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## AAP storms to power in Delhi, wins 67 of 70 seats

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal will take oath as Delhi's chief minister at the Ramleela Maidan here on February 14

BS Reporter | New Delhi

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AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal with wife and Kumar Vishwas, after the victory of AAP in Delhi Assembly Election in New Delhi on Tuesday - Photo: Dalip Kumar

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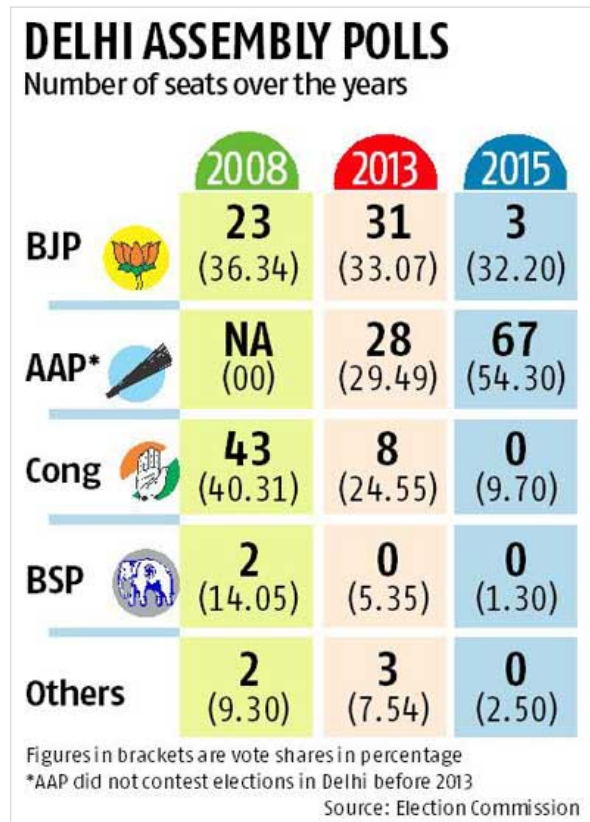
AAP funding takes centre stage in Delhi elections

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday stormed to a spectacular victory in the Delhi Assembly elections, winning 67 of the 70 seats, a vote share of 54 per cent and a swing of 25 per cent. AAP's performance left devastation in its trail: its principal rival, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), could manage only three seats, while the Congress failed to win any.

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The verdict for AAP was unequivocal not only from the underclass but all sections of Delhi's electorate. The only time vote share was greater than this was during the 2004 Sikkim Assembly elections, when the Sikkim Democratic Front secured 71.1 per cent.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal will take oath as Delhi's chief minister at the Ramleela Maidan here on Saturday, exactly a year from the day he had resigned from the post. On Wednesday, AAP will decide if a ministry will take oath with Kejriwal.



AAP's performance hurt the BJP the most, considering in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the latter had won all the seven seats here. In 2012, at the height of his popularity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi (then chief minister of Gujarat) had managed 48 per cent of the vote share for the BJP in the state. This prompted a dig from the BJP's partner, the Shiv Sena, on Tuesday; it said India had seen a Modi wave (in the Lok Sabha elections of 2014) but the Delhi verdict was a tsunami.

Now, AAP has to grapple with two major issues: governance and making good its manifesto promises; and organisational management. The party is committed to cutting consumers' electricity bills by half by auditing distribution companies, rectifying electricity bills, providing free Wi-Fi and reducing value-added tax (VAT). It has also promised 700 litres of free water a day to every household. The problem, however, is VAT and state excise duty (on alcohol) are the main sources of revenue for the Delhi

government. To provide universal subsidised electricity, water and Wi-Fi connectivity, revenue has to be enhanced. It is still unclear how AAP seeks to address this.

The party will also need to be on the right side of the central government. Though Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Kejriwal early during the day and offered all support to the Delhi government for the development of the capital, how this will pan out remains to be seen. AAP is deeply opposed to the land acquisition ordinance because of the way it affects farmers in the outskirts of the national capital. It supports the BJP's stand on foreign direct investment in retail.

With the Delhi victory, sections of AAP are clear it is time to spread the party's wings to other parts of India.

When asked if the party had national ambitions, senior leader Yogendra Yadav said: "That is what we set out to do. How we chart our route is the question, whether we do it in the next five years or 10 years...We have a tremendous oppositional vacuum in the country, especially the belt from Odisha to Gujarat. Congress is in the opposition in several states but it doesn't act like one. In the medium term, our principal task will be to occupy the role of a principled opposition party. We do not consider ourselves a regional party. We are offering a national platform for alternative politics and we deliberately chose Delhi as our first site."

Yadav was non-committal when asked if the party would contest the Bihar elections (October-November 2015) and those in Uttar Pradesh (2017).

Party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal's term ends in September this year and who will succeed him remains a question.

BJP and the Congress seemed trying to recover from shock. The Congress office was largely deserted, with a small group of people shouted slogans, demanding accountability from the leadership and asking Priyanka Gandhi to take up an active role. Party members connected with the national capital — Ajay Maken and Arvinder Singh Lovely — have offered to resign.

In the wake of the defeat, the BJP seems to have become conspicuously vulnerable to pressure and bargaining by allies, especially in the Rajya Sabha, where it does not have majority. The Trinamool Congress and Left parties are likely to step up pressure on the party in the Upper House, forcing the Congress to join the opposition ranks or face isolation. The Akali Dal is already annoyed that the BJP allowed Dera Sacha Sauda to campaign for it in Delhi, given the two parties were at loggerheads in Punjab and Haryana.

Internally, the BJP's equations in the Sangh Parivar will have to be reset. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which had been pressed into service extensively in these elections, showed up the BJP, with attacks on churches and communal tension working against it. Under these circumstances, Modi will be more empowered in dealing with those such as Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, whose controversial public statements hurt the BJP.

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