landslide victory in the Assembly elections.

The party secured a majority in the 147-member House by bagging over 100 seats. It contested 129 seats, leaving 17 seats to the Nationalist Congress Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India, with which it had en-

tered into seat-sharing arrangement.

The Congress finished second, winning less than 30 Assembly segments, while the Bharatiya Janata Party got less than 10 seats.

Mr. Patnaik, who led the party to the polls highlighting the achievements of his government during the past nine years, thanked the people for generously voting for his party, enabling it to form the government for the third consecutive term.

## BRIEFLY

### Landslide for SDF

**GANGTOK:** The ruling Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), led by Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, won a landslide in the Assembly polls on Saturday winning all 32 seats. The lone Lok Sabha in the State also went to the SDF. — PTI

**GEOGRAPHY**  
by  
**A.K. JAIN**  
at 25/15,  
**OLD RAJENDER NAGAR**  
# 011-26522738

### NC-Congress alliance sweeps J&K

**SRINAGAR:** The National Conference-Congress coalition on Saturday made a clean sweep in Jammu and Kashmir winning five of the six Lok Sabha seats, including Baramulla where People's Conference leader Sajjad Lone was defeated. The Ladakh seat went to an independent Ghulam Hassan Khan. — PTI  
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### First H1N1 flu case reported

**HYDERABAD:** The country's first case of influenza A (H1N1) flu virus was confirmed on Saturday when a 23-year-old male passenger, who came to Hyderabad from New York on May 13, tested positive. He has been quarantined. — PTI  
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