



INSIDER

Voice of South Asian Community Since March 2002

Rahul-Priyanka-Kharge: The Power Trio That Gave Congress New Life



Page 09

Vol. 23

Issue 14

Friday 7 June to 13 June 2024

\$1

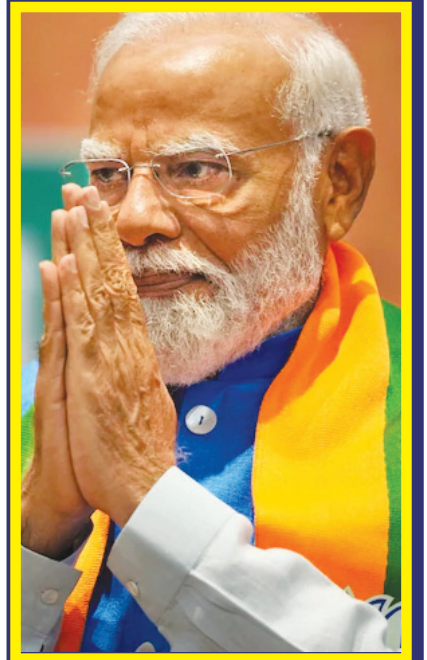
www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Modi Govt 3.0 will see a BJP more accommodative of allies

Modi Set For A Historic Third Term With A Weakened Mandate



Story on Page 18



Story on Page 19

Are you paying too Much for Business Insurance?

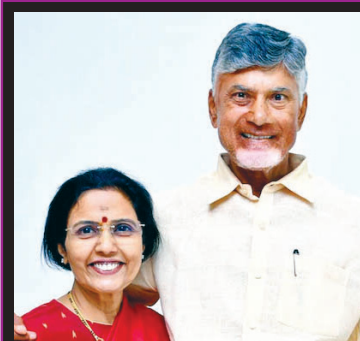
Call us today to find out how much you can save?

Phone: 646 875 8495 Advt.

How Nitish Kumar again proved his political timing to stay No. 1 in Bihar



Story on Page 20



Story on Page 20

How Chandrababu Naidu scripted his mega comeback



Story on Page 6

Poll win of Khalistan sympathisers in Punjab is both a message and warning

WORKING CAPITAL R' US



Business Loans

Your business need working capital?

Call (646) 897 3016

Ask for Jon Meyer

Kangana Ranaut slapped by CISF security staff at Chandigarh airport

†(NewsAgency)-Kangana Ranaut, BJP's MP-elect from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi, alleged that CISF official Kulwinder Kaur slapped her at Chandigarh Airport while she was boarding a flight to Delhi. Kangana Ranaut, Bollywood actor and BJP's MP-elect from Himachal Pradesh's Mandi, on Thursday alleged that a CISF security official at Chandigarh Airport slapped her while she was travelling to Delhi. According to Ranaut, when she was proceeding to the boarding point after the security check, the CISF woman official, Kulwinder Kaur, posted at the frisking area, allegedly argued with her and slapped her. Kangana's controversial statement about women in Punjab during the farmers' agitation is believed to be the provocation behind the alleged slapping, according to sources. The constable, Kulwinder Kaur, has been suspended with immediate effect following the incident and an FIR has been filed against her, CISF officials said. A probe panel has been set up to investigate



Kangana's claim. In a video message posted on X after the incident, Ranaut said that the constable told her that she supports the farmers' protest. The MP-elect asked how we are going to control this rising extremism in Punjab. "I am safe, I am perfectly fine. The slapping incident that happened at Chandigarh Airport occurred during the security check. When I completed the

security check and was waiting to pass the woman security officer, she came towards me, hit me, and started abusing me. When I asked why she did it, she said she supports the farmers. I am safe, but my concern is how to handle this shocking rise in terror and violence in Punjab." In another video purportedly from the airport, constable Kulwinder can be

heard saying, "My mother was also among the protesters when she [Kangana] made these remarks". The constable was detained and taken to the CISF Commandant Office for questioning. After arriving in Delhi, Kangana met CISF Director General Nina Singh and other senior officials and explained the incident to them. The incident stirred a loud political row, with several leaders calling for stringent action. Her election rival and Congress leader Vikramaditya Singh called the incident "unfortunate" and condemned it. "I don't have the entire information about the incident. I have heard in the news that Kangana has been physically assaulted. It is very unfortunate. Such incidents should not happen, especially with women. We strongly condemn this," Singh said. Kangana defeated Vikramaditya Singh, scion of Rampur state and the incumbent state public works minister, by a margin of 74,755 votes from the Mandi Lok Sabha constituency.

WHITESTONE Real Estate
Serving Community Since 2009

"Don't Wait To Buy Real Estate Buy Real Estate And Wait"

Amaninder Singh Thind (Max)
Licensed Real Estate Salesperson/Notary Public
Phone: (516) 474 7573

THINKING OF BUYING /SELLING?

Sharanjit Singh Thind
Real Estate Broker

- * Honesty
- * Integrity
- * Experience
- * Knowledge

Ask us how to buy Bank Foreclosures, Short Sale Properties, Bank Auction Homes and to Sell/Buy your Business.

WHITESTONE Real Estate
Serving Community Since 2009
Phone : 646 875 8495 Email : whitestone1979@gmail.com

We specialize in Income Producing & Investment Properties.

(Whitestone Real Estate & Asset Management Corp. DBA Nlight Real Estate is a licensed Real Estate Broker, New York State)

Modi 3.0 Cabinet: BJP draws red line as allies aim for big portfolios

The BJP reportedly asserted control over crucial portfolios like Defence, Finance, Home, and Foreign Affairs as the deliberations for the distribution of Union Cabinet portfolios are reportedly underway in NDA.

†(News Agency)-Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal United (JDU) have emerged as key players in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and have sought important positions in the Union Cabinet. However, the BJP may not easily concede some prominent positions to its allies and has reportedly asserted its stake over key portfolios--Defence, Finance, Home, and Foreign Affairs.

According to sources, the TDP and JDU, holding 16 and 12 seats respectively, are eyeing their preferred ministries. Based on initial discussions, the allies are demanding one minister for every four MPs. Reportedly, the TDP is seeking four cabinet berths, while the JDU is pushing for three ministers. Additionally, Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, with 7 seats, and Chirag Paswan's LJP, with five seats, each expect two ministries. Chandrababu Naidu is also eyeing the position of Lok Sabha Speaker, but the BJP appears unwilling to accept this demand. TDP may also demand the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology. With the BJP securing 240 seats, 32 short of the halfway mark, the role of these allies is crucial for



Modi 3.0. Together, the TDP, JDU, Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde), and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) command 40 MPs. In the previous two ministries under PM Modi, where the BJP single-handedly crossed the majority mark, the NDA allies could not hold the key Cabinet positions. However, the 2024 results project a hung assembly without a clear majority for the BJP, indicating that the saffron party will likely have to form a Union Ministry based on proportionality. This would result in a

Council of Ministers where the number of BJP ministers decreases and ministers from allies increase. However, it is unlikely that the BJP will compromise on the core ministries. Apart from Defence, Finance, Home and Foreign Affairs, the BJP will also want to keep the ministries that deal with infrastructure development, welfare, youth affairs and agriculture with itself. These portfolios are important for implementing the schemes for the four significant voter groups -- the poor,

women, youth and farmers.

Additionally, the BJP claims to have undertaken major reforms in the Railways and road transport, etc., under the previous NDA governments, and the party does not want to slow down the pace of reforms by giving them to allies. The Railways traditionally remained with allies, and the BJP brought it back to their domain with much effort, sources noted.

The BJP can consider giving the Panchayati Raj and Rural Development ministries to JDU, while portfolios like Civil Aviation and Steel can be given to TDP. The charge of Heavy Industries can be given to Shiv Sena. NDA allies can be appointed as Ministers of State in important ministries like Finance and Defence, sources close to the discussions said. There is also a possibility of other ministries, such as tourism, MSME, skill development, science and technology, earth sciences, and social justice and empowerment, being handed over to the allies.

If Chandrababu Naidu continues to insist on the Lok Sabha Speaker post, the BJP may try to convince him by offering the Deputy Speaker position.

NIA searches multiple locations in Punjab linked with aides of Canada-based terrorist Goldy Brar



†(News Agency)-The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday conducted searches at various locations linked to the associates of Canada-based terrorist Goldy Brar in Punjab as part of its probe in an extortion and firing case. The anti-terror agency also sought

people's help for information about Satinderjit Singh alias Goldy Brar and his gang, according to an official statement. A total of nine locations associated with Brar and his aides were searched by the NIA teams in connection with an extortion and firing case registered in Chandigarh, it

said.

The searches come a day after the NIA filed a charge sheet against Brar and 11 others for their alleged involvement in the killing of Karni Sena chief Sukhdev Singh Gogamedi last year in Jaipur. The NIA has also released telephone numbers, where people can share information about the terrorist and his associates or details of any threat calls they might have received from the gang.

The information can be shared on landline number 0172-2682901 or mobile number 7743002947 (for Telegram/ WhatsApp), the statement issued by the NIA said.

The identity of the informer will be kept a secret, it said. The crackdown on Thursday was part of NIA's investigations into a case pertaining to demand for extortion money and firing of gunshots at the residence of a victim in Chandigarh. The case was originally registered by the local police on January 20 this year and the NIA took over the probe on March 18. Today's searches covered the districts of Mohali, Patiala, Hoshiarpur and Fatehgarh Sahib, as part of the NIA's

sustained crackdown on individual terrorists engaged in criminal-terrorist activities in India. Incriminating material, including digital devices, have been seized, the probe agency said.

Investigations so far have revealed that Brar, along with one Goldy of Rajpura (Punjab), had hatched a criminal conspiracy to generate funds by demanding extortion money from businessmen of Punjab, Chandigarh and surrounding areas, the NIA said.

They were also providing arms and ammunition to members of terrorist gangs formed by Brar, the statement said.

They were additionally involved in smuggling and sale of narcotics and channelisation of the proceeds from these sales, it said. As per NIA investigations, Brar and his associates, based abroad, were continuously recruiting vulnerable youth into their gangs, using them for identification of extortion targets, firing in front of houses of those targets who refuse to pay the extortion money, and inducing them in sale and purchase of narcotics, weapon smuggling etc.

How did Shiv Sena (UBT) fare in Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra

†(News Agency)-The Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which includes Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP), and Congress, achieved success in the Lok Sabha polls by winning 30 out of 48 seats in Maharashtra.

However, this time the poll performance of Shiv Sena (UBT) has come under scrutiny as the party managed to secure only nine seats of the 21 seats it contested. In 2019, the undivided Shiv Sena managed to win 18 seats of the 22 it contested.

Meanwhile, Congress has emerged as the biggest part of the MVA with 13 seats in its tally out of 17 it contested, with a 76 per cent strike rate, followed by the NCP (SP) which won eight out of ten seats with an 80 per cent strike rate. In addition, though the



party managed to maintain its dominance by winning four out of six Lok Sabha seats in Mumbai,

the Election Commission data showed that minority votes, which are considered traditional voters

of Congress and NCP (SP), were also transferred to Shiv Sena (UBT) rather than the core

Marathi voters of the party.

Similarly, on 13 seats where there was a straight contest between the Shiv Sena (UBT) and Shiv Sena of Eknath Shinde, the former managed to win only six seats, while Shinde's Sena won seven. As per the data, the total votes polled in this direct fight for Shinde Sena were 62,65,584 in comparison to 60,38,891 bagged by Shiv Sena (UBT). This indicates that Shinde Sena got 2,26,693 more votes than Uddhav Sena.

The above statistics also reveal that despite the sympathy factor and the transfer of traditional votes of its allies, the UBT Sena fell short of retaining its reins from seats in other parts of states except Mumbai.

Ajit Pawar 'shocked' by wife Sunetra's defeat to cousin Supriya Sule in Baramati



†(News Agency)- Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday said he was "shocked" by his wife Sunetra Pawar's defeat to his cousin Supriya Sule, the daughter of NCP founder Sharad

Pawar. He also said he took responsibility for his faction's poor performance in the Lok Sabha polls.

Ajit Pawar's NCP won just one seat (Raigad) while it lost the prestige battle in Baramati,

where sitting MP Supriya Sule, who is from the Sharad Pawar faction, retained the constituency, defeating Sunetra Pawar. Addressing a press conference after the meeting of his party MLAs, Pawar said that all party MLAs were present at the meeting and rejected speculation that some were planning to defect to the faction led by Sharad Pawar. "We did not reach the expected results. We are not happy with the results in Maharashtra. I feel it is my responsibility for the result. I have to accept the public result. I take the entire responsibility for the result. All MLAs are with us," he

said. Speaking about Baramati, where Supriya Sule defeated Sunetra Pawar by a margin of over one lakh votes, the Deputy Chief Minister said, "I am very shocked by the result in Baramati. I don't understand it. How did the people not support me? I am very shocked. Leave other constituencies, but I did not expect this in Baramati." Asked about whether he would once again join hands with NCP founder Sharad Pawar, he tersely said he accepted responsibility for the poll debacle, adding "there is no need to bring family matters in public".

Asserting there would be detailed introspection of the party's poll performance, Ajit Pawar said some of the reasons included Muslims moving away from the ruling alliance, the Opposition's allegations of change in the Constitution, which alienated the Dalits and backward classes, as well as the Maratha quota protest. "Muslims went away from us, the narrative of changing the Constitution was there and we could not counter it. Leaving Sambhajinagar, we, Mahayuti, did not get a single seat in Marathwada. We will have to take a strong decision in the future," he said.

Kuki insurgent leader arrested in connection with Manipur violence

†(News Agency)-The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday arrested a key accused in a case involving an alleged transnational conspiracy by insurgents and terrorist groups aiming to escalate violence in Manipur and spread terror across the northeastern states.

The accused, Thongminthang Haokip, also known as Thangboi Haokip or Roger, a member of the Kuki National Front-Military Council (KNF-MC), was arrested at Imphal Airport. Roger was arrested



under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The NIA registered

the case on July 19, 2023. According to the NIA, a conspiracy was reportedly hatched by Kuki and Zomi

insurgents with backing from terrorist organisations based in the northeastern states and neighbouring Myanmar.

The agency alleges that the conspirators aimed to exploit ongoing ethnic unrest in the region and wage war against the Indian government through violent attacks.

The accused was found to have been involved in attacks on security forces in various locations during the violence in Manipur. He was in contact with the insurgent group Kuki National Front (KNF)-B of

Myanmar for logistical support, the NIA stated.

Investigations revealed that the accused had met with leaders of KNF-B (Myanmar) to arrange the supply of arms, ammunition, and explosives. He admitted to participating in several armed attacks against security forces and confirmed his membership in both the KNF-MC and United Tribal Volunteers (UTV), said the NIA statement.

Further investigations are ongoing.

How poll win of Khalistan sympathisers in Punjab is both a message and warning

The election victory of Khalistani sympathisers Amritpal Singh and Sarabjit Singh could create disquiet in Punjab that paid a heavy price to restore peace after a decades-long insurgency.

The growing political presence of extremist elements in Punjab has left the mainstream parties and security agencies worried. Even though only two of the 12 Khalistan sympathisers who contested the Lok Sabha elections won people's trust, the victory could synergise the separatist groups to some extent.

The 'Waris Punjab De' chief Amritpal Singh won from Khadoor Sahib by a margin of 1,97,120 votes, which is the highest in the state, and the massive victory earned him attention again. On the other hand, Sarabjit Singh won from Faridkot by 70,053 votes.

The hardliners who gathered in Amritsar on the eve of the 40th anniversary of 'Operation Blue Star' on Thursday were seen waving Amritpal's photos while raising pro-Khalistan slogans.

The impact of their victory will not be limited to the two Lok Sabha constituencies. This could create disquiet in the state that paid a heavy price to restore peace after a decades-long insurgency.

The hardliners will also contest the five Assembly bypolls in the days to come. Interestingly, while Amritpal and Sarabjit Singh Khalsa were able to win the elections, another Khalistan propagandist Simranjit Singh Mann, was defeated by AAP nominee Gurmeet Singh Meeta Hayer by a margin of 1.73 lakh votes.

While Simranjit has already joined hands with Amritpal by withdrawing one of his candidates from the Khadoor Sahib seat, designated terrorist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, who claimed to have funded Amritpal's campaign, has recently issued threats to attack Parliament.

The nine other hardliners who were given tickets by the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) lost their security deposits. Their vote share is between 1.95 per cent and 7.36 per cent which means only a few could taste victory out of the dozen contesting.

The Lok Sabha elections in Punjab seem to have underscored the growing footprint of hardliners. Amritpal won the election despite being in jail and with the support of locals, apart from the alleged funding from abroad.

Lodged in a jail in Assam's Dibrugarh under the National Security Act, Amritpal would often say that his fight was with



the Government of India and not with any community. His controversial statements were openly played by his supporters during the Lok Sabha campaign, which was allegedly funded by the banned terrorist organisation 'Sikhs For Justice'.

Amritpal's controversial poll manifesto, which went viral on social media, pledged to shut all barber shops and beauty parlours apart from closing meat, liquor and tobacco shops. It also said the deras, sects like Radha Swami Satsang, Nirankari Mission, churches and mosques also would not be allowed to function.

It promised to train Sikh youths in the latest weapons. Amritpal's father Tarsem Singh has, however, denied Amritpal issued such a manifesto.

Amritpal's family had said that they won't celebrate his victory till June 6. Amritpal's mother said his success in the Lok Sabha elections has been dedicated to the slain Khalistan terrorists.

Why Amritpal and Sarabjit Singh Khalsa won elections

Amritpal Singh was able to win the election on the basis of a narrative created by his supporters that he was 'promoting Sikhism and the Sikh identity' besides helping people get rid of drugs. His supporters believed booking him under NSA was wrong. Psephologist also said had he been booked under IPC he would have got bail and that would not allow him to generate the sympathy factor which led to his victory. Late PM Indira Gandhi's assassin's son Sarabjit Singh Khalsa also won the polls in the Faridkot election on the issues of the release of former Khalistan terrorists and the sacrilege cases, besides the Behbal Kalan firing case.

Interestingly, Simranjit Singh Mann was

Sidhu Moose Wala was killed. But he was rejected by the voters this time.

It is clear that the hardliners, who won elections in Khadoor Sahib and Faridkot, were successful in wooing the voters on issues of the growing narcotics trade, drug addiction, and unsolved sacrilege cases, besides the false narrative that Sikhism was in danger.

The victory of the hardliners, on the one hand, proved their growing footprints while, on the other hand, has exposed their double standards.

The hardliners who won elections in 2024 also said they had no faith in the Indian Constitution and will now have to swear that they will bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution. All eyes are now on Amritpal and whether he will be released from jail to take an oath, as there is no provision to administer an oath in jail.



INDO US EXPRESS, INC.

Worldwide Couriers / Freight Forwarders
Domestic Rush Delivery / Import / Export
Custom Clearance / Trading Consultant

Gurinder Singh
CEO

SALES OFFICE

224 West 30th St., #604, New York, NY 10001
Mail: P.O. Box 7304, Hicksville, NY 11802

Office: 212.447.5720 Fax: 516.932.3750
Delhi: 98.1849.0552
Mumbai: 92.2453.1807
New York: 347.538.7041

Visit US Online: www.indousexpress.com
Email: indousexpress@gmail.com

Hamas, Israel, and the World's Moral Blind Spots: An International Relations Analysis

The Israel-Hamas conflict has reached new heights, with Rafah, a southern city in Gaza, becoming the focal point of intense military actions and global scrutiny. Following an Israeli bombardment that unfortunately resulted in the deaths of over 40 Palestinian civilians and the injuries of 200 more, the hashtag #All eyes on Rafah went viral on social media on May 28. The attack, which was meant to target Hamas leaders Khaled Najjar and Yassin Rabia, accidentally caused an intense fire at a camp of refugees. This resulted in strong condemnation and the development of a widely shared AI-generated graphic that showed the extent of the damage.

Israel responded by launching a counter-campaign titled #What your eyes fail to see, which highlighted the horrific circumstances in which Hamas was holding 125 Israeli hostages. Through this campaign, the Israel Foreign Ministry hopes to change the perception of the situation and highlight the humanitarian catastrophe that these hostages, including women, children, and senior citizens, are facing. The genesis of the currently ongoing conflict can potentially be traced to Hamas' unexpected attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023, which claimed over 1,200 lives, most of whom were civilians, and abducted 252 more. At least 134 hostages, including children, were still taken captive by Hamas as hostilities resumed in November, despite a brief ceasefire. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) claimed that a barrage of rockets had been launched from Rafah shortly before the airstrike. Israel's recent military actions, including the airstrike on Rafah, have been a reaction to continued rocket strikes from Hamas.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has staunchly defended the ongoing operations, emphasising the critical need to target Hamas leadership to safeguard national security. However, he expressed regret over civilian casualties, labelled the incident a tragic mishap, and committed to a comprehensive investigation to ensure accountability and prevent future occurrences.

In a decisive move, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ordered Israel to halt its operations in Rafah and withdraw from the area immediately. Despite the clear directive, Israel has yet to fully comply. This verdict was made merely one day after three European countries formally recognised Palestinian statehood, and it followed a wave of worldwide condemnation. In a comprehensive analysis of the Israeli conflict, political scientists and scholars provide robust frameworks that justify Israel's actions as both defensive and essential for its survival. Samuel Huntington's #Clash of Civilisations

theory and John Mearsheimer's #Offensive Realism explain Israel's actions as defensive measures rooted in broader cultural and security dynamics. Concurrently, Alan Dershowitz's #The Case for Israel and Michael Walzer's #Just War Theory offer moral justifications, emphasising Israel's right to self-defence and the ethical conduct of its military operations. Collectively, these theories underscore the view that Israel's actions are vital for its territorial defence and national survival.

The viral #All Eyes on Rafah campaign highlights the influential role of social media in shaping public opinion and international discourse. However, critics have pointed out the selective nature of this activism, questioning the absence of similar outrage over Hamas' brutal October 7 attacks, which included the killing of soldiers and taking women hostage, actions that egregiously violated human rights. Notably, no comparable campaign emerged in support of Israel when Hamas crossed all bounds of humanity. This discrepancy raises critical questions about the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) stance and actions during those times of severe aggression against Israel.

Amidst ongoing conflict and relentless criticism, Israel's stance and struggles are often overlooked. Has anyone truly attempted to understand the relentless challenges Israel faces? As the world's only Jewish state, Israel has fought tirelessly to re-establish itself, transitioning from ghettos to a sovereign nation surrounded by hostile neighbours. Since its establishment, Israel has faced severe condemnation and has been in constant battle with terrorist groups like Hamas, Houthi, and Hezbollah. Despite these adversities, Israel has not only survived but has also actively sought to foster peaceful relations with neighbouring countries. The unique and profound difficulties Israel endure are often misunderstood or ignored by the international community, which continues to condemn Israel's actions without fully grasping the relentless threats and existential challenges it faces daily. In defending Israel's security, it is imperative to recognise the serious humanitarian crisis that is unfolding in Gaza. According to UN estimates, over a million Palestinians have left the area due to the continuous fighting, and up to 1.4 million have taken refuge in Rafah. Foucault's notion of #fearless speech (parrhesia) emphasises the moral obligation to uphold the rights of both Israelis and Palestinians. This fair-minded strategy encourages a considerate conclusion, guaranteeing that the rights and security of each party concerned are given first priority in the pursuit of peace.

By: Anjali Singh

BJP's task-win ally support on UCC, bring strong leader in Haryana, retain SS-NCP defectors

The 2024 general election results are full of lessons for parties to learn from, if they are willing to. It is strange that the BJP is feeling a bit low because it fell short of 32 seats to be able to form a government on its own. The Congress, which won 99 seats and leads the I.N.D.I.A coalition whose final tally is less than the BJP's, is rejoicing. The reason for this strange anomaly is not far to seek.

The BJP had set a target of 400 plus seats, which it could not achieve and hence the gloom, more in the BJP camp than in the NDA camp. The Congress' happiness is boundless because it has almost doubled its tally of seats from 2019. The fact is that in several states, the voting percentage of the Congress has actually fallen, more than 10 percent in some. Yet, the fact that the Narendra Modi-led NDA could not reach 400 seats seems to be reason enough for them to gloat.

Both political entities need to see the ground realities sooner than later. Speaking at the party headquarters soon after the election results were announced, Modi specifically mentioned the agenda of the NDA and not that of the BJP, clearly indicating his acceptance of the reality of the dawn of coalition era in politics. His strategy managers quickly contacted Nitish Kumar of Janata Dal United (JD-U) and Chandrababu Naidu of Telugu Desam Party (TDP). It is possible that the Congress too would have approached them, but would have realised the futility of having them on board when it is impossible for them to form a government. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's statement after the opposition group's meeting that #the India bloc will continue to fight the fascist rule of the BJP will

take appropriate steps at the appropriate time is a clear indication of their intent to destabilise the NDA government at some point in future.

This should be no cause of worry for the BJP as the Lok Sabha arithmetic does not favour the Congress as of now. But the BJP has several other reasons to worry about and take corrective steps to retain its hold over the government at the Centre and the states.

What must concern BJP

Maharashtra and Haryana are due for elections this year and in both states, the BJP's performance in the general election was below expectation of the party's top leadership. From 23 seats in 2019, the BJP has come down to 9 seats in 2024. With Shiv Sena as its ally in 2019, the NDA got 43 seats in 2019 as against 17 in 2024. After the split in Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (SS) and veteran politician Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-SP), it was expected that the BJP would gain. But the sympathy factor for the SS and NCP appears to have spoiled the game for the BJP, the Shinde group of Shiv Sena, and the Ajit Pawar-led NCP.

What should be of concern to these three parties is the possibility of defectors flocking back to the original group, thus deserting the government even before it completes the remaining few months in office in Maharashtra. The BJP could not win even one of the eight seats in Marathwada, the epicentre of Maratha quota agitation, which some observers feel the Shinde government handled badly. The induction of two veteran Congress leaders into the NDA fold was frowned upon by traditional BJP workers and a few leaders who could still be sulking.



ISSN No. 1554 06X

Editor in Chief & Publisher :

Sharanjit Singh Thind

Managing Editor :

Susmita Ghosh

Deputy Managing Editor :

Amaninder Singh Thind

Editor (Political Affairs-India) : Aruna Singh

Special Correspondents: Gagandeep Singh (India)

Editorial Intern: Roubin Singh Thind

Web Coordinator : Harpreet Singh

A Publication of Media Partners Capital, Inc.

REGD & MAILING OFFICE :

P.O Box 7005 Hicksville New York 11801

Phone: 917 612 3158

editor@thesouthasianinsider.com, thesouthasianinsider@gmail.com

www.thesouthasianinsider.com

Disclaimer The South Asian Insider is a weekly newspaper published every week by The South Asian Insider. It's available in community & religious centers, ethnic grocery stores and also available by mail, email & online to subscribers. The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed by the various writers, authors and forum participants in The South Asian Insider do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the Editor. All advertisers advertising in The South Asian Insider assume responsibility for accuracy of their advertisements. The South Asian Insider and/or people associated with it are not responsible for any claims made by the advertisers and don't endorse any product or services advertised in The South Asian Insider. We strongly urge consulting your lawyer before buying/contracting/hiring through the ads published in the newspaper. We are in the business of selling space and claims made by the advertisers are not authenticated or confirmed by an independent source

Never write off a politician, media blitz alone does not make a leader

As pundits and commentators discuss what the ramifications of this election will be, let's look at five things that became clear from the results.

By TS Sudhir

While Narendra Modi is all set to be sworn in as prime minister once again, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the National Democratic Alliance's failure to earn a strong mandate has put the party and the coalition in a state of some uncertainty. With an under-272 BJP, Modi 3.0 is likely to be greatly different from the first two terms. As pundits and commentators discuss what the ramifications of this election will be, let's look at five things that became clear from the results.

1. In the privacy of the polling booth, the Indian voter spoke his mind fearlessly. It is a beautiful victory for Indian democracy, because, with one punch on the EVM, the electorate sent a loud message to the entire political class that intimidation and the politics of hate are not what they want.

2. Never take the Indian voter for granted. The resounding defeat of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, who



thought his dole-centric governance with little care for development was enough to bring him back to power, is proof. The aversion of the people to intimidation by local-level YSRCP leaders, corruption and arrogance hit Jagan hard.

3. Never write off a politician. If you want proof, look no further

than N Chandrababu Naidu, who has returned in style after a terrible time out of power in the last five years, suffering humiliation and a stint in jail. Naidu, who ushered in e-governance in Andhra Pradesh in the 1990s, has logged in with a more powerful mandate. Reduced to just 23 seats in the 2019

Assembly elections, Naidu was ridiculed by the YSRCP and even sent to jail for 53 days in the Skill Development case last year. His performance on June 4 has shown that he will never say die. Over the past five years, Naidu lived to fight another day and when he entered the boxing ring in the May 13 election, he

delivered a knockout blow to his bete noire YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. The YSRCP squandered away its 151-seat mandate (in a 175-seat Assembly) in 2019 in this electoral tsunami unleashed by Naidu and Co.

4. The remote controls of the new NDA government will be in Amaravati and Patna. The BJP's failure to cross the halfway mark will mark the end of Modi's unilateral control. One can no longer rule out Delhi having to secure NOCs on important decisions from Chandrababu Naidu and Nitish Kumar, without whose support, the NDA coalition would collapse like a house of cards.

5. Media blitz and social media chatter alone do not make a leader. The defeat of media favourites like K Annamalai and Madhavi Latha is a case in point. This election should force the BJP to evaluate not just its messaging but also how its cadre is being managed.

Modi's Triumph, Opposition's Reckoning: A New Chapter in Indian Politics Begins

By: Sudesh Verma

The results of Lok Sabha are heartening for the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and also for the Opposition. Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets a third term in office and equals the record of the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

The Opposition gets more muscle to keep tabs on the government. But will they be able to band together on issues? In the coming days, some may feel the need to become a part of the ruling government and become a part of the good governance initiative undertaken by Modi. There is no common ideology than to keep Modi out. On that count, the Opposition alliance has failed. Will this hold true is something that cannot be said now. Rahul Gandhi must be complimented for almost doubling the Congress number from the last Lok Sabha. If he takes over the role of the main Opposition, this will demand more seriousness from him than the glottal reaction to whatever Modi



does. By not taking this role, he would miss a great opportunity to be a serious player in Opposition rank.

The results for the BJP are a mixed bag. Running a good coalition by placating NDA partners would not be easy, more so when it would come to taking serious decisions such as the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). It has done extremely well in Telangana and Odisha, the two

states that are likely to have BJP state governments in times to come.

But it could not repeat its performance in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. In Uttar Pradesh, it seems the Opposition succeeded in achieving better coordination of their core voters. Rajasthan went to the old status where the Congress and the BJP won seats almost equally. In Maharashtra too, the

Opposition achieved better coordination. When the BJP spoke of winning more than 400 Lok Sabha seats, it had a clear vision that it would retain its seats of 2019 plus add a few more here and there. The NDA alliance after all had close to 400 Lok Sabha seats. The party had already reached its peak and repeating the feat was an extremely difficult task. Beating anti-incumbency for the second

time is not an easy task. But without Modi magic and his untiring efforts during the campaign, the NDA would not have come to power. Even during the peak time of Atal Bihari Vajpayee (after Kargil victory in 1998), the BJP's tally was a mere 182. The BJP's numbers at close to 240 are very respectable by that count, more so if one sees the context of the party winning one of the lowest numbers in UP in recent times. Despite losing its numbers in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Haryana and Rajasthan, the BJP has been able to maintain its lead. With better cadre presence and organisational skills, it would be able to spread its tentacles in new states and try to win more seats in 2024. For the Opposition alliance to do better, the Congress would need to really rediscover itself as a party of true Indian value system. People of this country have shown that they are not as angry against corruption as they used to be during the time of the Anna movement.

Rahul-Priyanka-Kharge: The Power Trio That Gave Congress New Life

By: Rasheed Kidwai

The Congress has reasons to rejoice in its spectacular performance in the 2024 Lok Sabha election even though voters have mandated the grand old party to sit in the Opposition for the next five years. For the first time since 2014, Rahul Gandhi is able to shed the tag of a failure.

His biggest contribution is not as much as winning two parliamentary seats from Wayanad and Raebareli, but in maximising the party's vote share from 19 to 27 per cent. This is one achievement that Rahul earned through gruelling yatras, crisscrossing first from South to North and then from East to West. His mass interaction and direct communication gave him a supreme confidence that surprised many of his party colleagues, friends and foes alike.

Rahul, who will turn 54 in June this year, has finally arrived on the national scene, earning the respect and dignity he deserves. The Congress, in turn, has found a leader whose political instincts can be trusted. I have often argued that political loyalty is highly transactional. In the context of the Gandhis and the Congress, both sides had been a tad rattled and embarrassed that the fifth-generation dynast and fifth-party president from the family had not been a success. June 4, 2024, has wiped away that stigma forever. The bond between Gandhis and the Congress is all set to be further cemented due to the Priyanka factor. Congress leaders of all hues and shades were delighted to see Priyanka as an effective campaigner throughout the seven phases of electioneering. Her responses to Narendra Modi's line of attack were spontaneous, yet dignified. She exhibited the ability to gel with party leaders, and act as crisis manager and party manager rolled into one. Her political equations with Rahul have been easy, friendly and accommodating, negating any prospects of rival camps being created within the Congress ecosystem.

Senior party leaders say there are not many instances in any political party across the world where a brother-sister jodi has worked so well in a democratic polity. In the last three years, she has filled in the role of Ahmed Patel in sorting

out internal differences, conciliation and turf wars. Priyanka is now set to contest Raebareli Lok Sabha bypolls which are likely to be held along with the Assembly polls

of Haryana and Maharashtra. This will be a unique occasion when the Indian parliament will have three members belonging to a family. Rahul, Priyanka and Sonia Gandhi wish to accord

much of the credit to AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge. Since October 2023, Kharge has maintained a punishing 18-hour-a-day work schedule without a break. Kharge was instrumental

in holding INDI alliance talks, communicating, and shuttling. His personal rapport with many non-NDA parties and individuals has helped tide over crises and delicate situations.

Insurance

- *Home
- *Auto
- *Business
- *Liability
- *Renters

Are you paying too much for Auto, Home, Business, Workman Compensation, Contractors, General Liability, E&O ?

Call us today for complimentary Analysis of your policy.

Sharanjit Singh Thind
licensed Insurance Broker
(Service with Honesty & Smile, Since 2012)
Phone: 646 875 8495
Email: nlightinsurance18@gmail.com



What went wrong for BJP in Ayodhya? Decoding the political shocker

By Kumar Abhishek

Even as the BJP failed to get a majority on its own and banked on its allies to secure a third term, the party's surprising defeat in Faizabad, which houses the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, has hit headlines and sparked a debate.

In fact, the BJP's defeat came just four months after the consecration ceremony of the new idol of Ram Lalla in the grand temple in Ayodhya. Samajwadi Party's Awadhesh Prasad defeated BJP's Lallu Singh by 54,500 votes. Several reasons have been attributed to the BJP's shock setback in the temple town. Alienation of OBCs and Dalits from the BJP, Akhilesh Yadav's ploy of striking a solid caste equation, resentment among locals for not getting compensation for their land taken over for the development of Ayodhya are some of the reasons. A section also linked



the BJP's loss to tension between the party's Delhi and Lucknow units.

HOW BJP'S '400 PAAR' SLOGAN BACKFIRED

Moreover, Faizabad is also one of the seats that has the strongest caste equation in favour of the Samajwadi Party vote bank. Also, what seems to have worked for the Samajwadi Party was the narrative of BJP changing the Constitution if it received a brute majority.

In fact, BJP's Lallu Singh was the first to say in Ayodhya that the Constitution would be changed

if the BJP got more than 400 seats. After that, the Samajwadi Party whipped up a narrative on the issue, alleging that the BJP wanted to end the reservation given to the backwards, Dalits, minorities by changing the Constitution.

The issue gained so much momentum that the BJP kept giving clarifications about it throughout the elections and lost its plot.

Since 1984, the Samajwadi Party and the Congress have won the Faizabad seat twice each. The BJP gained prominence in

Ayodhya after 1991.

Vinay Katiyar, a Kurmi and Hindutva face of the BJP, won three times from the seat while Mitra Sen Yadav of the Samajwadi Party was elected here in 1989, 1998 and 2004.

In 2004, the BJP removed its OBC face Katiyar and made Lallu Singh the candidate. Singh won the seat two consecutive times, in 2014 and 2019. The BJP won the past two elections riding on a "Modi wave" but as soon as caste became the main issue, the party lost.

AKHILESH YADAV GETS CASTE EQUATION SPOT ON

The caste equation in Faizabad is being seen as the major reason behind the BJP's loss. Ayodhya has the highest number of OBC voters, with Kurmis and Yadavs forming the largest chunk.

OBCs constitute 22% of the electorate and Dalits 21%. Among the Dalits, the Pasi community has the maximum voters. The winning candidate,

Awadhesh Prasad, comes from the Pasi community.

Muslims also comprise 18% of the electorate. Together, these three communities make up 50% of the electorate. This time, the three communities - OBCs, Dalits, Muslims - came together to hand the Samajwadi Party a memorable win in Faizabad.

Apart from this, there was widespread resentment among locals for not getting compensation after their lands were taken for development of Ayodhya.

There were murmurs that while Ayodhya was developing and the Ram temple was being constructed, the people from remote villages were not getting any benefit. There were also discussions among locals that businessmen coming from outside were benefiting, while the people of Ayodhya were losing their lands to big projects.

WORKING CAPITAL R US



SOLUTIONS

SBA FINANCING

ASSET BASED LOANS

EQUIPMENT FINANCING

ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLES

BUSINESS LINES OF CREDIT

We look forward to your valued inquiry for our Business Solutions.



Call (646) 897 3016

info@workingcapitalrus.com
www.workingcapitalrus.com

When you want to read News that matters The South Asian Insider Weekly



Uncompromised and Unbiased

*21 Glorious Years *Always a Step Ahead

*Journalism of Courage

*Fearless Voice of the Community

www.thesouthasianinsider.com



The Narendra-Naidu 'Naatu-Naatu' could be good for India. But handle with care

If Modi wants to ensure that Naidu sticks by his side, he needs to ensure that the chief minister-elect is given pride of place as an ambassador of India in the global diaspora and shares the sunshine with him.



By TS Sudhir

In August 2003, Narendra Modi, then chief minister of Gujarat, was slated to visit Hyderabad during the Ganesh festival on an invitation from the BJP-affiliated Bhagyanagar Ganesh Utsav Samiti. But his counterpart Chandrababu Naidu, who had already demanded Modi's resignation in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots, did not want the visit to happen. Naidu was then part of the NDA, and he was worried that Modi's presence in Hyderabad could push the Muslims away from the Telugu Desam in the elections in 2004. The then Hyderabad police commissioner, MV Krishna Rao, dramatically announced that if Modi sets his feet on the soil of Hyderabad, he would either be sent back from the airport itself or arrested. Obviously, Rao's flamboyant boast drew strength from a nod from Naidu.

Much water has flown in the Narmada and the Godavari since that first flight into turbulent weather. The two became friends again ahead of the 2014 elections and won the elections in the bifurcated state of Andhra Pradesh that year. But four years later, Naidu stormed out of the NDA, citing the refusal to grant Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh as the excuse. The real reason was that Naidu felt that Modi 2.0 ain't happening and campaigned extensively across India, drumming up support against the BJP, even from the

Congress.

Calling Modi a terrorist, Naidu termed him unfit to be Prime Minister. The loss of power in Andhra Pradesh in 2019 meant Naidu had to spend more than four years repenting his decision, and it was only in early 2024 that NDA sent him the readmission form.

But during the election campaign in Andhra Pradesh, the BJP spared no effort to show who the boss is. Publicity posters had Modi and even JP Nadda towering over Naidu, whose face in smaller size had been clubbed along with Pawan Kalyan and Andhra BJP chief D Purandareswari, both of them many years junior in politics and experience to the TDP chief. The 2024 verdict has shown that politics is a great leveller as Naidu now gets the seat next to Modi at the NDA high table.

But while Naidu holds the remote control of power to Modi 3.0, is he likely to overuse or even abuse it? Is he likely to be on cloud nine and engage in whimsical politics of the vindictive kind? Is he likely to derive sadistic pleasure from Modi's compulsion to keep him in good humour? Is he likely to be a fairweather friend?

While Naidu will drive a hard bargain and won't settle for less when it comes to positions at the Centre and financial help for an exchequer-empty Andhra Pradesh, I believe that the Naidu of 2024 is not the Naidu of 1995 or 2003 or 2018. Those happy that Naidu will now Ctrl + Del any

decision of Modi that he does not like and press Esc if he feels that Modi is a losing cause, are looking at Naidu from the prism of 1995 when he overthrew his father-in-law and then Andhra Pradesh chief minister NT Rama Rao in a palace coup. The Naidu of today has more grey in his hair and beard and is a far more mature and seasoned politician. More importantly, he has tasted what life out of power and inside prison can be like. He has been subjected to humiliation, heckled by unworthies desperate to get into the good books of YS Jagan Mohan Reddy, reducing him to tears in public. Naidu 4.0 as chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, I would think, comes with upgraded political software and a different agenda in mind.

While there are differences over issues like reservation for Muslims, what binds Modi and Naidu together is their desire to leave behind a legacy. Through the campaign, Modi has been talking of 2047 and Viksit Bharat, while Naidu wants to reboot Andhra Pradesh where infrastructure development has been corrupted.

There would therefore be a meeting of minds when it comes to matters of governance. With the succession route in the TDP sorted with son Nara Lokesh elected to the Andhra assembly, this could well be Naidu's last innings as chief minister. Having tracked him closely since 1995, one can say with reasonable

certainty that Naidu in his fourth innings as chief minister would be a man in a hurry, eager to make Andhra Pradesh regain its pride of place in India.

Building Amaravati as a futuristic capital city would top his to-do list. Over the past five years, Telugus had bemoaned being left out of the political and investment map of India and the return of Naidu - this time with support cutting across communities - is expected to bolster Andhra's prospects and bring back the feel-good factor.

The other common meeting ground with Modi is the passion for tech-driven governance. Both understand the grammar of technology and Naidu prides himself on having been the first chief minister to embrace e-governance and was the darling of the industry during his years as chief minister of united Andhra Pradesh. Expect him to go overboard on wooing the corporates and market Amaravati and the east coast as an investment destination. The youth of Andhra voted for Naidu in the hope that he would spend the next five years generating employment and Naidu knows the Telugu voter is both impatient and extremely vengeful if promises are not honoured.

But if Modi wants to ensure that Naidu sticks by his side, he needs to ensure that the chief minister-elect is given pride of place as an ambassador of India in the global diaspora and shares the sunshine with him. Keeping the compulsions of coalition politics in mind, the chorus of 'Modi, Modi' would have to be tempered down and may be replaced with the 'Naatu-Naatu' like adept coordination between Narendra and Naidu.

So does it mean that Naidu is with the NDA for keeps? Right now, the INDIA bloc is short of numbers, so it does not make sense for Naidu to cross the aisle. Having won a handsome mandate with 16 MPs, Naidu also would not like to take a decision that could lead to a snap general election. His political partner Pawan Kalyan, too, is not inclined towards the Congress. The grand old party is also still anathema for the Andhra electorate. A lot could, however, depend on the different assembly elections that would take place in the next couple of years and the BJP's performance. A lot would also depend on how he is treated by Modi & Co.

BJP can't bank just on Brand Modi anymore

The Lok Sabha election results have been a thriller. Though the NDA came back to power, the BJP failing to get a majority on its own and a stunning performance by the INDIA bloc showed a changing political landscape. India Today's Consulting Editor Rajdeep Sardesai shares key takeaways from the results.



By Rajdeep Sardesai

The Lok Sabha election results have been anything but boring. What most expected to be yet another power performance by the BJP, turned out to be a stunning fightback by the Congress which saw its numbers soar from 52 seats in 2019 to 99 this time. Despite coming back for a record third term and with Narendra Modi days away from being sworn in as Prime Minister, the BJP rode on the back of its allies to achieve the feat. Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party and Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) have emerged as kingmakers in the new government, a 'mili juli sarkar' (coalition government). The NDA managed to win 293 seats, 21 more than the majority mark of 272, as opposed to the Congress-led INDIA bloc's 234 - what most exit polls failed to forecast. The INDIA alliance's impressive victory in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, two of the BJP's strongholds, showed the changing political landscape of the country. This is a midweek special because this has been a special week. The week when India has counted and the general elections of 2024

have thrown up quite a remarkable verdict. A verdict that few would have predicted just a couple of days ago. All the exit pollsters have got it horribly wrong. And the reality is that at the end of the day, we now have what they would call, a 'mili juli sarkar', a coalition government which will be headed by the BJP. There are plenty of takeaways that I have for you from this historic verdict that has been delivered by the wonderful people of this great country called India, that is Bharat.

Takeaway 1: The people of India have reflected the unique diversity of this country. This was an election which can be best described as a state-by-state competition. The BJP was keen to make it presidential--from Kashmir to Kanniyakumari--only one name, Narendra Modi and 'Modi Ki guarantee'. The truth of the matter is, voters in different states have voted on different issues. The voters in Maharashtra have voted differently to those in neighbouring Gujarat, and the voters in Uttar Pradesh have voted differently to those in Bihar, across the Hindi heartland. From Bengal to Odisha, different voting patterns. From Andhra to Tamil

Nadu, different voting patterns again. Diversity has won over uniformity. The attempt to suggest that India is a single leader, single party, single nation has been squarely rejected by the Indian voters, which is why they have reflected, in a way, their desire for a more accommodative coalition -- a mili juli sarkar. Because, my friends, this great country is a coalition after all.

Takeaway 2: The BJP is undoubtedly party number one and Narendra Modi remains leader number one. It is not easy to beat back 10 years of anti-incumbency after being in power and then still complete a hat-trick. The last leader to do that was the great Jawaharlal Nehru. Competition, perhaps, was much less. Despite that frenzied competition, Modi, in all likelihood, will become the Prime Minister of the country yet again. So, there's no doubt that the BJP remains party number one, pan India, winning a seat in Kerala, for example, for the first time. But, and this is important but, if the BJP thinks that purely banking on the Modi name will win it elections any more, they're sadly mistaken. We've seen that in this election very clearly. The

choice of candidates, the unwillingness to take people along, murmurs of dissent, even in Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath was unhappy with the choice of candidates. The manner in which the BJP leadership believed that purely brand Modi was enough to win an election (is) not happening any more. There are local factors that will have to be accounted for. The BJP itself will have to be a little bit more humble when it deals with the leadership, when it deals with its karyakartas (workers) across the country. Takeaway 3: The voters have rejected the arrogance of power. 'Ab ki bar 400 paar' was a drumbeat for the last few months, almost as if it was a done deal. This time, the voter, 'Consult us as well when you say 400 paar'. The BJP appeared to have taken this election, some would say, or at least the voters, at one level, for granted with that '400 paar' slogan, and it came back to bite them in some way or the other. Arrogance of power was reflected in various ways. Look at the way parties were broken in Maharashtra, for example. Deal-making was done almost as if the voter or the citizens' concerns didn't matter

at all. The people of states like Maharashtra have sent a message -- 'Enough is enough. There are limits to deal-making'. In Amethi, Smriti Irani, who had worked hard on the ground, was defeated by Kishori Lal Sharma of the Congress, a faceless worker, simply because the latter was seen as someone who was always available to the people. Smriti Irani was a high-flying minister, and not all karkyakartas (party workers) were happy with her style of functioning, apparently. The voter responded to the arrogance of power. Another example was Jagan Mohan Reddy arresting N Chandrababu Naidu at the age of 73. That arrest, if anything, seemed to have triggered sympathy for Naidu last year.

Takeaway 4: Mandal 2.0 has in some way trumped Mandir of the 21st century. The BJP lost in Faizabad where Ayodhya is, where the Ram Mandir is located, where its candidate, Lallu Singh, lost to a Samajwadi Party candidate who belongs to the Pasi community. Someone had once told me about a popular Hindi slogan there, 'Na Mathura, na Kashi, Ayodhya mein Pasi'. There are caste identities that can sometimes undercut this belief that there is a Hindu monolith, especially the caste that still exists at the bottom of the social pyramid. In that sense, Akhilesh Yadav was successful in sending out the message that his new PDA combine -- Pichhda, Dalit and Alpsankhyak (Backward Classes, Dalits and Minorities) -- was a wider social coalition.

Takeaway 5: The Dalit voter. It's very interesting that in more than 90 of the 150 Dalit-dominated constituencies - where Dalits comprise more than 20 per cent of the population - a large chunk of them went with the INDIA alliance. So, those at the bottom of the pyramid, those who were really hurt by Covid, post-Covid distress and falling incomes,

BJP can't bank just on Brand Modi anymore

needed people to reach out to them. And often many of their MPs didn't perhaps reach out to them during those times. I know that Dalits were also being influenced by this whole discourse of 'Samvidhaan khatre mein hai', reservations will go, but truly, I believe it was also not just a caste but a class issue. That those at the bottom of the pyramid who are people, who are victims of an unequal society, were the ones who are calling for comfort and compassion. And they were not getting that form of compassionate governance.

Takeaway 6: The next takeaway is the sharpening rural-urban divide in the country. It's in several parts of rural India that actually anti-incumbency was at its strongest. I travelled through Maharashtra and you could see it. Conditions of drought over a couple of years, water scarcity, some farmers complaining about restrictions on onion exports, others complaining that they were not getting remunerative prices. Rural distress is real and is often disconnected with GDP numbers. On the ground, the reality is often very different: rural distress, be it in falling incomes or water scarcity, was a real factor.

Takeaway 7: The Mahila voter. I mentioned this in a blog, a few weeks ago, and I repeat it. You can't win an Indian election comprehensively without the support of the mahila (women) voter. The women in different parts of the state reflect the diversity of this country. Which is why, for example, in some parts of the country, they may well back the BJP and the Prime Minister on 5-kg ration or an Awas Yojana scheme or Ujjwala scheme. But in Bengal they may back Mamata Banerjee for her Lakhir Bhandar scheme, where she provides Rs 1,200 to a woman in a household. And that may be an important reason why Mamata Banerjee was able to stave off anti-incumbency in Bengal. So the woman voter, the power of 49, remains a key

factor in Indian elections.

Takeaway 8: Also, what works in Indian elections is alliance politics. When you strike alliances intelligently, they work. The BJP was able to do it in Karnataka with the JD(S) and



managed to corner a substantial Vokkaliga (caste) vote. The BJP struck an alliance with Chandrababu Naidu, and they benefitted from it. The BJP, for example, in Bihar got Nitish Kumar back into the fold, Chirag Paswan into the alliance and they were able to, in a sense, retain a dominant position in Bihar.

By contrast, in Maharashtra, it's an unnatural BJP-led alliance. The same Ajit Pawar the BJP called corrupt was brought in. So, alliance politics may work in one state, it doesn't work in the other. Ditto with the INDIA alliance: the alliance between Akhilesh (Yadav) and Rahul Gandhi worked in UP, but the alliance didn't work in Delhi between AAP and Congress because there was no chemistry on the ground. It worked in Maharashtra for the MVA because Sharad Pawar held it together. Alliance politics requires arithmetic and chemistry. And if the INDIA alliance had ensured that Nitish didn't leave it, or reached out to Chandrababu Naidu, who knows what might have happened?

Takeaway 9: The north-south divide about which there was so much talk before the election.

The truth of the matter is the divide is slowly but surely finding ways of receding politically. You are seeing the BJP grow slowly in parts of southern India. A first ever seat won in Kerala, a major party in Karnataka, a strong

showing in Telangana, and they are a part now of a ruling alliance in Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, the INDIA and the Congress, which was almost demolished in the Hindi heartland in 2019 and 2014, has shown some signs of recovery. Politics is never static, the map of the country keeps changing.

Takeaway 10: Speaking of the Congress, my next takeaway, the Congress is ending up with around 100 seats, 99 to be exact. For a party which got 52 seats last time, that's almost double, and there is a reason to believe that Rahul Gandhi has had a major role to play in the party revival. His yatra certainly galvanised the Congress supporters. It gave the Congress a narrative to speak on. By raising issues of caste and inequality, of concentration of wealth, of holding out ekhatakhati promise of guarantees, the Congress reach out to marginalised sections may well have worked, and Rahul Gandhi deserves some credit. But the worry is that Congress will get typically complacent. The fact is, you're still well behind the BJP. So, the Congress is going to have to double its energies,

double its efforts, and improve its organisational strength if it really wants to take on the BJP.

Takeaway 11: Let me turn to two last points, which really are personal, which I feel strongly about. One is religion. Right

through this election, we've seen an attempt being made to bring in the toxicity of religion into the election campaign. 'Mangalsutra, machli, mutton, mujra' - the kind of language that's been used is deplorable. Lies like reservation benefits will go only to Muslims, 'woh aapki bhains cheen lenge' - what kind of language and discourse is this? This attempt to bring in religion into politics is dangerous in a plural country like India. We have one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, and the challenge of India and the charm of India is when we are able to reconcile rather than polarise. And somewhere when I went across this country, I was reassured, particularly by the young, that they are tiring of this Hindu-Muslim narrative, and they want you to talk about their real issues. Talk about rozgar, unemployment. Along with rural distress, unemployment was a major factor, which is why a number of voters from 18 to 23 age groups voted against the incumbent. That's the issue which you need to address, real issues. Mehngai (inflation), unemployment, not talk constantly about Hindu-Muslim and demonise a community.

Takeaway 12: Which brings me, as I conclude, to the fact that I really, at the end of the day, want to celebrate that we are this remarkably diverse country in the world. We are not in the end a China like remote controlled system. Everyone says democracy is dead, democracy 'khatre mein hai' (in danger). The voter has shown and spoken, the faceless silent voter, often at the bottom of the pyramid, often living on just Rs 6,000 a month, 'el will show you what democracy is'. It's perhaps the fat cats who don't even vote, who have seceded from electoral democracy. So don't the poor, humble, anonymous Indian voter who still comes out and votes in soaring temperatures and sends out strong messages to his or her netas.

As I end, I want to give you a post script today.

I don't know whether I will ever do another election. Maybe I will, maybe I won't. Who knows? Maybe retirement beckons. But either way, I wanted to say this to some of my media friends and colleagues: For much too long, all I have seen in the last several years is what I call 'edamru' journalism, beating the drumbeat of one leader, one party, constantly creating Hindu-Muslim fissures in slanging matches in television studios.

We need to give up the noise and come back to the news. We need to tell the real issues, not just once in five years when we go on our election travels, but more regularly. The people of this country need a strong, vibrant and independent media, and this is our opportunity to restore public faith in the media. Whether the opposition does it or not, we in the media must remain the country's perennial opposition, always telling the truth to power, whoever is in power from whichever party. That, my friends, is, in a way, a message that perhaps the voters are sending to us in the media too. They, too, want us to somewhere course correct. Jai Hind.

Beyond the 'Azad' Facade: Pakistan's Colonial Grip on PoJK



By: Arun Anand

On a bustling Rawalpindi highway in Pakistan's Punjab, a scene unfolds with unsettling familiarity when dozens of passenger vehicles bound for the various districts of Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) are suddenly halted by a group of masked men. What follows this forced halt is chilling as the veiled Pakistani men begin to deface these Kashmiri vehicles with slogans of 'Pakistan Zindabad' and 'Pakistan Army Zindabad'. Yet, this is not an isolated incident of arbitrary vandalism. It is but one episode in a disturbing trend of xenophobic aggression that has gripped Pakistan in recent days, which is a venomous reaction to the escalating unrest within PoJK. Alarmed by the surge in protests against its oppressive policies, the Pakistani government has responded with brute force that left scores dead and dozens injured. These incidents have once again exposed the colonial mindset of both the Pakistani state as well as its people towards Jammu and Kashmir. It also refocuses attention on Islamabad's continued denial of basic rights to the PoJK people beyond the facade of a nominal but hollow political system.

The roots of this turmoil can be traced back to the grievances festering within PoJK over the past year. In May 2023, the decades-simmering discontent exploded as protests erupted against exorbitant electricity tariffs and the withdrawal of subsidies on essential commodities, especially wheat. Given the scale of demonstrations, a Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) was convened, with representatives from every district of PoJK, to spearhead the protests in demanding the redressal of their legitimate grievances. The JAAC came up with a list of ten demands seeking withdrawal of electricity

taxes, restoration of wheat subsidy, transfer of ownership of hydel power projects to PoJK government, 4G cellular services, and debarring of student unions, among others. However, the response from Islamabad was not one of conciliation or reform but of evasion and repression. The Pakistani state, aided by its local proxies such as the toothless regional government, engaged in a game of cat and mouse with the JAAC, turning a deaf ear to the plight of the impoverished region. As these political demonstrations gained momentum in May this year, the Pakistani authorities resorted to their familiar tactic of violent suppression in their attempts to crush the peaceful protestors with their ruthless efficiency. For instance, in an incident in Muzaffarabad on May 13, Pakistan's Paramilitary Rangers killed three people and injured a dozen by using live ammunition on peaceful protesters. Yet, amidst the chaos and bloodshed, a remarkable defiance emerged from the streets of PoJK. For the first time in its recent memory, the people of PoJK dared to challenge the stranglehold of the Pakistani military apparatus, defying the omnipresent gaze of the armed forces and the intricate intelligence grid of its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Social media is awash with posts showing young men replacing Pakistan's national flag with that of the PoJK flag on major landmarks of Muzaffarabad and other prominent cities and towns.

At the same time, while Islamabad's violent response exposes the hollowness of its self-ascribed benefactor role towards Kashmiris, the concomitant increase in the xenophobic retort of the common Pakistanis towards the PoJK residents, in essence, reveals the deeply ingrained colonial mindset that underpins Pakistan's historic approach towards J&K. These

protests have also forced the Pakistani state to push its local proxies such as Muslim Conference to hold counter rallies in support of Islamabad and Pakistan Army, which have, however, been met with disdain by the locals.

It is interesting how Pakistan has been able to perpetuate the narrative of its benevolence by claiming to have provided PoJK with the so-called 'autonomous' governance system through various constitutional arrangements over a period of time. Yet, it is these arrangements that have effectively deprived the people of PoJK of their rights, political autonomy, and resources while allowing Pakistan to maintain overarching control over the region, and engage in its resource loot, from minerals to water resources.

For instance, the 1974 Interim Constitution of PoJK, drafted by Pakistan's Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, established separate offices for the president, prime minister, and Supreme Court, among others. However, it granted Islamabad unchallenged authority to dismiss any elected government irrespective of the support it may enjoy in the PoJK Legislative Assembly. As such, not only can Pakistan's Minister of Kashmir Affairs dismiss the PoJK government, but even the region's chief secretary, the highest-level federal bureaucrat in Muzaffarabad can exercise such discretionary powers to sack the prime minister, which is a travesty of even the very nominal nature of this system.

Hence, this constitutional arrangement essentially renders PoJK's so-called 'autonomous' government subservient to Pakistan's Federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. Likewise, the constitution established two executive forums for PoJK, including the Muzaffarabad-based PoJK government, which is formed by the largest

party in the Azad Kashmir Legislative Assembly and Islamabad-based Azad Kashmir Council (AKC), which functions under the control of Pakistan's prime minister. What is significant is that the Council exercises absolute power over the PoJK Assembly with its decisions final and beyond any judicial review. The constitution further details that the Government of Pakistan retains control over 52 subjects through the Kashmir Council, which leaves hardly anything in the legislative domain of the PoJK Assembly. As such, this provides Islamabad control over virtually everything, of any importance, to PoJK, thereby reinforcing how the local government's authority does not exceed beyond the municipal affairs.

Moreover, Pakistan retained provisions for deploying its federal bureaucrats to PoJK in the 1974 Constitution, including civil and police officers who assume decision-making positions across its administrative units. This enables Islamabad to directly manage the region's micro cum macro-governance affairs, as these officers are more accountable to the federal government than to the PoJK government. The helplessness of PoJK is reflected in one of Human Rights Watch's annual reports which states that the Pakistani bureaucracy is the real administrative power, the ISI and the Pakistan army exercise coercive power. And under the constitution, the elected representatives are subservient to the Kashmir Council controlled by Pakistan. High Court and Supreme Court Judges can only be appointed by approval of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs in Islamabad.

Additionally, the Pakistani Army has taken on a dominant role in managing the region, with a two-star officer of the Murree-based 12 Infantry Division wielding more power than the president and prime minister of this so-called 'Azadi' Kashmir government. As such, this arrangement mirrors a typical colonial apparatus as it allows Islamabad to exercise control over both micro and macro-level governance affairs of the region. For a long time, Pakistan has used the nominal autonomous characterisation of PoJK's political offices to obscure the reality of its municipal-level government authority to create the impression of self-rule in the region. It is in this context that the year-long protests in PoJK assume significance as they not only unnerved the Pakistani state and its military establishment but also exposed its imperial approach towards the region.

Moreover, the initial demands for economic relief have gradually expanded to include calls for greater autonomy and self-determination demands that Pakistan has suppressed for years. This shift demonstrates that the people of PoJK are determined to challenge Pakistan's military dominance in pursuit of their political and economic rights.

Left-‘Liberals’ And The Demonisation of Donald Trump

By: Ravi Shanker Kapoor

Former US president Donald Trump's conviction in the hush money case, which has delighted Leftists all over the world, underlines a disturbing fact: even though the ideologies they believed in, communism and socialism, were globally discredited more than three decades ago, their influence continues to date. The success of Alvin Bragg, the radical Leftist politician and Manhattan Attorney, against Trump proves that.

Consider this: a billionaire former US president, who seems to be on a comeback trail, has been convicted for a crime that has no victims. By no stretch of imagination can his action of paying hush money, even if he did that, to a pornstar can be called an offence serious enough to attract four years of imprisonment. The only person who should be worried about a man's dealing with a pornstar could be his wife, but that is beside the point. The Leftists running the ruling Democratic Party in the US are keen to somehow keep Trump away from office by hook or by crook. Ends justify means; hence the travesty of justice called Trump conviction. Jose Alba, 61, was charged with second-degree murder in the killing of Austin Simon, 35, despite the video clip clearly showing the six-foot Simon shoving and attacking Alba. The video in this case speaks for itself: Mr. Alba was simply doing his job when he was aggressively cornered



by a much younger and bigger man, Alice Fontier, a spokeswoman for Alba's attorney, told the media. Thankfully, the judge dismissed the murder charge, but Alba still had to spend time in prison. All this because he had the temerity to ask Simon's girlfriend to pay for the items she had taken from the store. She came back with Simon and, during the scuffle in which he died, she also stabbed Alba. But, typically, Bragg refused to prosecute her for the stabbing.

Bragg also ensured that a felony robbery

charge against the violent criminal Christian Hall was reduced, resulting in his release in January 2022. A month later, he was arrested again after he assaulted a city sanitation worker in the same neighborhood.

The pro-criminal approach of Bragg and of other politicians is predicated upon critical legal theory. A counter-Enlightenment theory, it is predicated upon the dogma that jurisprudence in the US and other democracies operates in a sanitized universe that doesn't take social

biases into account. Leftists contaminate the conventionally accepted jurisprudence with the toxicity of social justice, and deliver critical legal theory. For them, executing such devious doctrines is a religious duty. They are equally passionate in destroying anyone who is a threat to beliefs and authority. Hence the relentless demonisation of Trump right from the day when he announced to run for presidency to his presidency, and to date. A zillion accusations have been made against him: Russian collusion, racism, xenophobia, financial fraud. Nothing stuck till the recent past; somehow, though, his enemies managed to convict him.

They are as zealous in maligning and defaming Trump as they are fervent in shielding the man they believe can stop him coming back to power: Biden. The entire Left-liberal establishment, including academics, the mainstream media, and activists, has closed their ranks behind the incumbent US President. The US House Committee on Oversight and Accountability found last year that the Bidens and their associates have received over \$20 million in payments from foreign entities. In September 2023, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said, Bank records show that nearly \$20 million in payments were directed to the Biden family members and associates through various shell companies.

Critics Vs Data: How India's Economy Proves the Doubters Wrong

By: Aditya Sinha

In one iconic episode of Yes, Minister, Sir Humphrey Appleby revealed the nature of bureaucratic criticism to Jim Hacker, saying, 'The Opposition aren't really opposing. They're criticising, and it's a much more subtle form of disapproval.'

This sentiment echoes the recent scenario involving a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. Known for his consistent criticism of the government, in one of the conversations with one of the Opposition leaders, he predicted that the country would be fortunate to achieve a 5 per cent growth rate next year. Much like Sir Humphrey's description, this prediction seemed to be more about criticism for its own sake rather than being backed by substantive data.

However, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released data on May 31, 2024, that stands in stark contrast to this pessimistic outlook. According to their estimates, the Real GDP is expected to grow by an impressive 8.2% in FY 2023-24, up from the 7.0% growth rate in FY 2022-23. It is even more than



expected 7.6%, according to the second advance estimates released in February 2024. The Indian economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience and growth across various sectors in FY 2023-24 compared to FY 2022-23. The

manufacturing sector saw a dramatic turnaround, jumping from a contraction of -2.2% to an impressive growth of 9.9%. Similarly, the mining and quarrying sector experienced a significant boost, growing from 1.9% to 7.1%. Electricity, gas, water

supply, and other utility services saw growth from 7.5% to 9.4%, while construction maintained its strong growth at 9.9%.

The trade, hotels, transport, communication, and services related to the broadcasting sector slowed from 12.0% to 6.4%, yet still exhibited positive growth. However, there are some concerns, as this sector employs a significant portion of the workforce. Financial, real estate, and professional services saw a slight decrease in growth from 9.1% to 8.4%, and public administration, defence, and other services experienced a modest decrease from 8.9% to 7.8%. Agriculture, livestock, forestry, and fishing growth decreased from 4.7% to 1.4%. These figures show the resilience and robustness of the Indian economy, making it the fastest-growing economy in the world. An 8.2% growth rate was not anticipated by anyone, defying all pessimistic forecasts. This is precisely the kind of economic performance India needs to sustain over the next decade to ensure continued development and prosperity.

How Maha Vikas Agadhi showed its mettle in Mumbai and Maharashtra

By Neeta Kolhatkar

The last two years have been challenging for Uddhav Thackeray, in particular when his party split and his father's party was hijacked by Eknath Shinde. Neeta Kolhatkar

The minute the results began trickling in on June 4, the mandate pointed to the people rejecting divisive politics and forcible breaking of opposition parties in Maharashtra and the rest of the country. The Bombay Stock Exchange closed at 4,389 points lower, and the Nifty dropped by 1379 points ó one of the worst crashes in the last four years. Mumbai and Maharashtra had already reflected this mood before the election, angry when they saw the Maha Vikas Agadhi government fall on June 21, 2022. The mandate held the Bharatiya Janata Party accountable and did not give it a clear majority. Did Narendra Modi sense this? Is this why he resorted to communal rhetoric? Voters asserted their right to say no to divisive politics.

In 2014, the BJP alleged that the original Shiv Sena and Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray ditched them at the last minute, and they always harped on the



deceit, saying the MVA, the tri-party alliance of Indian National Congress, Nationalist Congress Party and Shiv Sena, was borne out of greed for power. Political parties were split, and rival politicians were booked in cases and threatened with arrests.

The last two years have been challenging for Uddhav, in particular when his party split and his father's party was hijacked by Eknath Shinde. Uddhav lost his party symbol and was given a torch, yet the citizens of Mumbai bestowed trust in him. Now, Uddhav will have to deliver in the next five years. Mumbai City

It was a nail-biting finish in Maharashtra as first-timer Amol Kirtikar stood up against his stalwart Shiv Sainik father Gajanan Kirtikar, a former

minister who shifted his loyalties to Eknath, while Amol stood by Uddhav. He faced another Uddhav loyalist, Ravindra Waikar.

Waikar demanded recounting and Amol lost by a mere 48 votes. It is a personal loss for both Uddhav and Amol. Yet, politically speaking, Waikar is still an Uddhav loyalist. Before Waikar moved to the Shinde Sena, he alleged that authorities were threatening him and that he and his wife faced arrests and were forced to leave. Uddhav's larger political picture for Mumbai city may not be impacted because, as a Member of Parliament, Waikar will have authority to disburse funds and sanction projects.

The Piyush Goyal win was the

most predictable one for Mumbai North. This constituency has the trend of being a BJP and Modi loyalist apart from a large decisive population of Gujarati residents.

Muslim vote shifts

The important seats for MVA were South Mumbai (Arvind Sawant), North Central (Varsha Gaiwad), and South Central (Anil Desai). The large Muslim vote has been decisive. Shinde Sena's Yamini Jadhav lost to Sawant primarily due to 40,000-odd Muslim voters. This lead was in Byculla and Dongri. For Anil Desai, again, ideally he should have got nearly 45,000 votes from Aaditya Thackeray's constituency, Worli. However, those were reduced to nearly 4,000-5,000, while Muslim votes from Chembur, Anushakti

Nagar, Kurla, Sion, and Mahim were decisive.

This year's Muslim vote is different from that of 1996. After the Bombay riots in 1992-1993, Muslims in Mumbai voted out of fear. This time, Muslims voted to support Uddhav, who was the only Maharashtra leader who took on Modi and the BJP for their divisive politics ó Congress leaders did not aggressively call out the hate politics.

Uddhav also got sympathy from unexpected quarters, the elite of Mumbai. During his tenure as chief minister in 2020, when the world was gripped by the Covid-19 pandemic, Uddhav proved his mettle as he handled the situation with poise. That Dharavi, one of the world's largest slums, was not adversely impacted by Covid-19 is no small feat. Citizens did not forget and paid their dues on May 20 by voting for the Uddhav Sena.

But Uddhav's worries are far from over ó he suffered major losses even though his party won nine seats (the Shinde Sena bagged seven). Shinde managed to hold his turfs of Thane and Kalyan, and thanks to him, the BJP made in-roads in Konkan, a major loss to Uddhav and the MVA.

Exit the Exit Polls? Why It Might Be Time

By: Priyadarshi Dutta

All exit poll predictions went awry this time. Pradeep Gupta, Director and CMD of Axis My India, a market survey and intelligence company, found himself on the receiving end of snide remarks from Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera on a TV channel. Khera insinuated ulterior motives behind Gupta's predictions, linking them to stock market speculations, as the Sensex experienced volatility after election results came in.

Market sentiments built on false dreams of exit polls caved in at the onset of actual results. Gupta is a top psephologist, and his company boasts of 94 per cent accuracy in exit polls. It seems this was a case of six per cent on the wrong side. However, Gupta was not an exception. Predictions of around 10 pollsters, who had



tied with different media houses, went horribly wrong.

It would be too much of an accusation that all of them were manipulated to suit the narratives of a particular political party. However, nothing is too much in today's polarised and raucous

political climate. This is not, however, the first time exit polls have gone haywire. They have a non-uniform track record over the last 25 years they have been held in India. They have sometimes gone right, even dead right, and wrong on other occasions. We

have repeatedly tried to comfort ourselves into believing that their accuracy has improved over the years, as is the case with weather predictions. That attitude is always a hint of a bigger debacle. Interestingly, it was DD (then called Doordarshan), that first legitimised exit polls in India. At that time, it was trendy in liberal democracies like the UK, USA, Israel etc. On February 28, 1998, a minute after polling closed for the 12th Lok Sabha at 5 pm, DD aired exit polls conducted by GVL Narasimha Rao for a prominent newspaper and Pritish Nandy Communications. These polls, based on a sample size of 26,000 voters across 1,450 polling booths in 120 constituencies, continued late into the night. Sample sizes have drastically increased since then, reaching an average of around five lakh

voters today.

However, the perils of exit polls were identified by Pritish Nandy even at that time. In an article on March 5, 1998, he argued that exit polls, unlike opinion polls, were a 'dangerous and scary business'. 'You can be proved wrong within days ó in fact, hours', said Nandy, 'and there are enough people prepared to insinuate motives to what can quite easily be described as systems failure, to quote Dr Manmohan Singh's famous definition of securities scam.' A quarter-century later, Nandy's predictions ring strikingly true. A pollster, risking their reputation to make predictions, faces the potential for swift public scrutiny and accusations of ulterior motives, even if flawed findings stem from systemic issues rather than deliberate manipulation.

Not Your Victory: Why Congress Should Not Celebrate Lok Sabha Results

By: Sandip Ghose

Writing for Firstpost in early April 2024, this columnist had quipped, 'if the electioneering is muted and shorn of fireworks, the voter too is keeping mum. Is there a message in that silence too?' The voters broke their silence on June 4, 2024. But have they all spoken in one voice? Certainly not. There is also no single message either in favour of the INDI alliance and the Congress or against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as I shall argue in this piece.

The BJP is often a victim of its own hype as we have seen in the case of some state elections in the past, most notably in West Bengal circa 2021 when an increase in the number of seats in the Assembly from a mere three to 77 was called a resounding defeat. Having started with a clarion call of '400 paar', the June 4 results will no doubt appear as West Bengal redux. While the Congress with less than 100 seats is celebrating victory, the BJP with 240 seats is made to look like a loser. So, it is all about perspectives and context. After the INDIA bloc meeting last evening, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge made a cryptic statement: 'We will take appropriate steps at the appropriate time to realise the people's desire not to be ruled by the BJP's government.' So, the Congress appears to be in no mood to rest. It is a party that is not used to remaining out of power and it is no secret that the Gandhi family sees itself destined to rule the country. Ten years is the longest time anyone has managed to keep it away from the Centre. Having come close to snatching back power, they would do everything within their capacity and support from any willing sponsor to unseat Narendra Modi, as they have done with other non-Congress prime ministers in the past.

Though for now the BJP's pre-poll allies have pledged support and decided to stay put with the NDA, in the great Indian political bazaar, one cannot rule out some of them switching sides, if they fail to strike a bargain in the new formation, or if the other side lures them with an offer they cannot refuse. Besides, there is a large bunch of fair-weather birds who flocked to the BJP before the elections and may now put themselves out in the market as



a cohort. Should the Congress resort to 'Operation Lotus' tactics against the BJP, aiming to destabilise the government as they've done before, that could queer the pitch too. Therefore, it may be premature to assume the current NDA tally of 292 is a done deal. At the same time, it would be wrong to believe that the new BJP under Narendra Modi is not capable of playing its own games and getting more people on its side to bolster its position and, thereafter, go for mid-term polls at a time of its own choice to return with a larger majority. Anything is possible in politics where a week is a long time. Thus, it may be prudent to keep the arithmetic on hold and, instead, delve a little into the verdict to decode the messages and implications.

In the absence of any overarching issue, the BJP fought the election in Narendra Modi's name. Modi himself ran an unapologetic presidential-style campaign, using the catchphrase 'Modi Ki Guarantee' and often saying in his speeches that pressing the BJP's lotus symbol button on the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) would transfer the vote directly into his account, making the local candidate appear inconsequential.

This had worked in 2019 when it was said in jest that if a lamppost were made to stand on a BJP ticket, it would have won purely on the Modi wave. But in circa 2024, the law of

diminishing returns began to cast its shadow over 'Brand Modi'. It was no longer enough to carry the day by itself, overcoming local anti-incumbency or the negative baggage of individual candidates. Therefore, in fairness, Narendra Modi will have to take accountability for the numbers. But, can it be said that the final outcome is a verdict on Modi himself? To that, I will say a categorical 'NO', just as I would also assert that it is not a positive mandate for either Rahul Gandhi or the Opposition.

First, the issues that affected the BJP were not uniform across places. The reasons for its performance in different states varied widely, including the ones where it has done well like Jharkhand and Odisha. Equally, it cannot be said that the INDI alliance secured its votes by fighting from a common platform like the Janata Dal movement in 1977.

While 'saving the Constitution' was a common refrain among INDI alliance partners, not all of them were on the same page with Rahul Gandhi on caste census, quotas, reservations and 'khat-khat' doles and instant employment like in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar. Among these, UP deserves special

attention, as this is the state where the BJP has actually been reduced to half. As the state that returns the largest number of parliamentarians, it is most representative of the 'North'.

The BJP's debacle in UP is baffling given the Yogi-Modi 'double engine' regime's track record: development, governance, 'labharthi' (welfare) schemes, expressways, and, above all, Kashi and Ram Mandir. Here, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress combine appear to have ticked all the boxes to get minorities, OBCs (other backward classes) and, surprisingly, the youth rallying behind the 'gathbandhan'. Their task may have been made easier by caste fault lines, factionalism within the BJP, and mistakes in ticket distribution factors many link to a power struggle between the BJP's state and central leadership.

Whatever be the underlying reasons, it is a 'deja-vu' of the 'India Shining' anti-climax of 2004. However, the same cannot be said about the other states.

If the INDI alliance's performance in Maharashtra has been impressive, it was thanks to the BJP's confused strategy in the state ever since it broke ties with Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena.

With Nitish and Naidu on song, will it be music to Modi's ears?

By TS Sudhir

In 2019, when Nitish Kumar's JD(U) had won 16 seats in the Lok Sabha elections, he demanded that all NDA allies be given proportional representation in the Union cabinet according to their respective strength. But the BJP leadership snubbed his proposal, insisting that his party wouldn't get more than a single berth in the Cabinet. Five years later, Nitish Kumar's chunk of 12 MPs is part of the critical oxygen support system for the BJP at the Centre. It won't any longer be a case of Nitish proposes, Modi disposes. Just 48 hours ago, the buzz that Nitish would be asked to step down as chief minister and move out as Governor or a minister at the Centre was strong. The talk that deputy chief minister Samrat Choudhary could be asked to step up gained currency in Delhi and Patna political circles. The photo-op of a meeting



with Prime Minister Narendra Modi seemed to confirm such conjectures. But the third umpire in the Bihar voter has declared Nitish Babu 'Not Out'. The BJP that keeps flexing its muscle in Bihar will now have to treat the chief minister with kid gloves. In the most apt proof of the dynamic nature of politics and life, now Nitish, with his 12 MPs, holds one of the two remote controls to 7 Lok Kalyan Marg. Times

have changed for the man once celebrated as CEO of Andhra Pradesh Inc as well. Earlier this year, when Chandrababu Naidu boarded the flight to New Delhi to negotiate a return to the NDA fold after six years, he was visibly anxious and a touch nervous. A senior leader who accompanied him felt Naidu's demeanor was not surprising, since he had endured a lot of humiliation in the past five years. Sharp barbs,

including personal comments on his family from the YSRCP, had reduced the senior leaders to tears in public.

The YSRCP social media cell humiliated him further by converting that unfortunate sight into memes in bad taste. Being sent to Rajahmundry Central Prison for 53 days in 2023 in the Skill Development case had left him feeling very vulnerable. His son Nara Lokesh was made to wait in New Delhi to secure an appointment with Home Minister Amit Shah. Despite several overtures by Naidu since the 2019 drubbing in Andhra Pradesh, the duo of Narendra Modi and Shah was simply not interested in readmitting the Telugu Desam into the NDA till earlier this year. The tide has turned, and now it is Naidu who has made a Rajinikanthesque comeback.

Why Modi gov't 3.0 will see a BJP more accommodative of allies

PM Modi's victory speech on June 4 avoiding references to 'Modi Sarkar' and reiterating 'NDA' indicates gathbandhan flexibility in the making

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's arrival at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi late in the evening of June 4 to lead the victory celebrations brought cheer to the gathered party leaders and cadre, but the enthusiasm was dim elsewhere. The Lok Sabha election verdict may have brought Modi to power for a third straight term, but with a reduced mandate and confidence as allies get more elbow room to bargain hard.

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has secured 291 seats, much lower than the projections within the camp. The BJP did manage to hold onto some of its traditional north Indian bastions, such as Madhya Pradesh (29 seats), Gujarat (25), Chhattisgarh (10), Delhi (7), Uttarakhand (5) and Himachal Pradesh (4), while making headway down South in massive losses for the BJP in the Jat heartland of Sonapat, Hissar, Rohtak, Sirsa and Ambala where these combinations play a pivotal role. The bellwether states in the BJP leadership's immediate assembly elections in Haryana, Jharkhand and Maharashtra. The NDA has not only lost seats here but the BJP vote share has also gone down. The NDA won 21 of the past 10 Maharashtra's 48 seats. While Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena leadership faction won seven of the 15 seats contested with a 12.95 per cent vote share, the rival Shiv Sena (UBT), led by Uddhav Thackeray, did marginally better, winning nine seats and a 16.92 per cent vote share. Similarly, Ajit Pawar's NCP faction won one of the four seats contested with 3.6 per cent votes whereas his uncle Sharad Pawar's faction of the NCP grabbed eight seats with 10.27 per cent votes. Contesting with these allies, the BJP will have to sweat hard to win the Maharashtra assembly polls. Over the next three months, the BJP will also have to rework its social engineering and alliances, especially in Maharashtra and Haryana. The BJP will have to win back the Jat votes or strengthen the non-Jat caste rainbow besides accommodating the Jats from Haryana into the government. The BJP's vote share in Haryana has dropped to 46.1 per cent from 58 per cent in 2019. The assembly polls will see a more confident Bhupinder Hooda and the Congress challenge the BJP. In West Bengal, the BJP will have to rethink its strategy. Direct confrontation with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress is not working out. The BJP could win only 12 seats out of 42 with 38.73 per cent votes. The Union government was late in implementing the CAA and overhyped the issue. The BJP will also have to strike a balance between turncoats and the party's committed cadre to ready them for the 2026 assembly polls.

Here are some broad takeaways from the BJP's electoral performance:

Limitations of Hindu nationalism
The BJP went into polls banking heavily on its hyper Hindu nationalism narrative. The euphoria was loaded with themes like the Ayodhya Ram temple, abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir,

Citizenship (Amendment) Act, and the substantial movement towards a Uniform Civil Code. The BJP was expected to reap the benefits of this but met with resistance in the Hindi heartland itself.

Rural distress, local issues such as reluctance in opening up government jobs, poor selection of candidates, intense



fractionalism, and social engineering by opponents in UP and Rajasthan undid the BJP's gameplan. The top leadership stoking Hindu nationalism further by repeatedly accusing the Opposition of Muslim appeasement only polarised the Muslim vote further away from the party in UP, West Bengal and crucial seats in Rajasthan and consolidated it in favour of the INDIA bloc. Add to this the substantial shift of the Dalit vote from the BJP in UP, Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab, as well as the transfer of the Bahujan Samaj Party vote-bank to non-BJP parties in UP.

In UP, Rajasthan and Haryana, the BJP struggled to appease the dominant Jat voters, who not only substantially voted against the party but also worked actively to convince other communities under their influence to do the same. These communities had resonance for the Hindutva narrative but voted by giving preference to local issues.

Friends in deed

Analysts say Modi's next term will need him to be more reconciliatory towards friends and allies. In his political career as chief minister of Gujarat and two terms as prime minister Modi has always run

full-majority governments and didn't have to budge to allies. That may have to change not only to smoothly run an alliance government but to also win back the confidence of the electorate in his brand of politics.

Modi's victory speech on June 4 avoiding references to 'Modi Sarkar' and reiterating that this was an NDA government

indicates flexibility. The BJP will have to balance the power equations with allies like N. Chandrababu Naidu (TDP), Nitish Kumar (JD-U), Chirag Paswan (LJP) and Eknath Shinde (Shiv Sena) at the central/state level. The allies crucially contribute 52 MPs to the NDA government's stability, marking the return of the 'gathbandhan' era after a decade. The TDP is seeking cabinet slots for three of its MPs, the Lok Sabha speaker's post and two berths as junior ministers. The BJP has to accommodate its warring allies in Bihar, where Chirag, Nitish and Jitan Ram Manjhi don't see eye to eye. The BJP also needs to meet the demands of its allies in Maharashtra, who bring crucial nine MPs to the NDA.

Subdued cadre

The lower-than-expected seat count is reflecting in the subdued enthusiasm of the BJP cadre. The BJP leadership's quest to induct turncoats to win seats and come to power in states had put off party workers in most parts of the country. The arbitrary selection of candidates in several states upset the cadre. There has been a common grudge that the BJP

leadership didn't heed advice and make appropriate corrections based on feedback from the cadre, and that executives of the professional agencies hired were trusted more. Modi's war cry of '100 crore' also proved to be counterproductive and costly in that the cadre took it too seriously and eased off during the campaign.

again exposed the inefficiency of chief minister Bhajan Lal Sharma, who failed to control the party factions. In making him chief minister after the assembly poll victory last year, the BJP sidelined several top leaders, such as two-time chief minister Vasundhara Raje, Union minister Gajendra Shekhawat and state unit chief C.P. Joshi.

During the campaign, when Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal claimed that the BJP may opt to replace Yogi Adityanath after the Lok Sabha polls, it was an attempt to create confusion among the party cadre and the UP chief minister's loyalists. There is grudge in a section of the party in UP that Adityanath was not used to full potential in the campaign, and that many of his recommendations were overruled.

The BJP was also late in replacing Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Here too, the party brought in a lightweight Nayab Singh Saini, who didn't get much time to appease the warring Jats. Also, the Opposition narrative that the BJP government might amend the Constitution to end reservations altogether made Dalits apprehensive and resulted

Handling of satraps

in the past 10 years, the BJP leadership changed all party chief ministers and even replaced some of them with political lightweights. The results in Rajasthan have

again exposed the inefficiency of chief minister Bhajan Lal Sharma, who failed to control the party factions. In making him chief minister after the assembly poll victory last year, the BJP sidelined several top leaders, such as two-time chief minister Vasundhara Raje, Union minister Gajendra Shekhawat and state unit chief C.P. Joshi. During the campaign, when Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal claimed that the BJP may opt to replace Yogi Adityanath after the Lok Sabha polls, it was an attempt to create confusion among the party cadre and the UP chief minister's loyalists. There is grudge in a section of the party in UP that Adityanath was not used to full potential in the campaign, and that many of his recommendations were overruled. The BJP was also late in replacing Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar. Here too, the party brought in a lightweight Nayab Singh Saini, who didn't get much time to appease the warring Jats. Also, the Opposition narrative that the BJP government might amend the Constitution to end reservations altogether made Dalits apprehensive and resulted

Modi Set For A Historic Third Term With A Weakened Mandate

Narendra Modi will become the first incumbent prime minister to return to office for a third consecutive term, 62 years after Jawahar Lal Nehru's hat-trick in 1962. In 2019, Modi became the first prime minister to return with a majority, 48 years after Indira Gandhi first achieved the milestone.

RETURN TO COALITION POLITICS

This time, of course, Modi's BJP will be helped across the halfway mark as India returns to a period of coalition politics after a hiatus of 10 years. A win, of course, is a win. And the NDA is still very well placed to deliver effective governance, especially when it rests on a fulcrum as substantial as that of the BJP.

BJP'S HEGEMONY SHEATHED

But it is also true that a humbled BJP will have to learn to rule on terms that may not always be set by it. While it is true the prime minister has never personally lost a major election but that doesn't mean he has no experience in making



compromises to stay in power. In Karnataka, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir and Maharashtra, the BJP ran effective coalition governments under the aegis of the prime minister. Yet, there is no gainsaying that coalition politics can be frustrating and distracting in the company of temperamental and demanding allies.

AFFIRMATION OF INDIA'S DEMOCRACY

The weakened mandate that has chastened the BJP is an affirmation of the robustness of India's democracy and the institutions that guard it. This is not a country sliding backwards into the abyss of tyranny. Authoritarian leaders never voluntarily subject themselves to any sort of inquisition at the hands of the public. Quite clearly, Modi is very much a democrat willing to let the people have their say.

India's democracy has set down deep

roots. It has matured, voters are spoiled for choice. No result is pre-ordained, and no precept is sacrosanct except one: performance pays.

MODI'S APPEAL LARGELY INTACT

And that is why the BJP projected Modi front and centre. The party realised that Modi's personal credibility was the only guarantee of a creditable showing in the face of ten years of anti-incumbency exacerbated by twin convulsions.

First, the deflating impact of Covid-19 pandemic on job creation and industry in the country. And second, a conflict in Europe that has inflated the price Indians need to pay to simply keep their heads above water. That the prime minister has emerged from this maelstrom relatively unscathed is still a remarkable feat. Some other top global leaders haven't been half as fortunate. The BJP will also take heart from certain positives.

BJP'S GAIN IN LOSS

For one, the knowledge that it is by far the single largest party with more than double the number of seats than the Congress. And that its vote share has more or less held steady, which proves that the party is still the first choice of the voters across India.

BJP's seats overall may be

down by a little over fifty and it might have lost in its twin citadels of Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra but it has nevertheless broken fresh ground. In Odisha, the BJP has emerged as the ruling party at both the state and national levels. In the South, it has made impressive gains. In Andhra, the NDA will have its government at the state level. It will also have a hefty contingent of parliamentarians from the state. In Telangana, it has emerged as a major force. It has opened its account in Kerala. Even in Tamil Nadu where it has flattered to deceive, the BJP has grown.

This is the first time since 1989 that a national party leading a third front has won a double-digit vote share and ended up a runner-up in nine seats in Tamil Nadu. This proves that the disaffection with the BJP was localised to a few states. And that in the absence of one overriding issue, local factors played a

role in these stressed geographies.

But a lot else has also gone wrong.

BREACH IN BJP'S SOCIAL ENGINEERING

The BJP has seen its support among the depressed classes dwindle in the Hindi heartland, especially in Uttar Pradesh. For a variety of reasons, these non-jatav Dalits and non-Yadav OBCs have deserted the BJP. The prime minister has always seen himself as the greatest benefactor of these classes. Their goodwill had powered the BJP to two terms with massive majorities. The BJP will have to introspect why and how they squandered their beneficence.

IMPORTED LEADERS

Simultaneously, the BJP may have also squandered the goodwill of some of their own cadre. Putting unwinnability above all else, the BJP lowered the entry-level threshold substantially. Many leaders taken in laterally had little in common with the BJP's ideological disposition or the Sangh's cultural outlook. There are murmurs that these imports served only to douse the morale of the BJP worker and the Sangh cadre that may not have wholeheartedly campaigned.

In the end analysis, to merely view the result of the 2024 election as a barometer of Modi's electability would be to reduce the consequentiality of the contest. The 2024 election was unique because it will be documented as not merely a competition between leaders but between their vastly differing take on the idea of India. Posterity will judge if the better idea won. But today, a vast number of people have certainly told us that with a few important caveats, they still mainly trust the agency and vision of PM Modi to secure their future.

How Nitish Kumar again proved his political timing to stay No. 1 in Bihar

This Lok Sabha election should not have been about Nitish Kumar, the longest-serving chief minister of Bihar. After all, he did not have any personal stakes involved in an election that would elect the next government at the Centre. Also, with the current Bihar assembly's tenure valid till November 2025 and a simple majority already backing him, Nitish ostensibly had no threat to his position in his state.

But in the backdrop of multiple what-ifs and conspiracy theories of the BJP attempting to eat into Nitish's votes and Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav, with his kinetic campaign, set to run away with the poll narrative, the spotlight stayed on the Bihar chief minister.

The Janata Dal United's performance in the 2020 assembly polls—finishing a poor third with just 43 seats—had only added to the lingering questions. But as the Lok Sabha poll results were declared on June 4, the JD(U)'s impressive seats tally left Nitish's critics stunned and opponents silenced.

Nitish's party has emerged as the single-largest entity in Bihar despite contesting only 16 seats whereas the other big two parties, RJD and BJP, had fielded more candidates. Now, as the new Lok Sabha configuration sees the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) past the simple majority mark, Nitish's significance is only likely to increase.

So, how did Nitish achieve something that seemed so difficult in the beginning? Clearly, the chief minister has played to his strengths.

In every campaign meeting, Nitish addressed 65 of these—the chief minister spoke about his initiatives to provide 50 per cent reservation to women in panchayats and urban bodies, raise women's reservation in government jobs to 35 per cent, and provide cycles to schoolgoing girls to increase education levels, which in turn led to a sharp decline in fertility rates.

To an outsider, a major part of Nitish's speech, connecting education, reservation, fertility rate and empowerment, may well have been delivered at a NITI Aayog meeting. However, those familiar with him reveal a clever strategy. Like in previous elections, women have once again voted in huge numbers in Bihar. As Election Commission data confirmed that 6.4 per cent more women than men voted in the Lok Sabha polls in the state, it was clear that Nitish's thrust on women had paid off.

Nitish has remained the fulcrum of Bihar politics since decisively winning the November 2005 assembly polls. Since

then, Bihar has witnessed three assembly (2010, 2015, 2020) and four Lok Sabha polls (2009, 2014, 2019 and 2024). Remarkably, with the exception of the 2014 Lok Sabha election when Bihar, like the rest of the country, was swept by the Narendra Modi wave—Nitish was aligned with the winning side in six of these elections. This consistency underscores his exceptional political acumen and ability to navigate Bihar's complex political landscape.

In all his public meetings, Nitish was seen constantly reminding everyone, especially the youth, about the dark age that Bihar endured during the 15-year reign of the RJD from 1990 to 2005. This was not without reason. Among the 76 million voters in Bihar, about 9.2 million (over 12 per cent) fall into the age bracket of 18 to 19 years—a cohort that didn't even exist when Nitish commenced his inaugural full term in November 2005.

There are an additional 16 million voters,

constituting over 21 per cent of Bihar's electorate, aged between 20 and 29 years. Notably, the eldest in this demographic would have been merely five years old when Nitish ascended to Bihar's helm, making any recollection of the days of the Lalu Yadav-Rabri Devi administration quite unlikely.

This elucidates why Nitish emphasised on educating young voters about the lawlessness that prevailed in Bihar before his tenure. Historically, both Nitish and the BJP have thrived by presenting themselves as a reliable alternative to the era of 'Jungle Raj' under Lalu. The results of this Lok Sabha election prove that this narrative has again struck a chord with a section of the electorate. However, it would have sounded jarring to some that Nitish, someone credited for Bihar's turnaround by building roads, providing electricity to every home and improving law and order, constantly reminded everyone about the RJD's misrule when he has partnered with the party in governing the state. But the Lok

Sabha results have somewhat hinted why Nitish was seen raking up the bad old days more than promising 'achche din'. Since 2005, Nitish has earned many monikers. His supporters call him 'Sushashan Babu', a man of good governance, whereas opponents dismiss him as 'Paltu Ram' (alliance hopper); the women treat him as the man who empowered them in Bihar.

The truth about Nitish lies somewhere in between these extremes of adulation and dismissal. Nitish's methods will continue to spark interest and intrigue. Whether seen as a governance genius or a master of marketing, Nitish's story continues to captivate those interested in the mysteries of Bihar politics.

The Lok Sabha polls results have once again established that the truth about Nitish will remain nuanced, blending elements of fact, speculation and enduring myth. The one thing that appears clear is the Bihar chief minister's uncanny ability to stay politically relevant.

How Chandrababu Naidu scripted his mega comeback

Nara Chandrababu Naidu, 74, the longest-serving Telugu chief minister (13 years, 247 days), is poised to surpass this distinction, with his Telugu Desam Party (TDP) winning yet another term in office. Riding a strong anti-incumbency wave, the TDP, on June 4, notched a landslide victory in the Andhra Pradesh legislative assembly elections just as arch-rival Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's Yuva Jana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) had done in 2019.

The TDP, with the Jana Sena Party (JSP) and BJP as allies, also wrested the majority of seats in the Lok Sabha polls, marginalising the YSRCP and relegating the Congress-led alliance that included the CPI and CPI(M). Barring Jagan Reddy's home district of Kadapa, the TDP-JSP-BJP alliance was triumphant across all three regions of the state—north coastal and south coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. Sensing that the TDP may not be able to achieve electoral victory on its own, Naidu had since last summer worked on joining hands with the BJP and actor-politician Pawan Kalyan's JSP to edge out the YSRCP. As the final outcome shows, the TDP secured a comfortable majority on its own in the state, and with its beefed up strength in the Lok Sabha (as against three MPs in 2019) is poised to be a major and

influential partner in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Given his past experience as a constituent of national coalitions, Naidu, a meticulous planner, had son Nara Lokesh, who is the TDP national general secretary, embark on the statewide Yuva Galam padayatra (Voice of Youth march) last year. Then, following his arrest in September 2023, to turn the development to his advantage, Naidu had wife Nara Bhuvaneshwari, the third daughter of TDP founder N.T. Rama Rao, launch the Nijam Gelavali (Truth Should Triumph) yatra on October 25. Her purpose was to meet and console the families of TDP sympathisers who had died unable to bear the illegal arrest of Chandrababu. To capitalise on this groundswell against the YSRCP, Naidu then set out on the Praja Galam (People's Voice) yatra on March 8 this year, even before the Election Commission had announced the poll schedule. Relying on similar strategic planning, Naidu will go the extra mile to ensure that Andhra Pradesh get its due. The state is strapped for cash considering how Jagan Reddy's priority was to spend on a slew of direct benefit transfer schemes, keeping welfare of the less advantaged on top and reducing emphasis on developing infrastructure. For this, Naidu will be compelled to turn to the Union government as well as

development lending agencies for financial assistance.

A major challenge before Naidu is to resolve the imbroglio about the state capital. He had planned for Amaravati as a mid-21st century megapolis, a project Jagan Reddy shelved and promoted the tri-capital concept of having the port city of Visakhapatnam as the administrative capital, Amaravati as the legislative headquarters and Kurnool the judicial one. The issue is pending legal resolution. Naidu is expected to pull out all the stops to develop the Amaravati of his dreams.

On the vexatious issue of the Union government according Special Category Status to Andhra, promised by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-2 regime at the time of Parliament adopting the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014, the INDIA bloc has now added a new dimension by declaring that it is willing to do so. This is a developing challenge for Naidu. The reiteration of the Congress' promise, made in its 2024 manifesto, assumes significance amid reported efforts by the INDIA front to win over the TDP on its side. There are other significant challenges. Naidu will have to do the balancing act on welfare schemes. That is not all. The TDP has promised the 'Super Six' guarantees.

India's message, Reality check for BJP; Opposition makes big gains

LOUD and clear is the message conveyed by India's voters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi — never take us for granted. The BJP-led NDA has managed to get the better of the INDIA bloc in the 2024 General Election, but its victory was anything but emphatic. The landslide predicted by the exit polls failed to materialise; the ruling alliance's "abki baar 400 paarí slogan remained just that — a slogan. The BJP's all-out attempts to bulldoze the Opposition into submission largely came a cropper as the Congress-spearheaded bloc put up a

spirited fight. And at the end of the day, PM Modi didn't look all that mighty — for a change, he would have to rely heavily on regional satraps like Nitish Kumar and N Chandrababu Naidu to keep his government intact.

The BJP, in its heart of hearts, knew that a few influential allies would come in handy when the going got tough. No wonder Bihar CM Nitish's Janata Dal (United) returned to the NDA fold in January, while the Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party forged a tie-up with the BJP in March. The BJP has done well to upset Biju Janata Dal's

aplecart in Odisha and made major inroads in the South, but the reversals in Uttar Pradesh have left it shell-shocked. The inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya was projected by the BJP as the high point of the PM's second term, but even this momentous event did not work wonders for the saffron party in UP, easily India's most important state in political and electoral terms. The Samajwadi Party-Congress combine turned the tables on the BJP with a remarkable performance. The beleaguered grand old party — which was in danger of

losing its pre-eminence within INDIA — bounced back with a vengeance to nearly double its 2019 nationwide tally.

The good news for Indian democracy is that the country is in no danger of becoming Opposition-mukt. The BJP is likely to be kept on its toes not only by its allies but also Congress and Co. Socio-economic issues such as unemployment, inflation and growing inequality, which played a significant role in influencing voters' choices, will have to be addressed on priority by the new government.

NYC's Eric Adams, who is waging all-out war against rats, gets ticketed for 5th rodent violation on his property since becoming mayor

New York City's rat-hating mayor has once again been ticketed for a rat infestation at his Brooklyn property.

Mayor Eric Adams' latest ticket was issued by a city health inspector May 16 at a row house he owns in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. The inspector observed fresh rat droppings and a rat burrow at the front left base of the

staircase of the property. The ticket, first reported by the Daily News, was Adams' fifth rodent violation since he became mayor in January 2022.

He can contest the ticket July 7 before an Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings officer.

A spokesperson for Adams, Liz Garcia, said in a statement, "The mayor prides

himself on keeping his property clean. He will review the summons and follow all standard procedures. Adams, a Democrat, frequently proclaims, "I hate rats!" and once tried to prove it by demonstrating a device that drowned them in a vat of caustic liquid. He appointed the city's first rat czar last year after posting a help-wanted ad seeking applicants who

could commit to the wholesale slaughter of the pests. Adams, who now lives in Gracie Mansion, the official mayor's residence, challenged the previous rat tickets he got at the Brooklyn property. Three were dismissed, but the mayor paid \$300 to settle the fourth. Adams told a hearing officer he had spent \$7,000 on rat mitigation at the property.

Two 39-year-old Estonian men are the alleged kingpins behind a massive half billion fraud targeting thousands of U.S. investors

The Department of Justice is advancing a case alleging that two men in Estonia cheated investors in a byzantine cryptocurrency mining operation that generated \$575 million, authorities said.

Sergei Potapenko and Ivan Turigin, both 39, were arrested in Tallinn, Estonia, and charged on an 18-count indictment filed in the Western District of Washington, DOJ said in a statement today. According to the indictment, the duo claimed to offer virtual currency mining rights to customers for a fee, but in reality they were relying on sham invoices, fabricated documents, and a crypto mining capacity of less than 1% of what they told customers. Potapenko and Turigin, and others who were unnamed in the indictment, spent the money people paid them on real estate properties in Estonia, luxury cars, and lavish gifts, authorities said.

"The size and scope of the alleged scheme is truly astounding. These defendants capitalized on both the allure of cryptocurrency, and the mystery surrounding cryptocurrency mining, to commit an enormous Ponzi scheme," said U.S. Attorney Nick Brown of the Western District of Washington in a statement. "They lured investors with false representations and then paid early investors off with money from those who invested later. They tried to hide their ill-gotten gain in Estonian properties, luxury cars, and bank accounts and virtual currency wallets around the world. U.S. and Estonian authorities are working to seize and restrain these assets and take the profit out of these crimes." The FBI is also investigating the fraud and actively seeking victims in the probe.

Starting in 2013, authorities said Potapenko and Turigin relied on a network of shell companies, bank accounts, and virtual asset service providers and wallets to funnel fraudulently obtained funds from victims who thought they were buying mining hardware. According to the U.S. Attorney, the duo claimed that its virtual cryptocurrency mining process, the process of verifying and adding transactions on a blockchain ledger, had significant power and capacity. Currency mining

power is measured by "hashrate," which indicates the number of calculations the computer can perform per second. In cloud or remote mining, people can rent so-called hashrate from a mining operation and get a portion of the virtual coins mined. Potapenko and Turigin started a company called HashCoins in Estonia in December 2013 and marketed the firm's mining equipment for Bitcoin and other digital assets, the indictment states. In reality, HashCoins didn't manufacture the equipment but was buying, building, and reselling parts manufactured by other companies. By 2014, HashCoins had a flurry of unhappy customers and it struggled to meet requests for refunds and fill new orders, authorities said. In 2015, HashCoins told some clients that their undelivered currency mining equipment would be operated remotely instead of giving actual machines to customers that they paid for. Under the new deal, customers would get rights under mining contracts that would pay them a percentage of profits from the overall operation, known as HashFlare, authorities allege.

Supposedly, HashFlare allowed customers to buy virtual currency mining capacity that people paid for using credit cards, bank wires, and virtual currency transfers. Potapenko and Turigin told customers they could access their accounts through the HashFlare website, view their balances, and withdraw or reinvest to buy additional hashrate, authorities said. This generated more than \$550 million from customers who wanted in on virtual currency mining. In reality, HashFlare's mining activity was estimated to be less than 1% of the hashrate it sold to customers for Bitcoin mining and less than 3% of the hashrate sold for mining other coins.

And when people wanted to withdraw their supposed returns on the crypto-mining operations, they were either blocked from withdrawing, or could only take out small amounts, the complaint alleged. Sometimes Potapenko and Turigin bought virtual currency on the open market and paid it to investors. This made it a Ponzi scheme, the DOJ said.

Two 39-year-old Estonian men are the alleged kingpins behind a massive half billion fraud targeting thousands of U.S. investors

The Department of Justice is advancing a case alleging that two men in Estonia cheated investors in a byzantine cryptocurrency mining operation that generated \$575 million, authorities said. Sergei Potapenko and Ivan Turigin, both 39, were arrested in Tallinn, Estonia, and charged on an 18-count indictment filed in the Western District of Washington, DOJ said in a statement today. According to the indictment, the duo claimed to offer virtual currency mining rights to customers for a fee, but in reality they were relying on sham invoices, fabricated documents, and a crypto mining capacity of less than 1% of what they told customers. Potapenko and Turigin, and others who were unnamed in the indictment, spent the money people paid them on real estate properties in Estonia, luxury cars, and lavish gifts, authorities said.

"The size and scope of the alleged scheme is truly astounding. These defendants capitalized on both the allure of cryptocurrency, and the mystery surrounding cryptocurrency mining, to commit an enormous Ponzi scheme," said U.S. Attorney Nick Brown of the Western District of Washington in a statement. "They lured investors with false representations and then paid early investors off with money from those who invested later.

Maldives President Mohammad Muizzu invited to Narendra Modi's swearing-in as PM

†(News Agency)-Maldives President Mohammad Muizzu invited for the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as the PM for third consecutive term.

Maldives President Mohammad Muizzu was among the foreign leaders invited for the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister, which is likely to happen on June 9.

If agreed, this will be the Maldives President's first visit to India. Muizzu and PM Modi met earlier at the UN's Climate Change Conference, COP28 in Dubai.

Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe are among the foreign leaders to attend the ceremony. Besides, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck will also attend the swearing-in ceremony.



In the recently announced Lok Sabha election results, the NDA won 293 seats, which paved the way for Narendra Modi's third term as PM.

PM-elect Modi on Wednesday called his Sri Lankan counterpart and invited him to the swearing-in ceremony, PTI reported quoting sources.

Modi also had a phone conversation with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the two leaders reportedly vowed to continue working together to achieve the vision of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and 'Smart Bangladesh 2041'.

For Modi 2.0 after the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the leaders of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan were invited and as many as 8,000 delegates attended the swearing-in ceremony of PM Modi in 2019.

India Must Heed Sheikh Hasina's Caution on Christian Nation, Track West's Regime-Changers

†(News Agency)-Her critics may accuse Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of many shortcomings, but reckless overstatement is not one of them. So, when she alerts the world about a Western conspiracy to create a new Christian country out of Bangladesh and Myanmar, India has to take notice. And it has.

Speaking to her 14-party coalition in Dhaka this week, Hasina said a white man had offered to help her win the January 7 elections in Bangladesh easily if in return she allowed a foreign country to set up a military airbase in Bangladesh.

Without naming the nationality of the white man, she said the plan was to carve out an East Timor-like Christian nation from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The immediate speculation has been around America.

For many years, Washington is believed to have been eyeing St. Martin's Island, a small island in the northeastern part of the Bay of Bengal, about 9 km south of the tip of the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf peninsula in the southernmost part of Bangladesh. In June 2023, a rumour spread in Dhaka that Washington was demanding St. Martin's Island in return for supporting the ruling Awami League government. But US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said the US had no intention of taking control of St. Martin's Island.

Also, the US Democratic Party establishment under Joe Biden has been long looking for a regime change in Bangladesh. Intel sources say while the US was initially punting on Nobel-winning economist and banker Muhammad Yunus who is very close to the Clintons, Obamas, and Gates who it has now



widened the net. Top US officials have been covertly in touch with senior politicians in Bangladesh from both the Awami League and the BNP, including saboteurs in Sheikh Hasina's own political and ministerial team.

The Indian government and intelligence agencies have been closely watching the developments and tracking Bangladeshi politicians who the West could use for a possible regime change. Although Hasina named just Myanmar and Bangladesh, the ongoing disturbance in India's Manipur and the smell of a foreign hand there makes the spectre of a new Christian nation of particular concern for India.

Have the Western powers that Hasina referred to secretly joined hands with regional militant groups like the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)?

Major cases keeping former Pakistan PM Imran Khan in jail

†(News Agency)-Pakistan's jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan was acquitted on charges of leaking state secrets on Monday after his conviction was overturned, but he will remain in prison in other cases.

It was one of four cases in which the 71-year-old former cricket star, who has been in jail since August last year, had been convicted ahead of a national election in February. In two of those cases the sentences have since been suspended while he appeals. Details of the convictions and some important cases follow:

STATE SECRETS CASE

Khan was handed a sentence of 10 years in prison on charges of making public a classified cable sent to Islamabad by Pakistan's ambassador in Washington in 2022, in what is commonly known as the cipher case.

Islamabad High Court on Monday granted his appeal to overturn the sentence and acquitted him.

Khan has said the cable was proof of a conspiracy by the

Pakistan military and U.S. government to topple his government in 2022 after he visited Moscow just before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Washington and Pakistan's military deny that accusation.

UNLAWFUL MARRIAGE CASE

Khan and his wife, Bushra Khan, also known as Bushra Bibi, are serving seven-year jail terms after a trial court ruled that their 2018 marriage broke the law.

An appeal against this case is being heard by a sessions court, which has referred it back to Islamabad High Court after Bibi's former husband raised objections that the judge hearing it was biased.

The high court has assigned it to a new court, which will start fresh proceedings on the appeal.

They were charged with not completing the waiting period mandated by Islam, called "Iddat", after Bibi divorced her previous husband. They signed their marriage contract, or "Nikkah", in January 2018 in a secret ceremony.

Trump vows tariffs on nations including China over illegal immigration if re-elected

†(News Agency)- Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump said on Thursday (local time) that he may impose tariffs on countries, including China, that do not curb the flow of undocumented immigrants from their territory to the US, if he wins the election in November.

Trump made the remarks at an event in the border election battleground state of Arizona while responding to an audience question and did not specify the size of the tariff he would impose in such a scenario. Asked about ways he would curb the flow of migrants crossing into the US illegally, Trump said, "We have tremendous economic power." Trump said if a country, such as China, does not help to curb the flow of immigrants into the US, "we have these things called tariffs". Trump warned if other countries do not help to reduce it, then he could "tariff the hell out of that country" if re-elected.

Border security and immigration have emerged as top issues for Americans in the run-up to the November 5 election where Trump will face US President Joe Biden,



a Democrat, in a rematch of their 2020 White House contest.

The majority of people crossing into the US illegally are from Latin America. According to US government data, the US Border Patrol arrested more than 27,000 Chinese migrants caught illegally crossing the border with Mexico from October 1, 2023-April 30, 2024, part of a sharp increase in Chinese arrivals.

It was Trump's first campaign event since a Manhattan jury on May 30 found him guilty on all 34 counts he faced of falsifying

business records to cover up a \$130,000 (approx Rs 1.08 crore) payment his former lawyer Michael Cohen made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels before the 2016 election for her silence about a sexual encounter she says they had. Trump has denied any wrongdoing and vowed to appeal the verdict. On Thursday, he called the trial "rigged".

Trump lambasted Biden's latest effort to crack down on people crossing America's southern border illegally, an asylum ban similar to restrictions Trump tried

to implement when he was president.

Biden took executive action on Tuesday that instituted a broad asylum ban on migrants caught illegally crossing the US-Mexico border.

Trump claimed Biden's new plan was "outrageous" and a concession of "death and defeat" at the border, even though the Biden measure mirrored Trump-era policies to deter would-be migrants.

Biden has toughened his approach to border security as immigration has emerged as a major political problem for him. Trump made a hardline stance on immigration a centerpiece of his administration and has vowed a wide-ranging crackdown if re-elected.

Under Biden's order, migrants caught crossing illegally could be quickly deported or turned back to Mexico under the measure, which took effect on Wednesday. There are exceptions for unaccompanied children, people who face serious medical or safety threats and victims of trafficking, the US Department of Homeland

Security said.

Trump called Biden's measure "bullshit", eliciting a chant of "bullshit" from his friendly audience in Phoenix. Trump said he would rescind Biden's measure on his first day in office if re-elected.

Trump claimed without evidence that Biden's asylum ban would allow a minimum of two million "illegal alien border crossers" into the US each year.

Asked how Trump reached that figure, Trump's campaign did not immediately respond.

The US Border Patrol arrested some two million migrants crossing illegally in the fiscal year ending September 30, 2023, and the country has seen similar figures this year. But Biden's latest move aims to reduce attempted crossings, not maintain current levels. Trump also said he could move US troops stationed abroad back home to patrol the southern border. Biden has pushed unsuccessfully for months to pass a Senate bill crafted by a bipartisan group that would toughen border security, but Republicans rejected it after Trump opposed it.

4 Indian medical students drown in Russia, were trying to save friend



†(News Agency)- Four Indian students drowned in a river near St Petersburg in Russia, officials said on Friday, with authorities recovering one body and searching for the remaining three, officials said.

The four deceased were identified as Harshal Anantrao Desale, Jishan Ashpak Pinjari, Jia Firoj Pinjari and Malik Gulamgous Mohammad Yakub, medical students at Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University. They were taking a walk along the Volkhov river in Veliky Novgorod when they entered the waters, reported news agency PTI.

Another student, Nisha Bhupesh Sonawane, also fell into the river, but was rescued and receiving medical treatment. Jalgaon District Collector Ayush Prasad confirmed the deaths to news agency ANI.

Three of them -- siblings Jia and Jishan, and Harshal Desale -- were from Jalgaon district in Maharashtra. Jishan was on a video call with his parents when he and the three others drowned in the river, a family member told PTI.

"The students were taking a walk near the city's beach along the Volkhov river, in the evening,

during their study-free time. The tragedy was accidental and unexpected. Nisha Bhupesh Sonawane survived. Now she is under the care of medical staff," a university official said.

Local media reports said that a female Indian student, who waded out from the beach into the river, got into trouble and four of her companions tried to save her. In their attempt to save her, three others also drowned in the river.

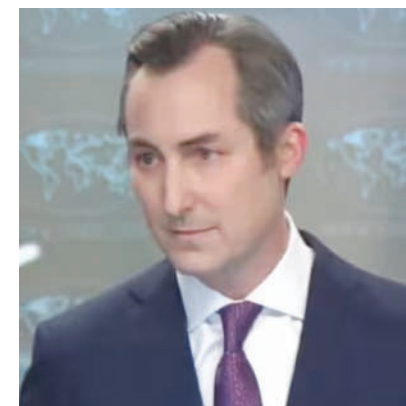
EFFORTS ON TO BRING BODIES HOME

The Indian Embassy in Russia and the Consulate in St Petersburg are working with local authorities to recover the bodies and repatriate them to India as soon as possible.

"We are working to send the bodies to the relatives as soon as possible," the Indian Embassy said in a statement. "Proper treatment is also being provided to the student whose life was saved." The Consulate in St Petersburg elaborated that they are collaborating with authorities in Veliky Novgorod. All four deceased were aged 18-20.

US reacts as China objects to Narendra Modi's exchange with Taiwan President

†(News Agency)- Amid China's protest over the exchange of greetings between Narendra Modi and Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te, the US State Department said such congratulatory messages



between two foreign leaders are a part of diplomatic business. "I would say that such congratulatory messages are the normal course of diplomatic business," State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters on Thursday at his daily news conference.

He was responding to a question on China protesting over Modi's

comment that he looked forward to having closer ties with Taiwan after his victory in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections. Earlier on Wednesday, Modi's remarks came in response to a congratulatory message from Taiwan President Lai Ching-te on his election victory.

Lai, elected as Taiwan's President last month, in a message posted on X said: iMy sincere congratulations to Prime Minister @narendramodi on his election victory. We look forward to enhancing the fast-growing #Taiwan-#India partnership, expanding our collaboration

on trade, technology & other sectors to contribute to peace & prosperity in the #IndoPacific.†

In his reply posted on X, Modi said: iThank you @ChingteLai for your warm message. I look forward to closer ties as we work towards mutually beneficial economic and technological partnership.†

Nvidia overtakes Apple to become world's second-most valuable company

The increase in Nvidia's market value, surpassing Apple's, highlights a significant shift in Silicon Valley's hierarchy.

Nvidia's shares surged to record highs on Wednesday, lifting the AI chipmaker's market valuation to \$3 trillion and surpassing Apple to become the world's second most valuable company.

This rise in valuation comes as Nvidia prepares for a ten-for-one stock split on June 7, aimed at broadening its appeal to individual investors.

The increase in Nvidia's market value, surpassing Apple's, highlights a significant shift in Silicon Valley's hierarchy. Apple, co-founded by Steve Jobs, has dominated the tech landscape since the launch of the iPhone in 2007. Meanwhile, Microsoft remains the world's most valuable company with a market value of \$3.14 trillion, supported by a 1.5% increase in its shares.

Nvidia's stock has climbed 147% so far in 2024, driven by



high demand for its advanced processors. Companies such as Microsoft, Meta Platforms, and Alphabet are rapidly expanding their AI computing capabilities, boosting Nvidia's growth.

The stock has risen nearly 30% since May 22, when Nvidia

released an impressive revenue forecast.

During Wednesday's trading session, Nvidia's stock briefly reached an intra-day high of \$1,223.59, giving it a market value of \$3.010 trillion, just ahead of Apple's \$3.005 trillion.

By the end of the session, Nvidia's stock settled at \$1,221.51, up 4.9%, with a market value of \$3.004 trillion, while Apple's stood at \$3.00 trillion, climbing 0.7%.

Optimism about AI technology also boosted chip stocks

broadly on Wednesday, with the PHLX chip index rising about 4%. Super Micro Computer, which sells AI-optimized servers using Nvidia chips, saw its stock increase nearly 5%.

Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has been in the spotlight recently, receiving extensive coverage on Taiwanese television and drawing significant attention at the Computex tech trade fair in Taipei, where he was born before moving to the United States.

While Nvidia benefits from AI enthusiasm on Wall Street, Apple faces challenges with weak demand for iPhones and tough competition in China, the world's largest smartphone market.

Some investors also view Apple as lagging behind other tech giants in integrating AI features into their products and services.

Air India, Vistara merger to be completed by year-end, says CEO

The merger between Air India and Vistara could be completed by the end of 2024.

Air India CEO Campbell Wilson has announced that the highly anticipated merger between Air India and Vistara is expected to be finalised by the end of the year.

Campbell went on to say that Air India has "plenty of changes" planned, and its merger with Vistara is well on track. This development aligns with Tata Group's strategy to merge Vistara with Air India and AIX Connect (formerly AirAsia India) with Air India Express.

Wilson highlighted numerous upcoming changes aimed at making Air India bigger and better.

He mentioned the introduction of new IT systems and the retrofitting of over 100 aircraft, including 40 wide-body planes.

The airline has ordered approximately 25,000 new seats



to replace existing ones, upgrade.

investing \$400 million in this

integration, Wilson remarked that things are "so far so good"

and mentioned ongoing collaboration with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) for the transfer of all new services post-integration.

The newly aligned aircraft will be deployed in key markets such as Singapore, Dubai, and Frankfurt.

Speaking at the CAPA India Aviation Summit, Wilson highlighted the group's "immense flexibility" in offering both full-service and low-cost options, and stated that they are in a good position.

Meanwhile, aviation consultancy CAPA India has projected losses of \$300-400 million for fiscal 2024 and anticipates yields of the average fare paid per kilometer rising by around 1% this year. The consultancy also expects overall airline costs to increase by 3.8% in fiscal year 2025.

Several IVF attempts can signal higher risk for any eventual pregnancy

Women who attempt IVF several times before they get pregnant are at higher risk of having pregnancy complications involving their placenta.

This might be because the woman's uterus had an undiagnosed health problem all along that caused the failed attempts, or it could be because some of the extra IVF interventions harm the uterus in some way, says Caitlin Sacha of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.

Pregnancies achieved through IVF were already known to have a slightly higher risk of several health problems, including complications involving the placenta, the organ that supplies nutrients to the baby in the

womb. But we don't know why these arise.

Sacha's team examined the placentas of 477 women who had given birth after IVF, noting whether they had got pregnant with their first treatment cycle, their second, or if they took more attempts than that.

Those who needed more treatment cycles had a higher chance of two different problems with their placenta: inflammation and abnormal umbilical cord blood vessels.

For instance, 9 per cent of those who took three or more attempts to get pregnant had an inflamed placenta, compared with 5 per cent for those who took two tries, and 1 per cent among those who got pregnant first time. Such

inflammation can cause premature birth.

When a first attempt at IVF fails, women are more likely to be recommended interventions, such as having growths known as polyps removed from their womb or taking higher doses of medicines to make them produce more eggs, says Sacha. "As patients fail, they often undergo more aggressive protocols."

But Michael Feichtinger of the Medical University of Vienna, says the inflammation could be causing the repeated IVF failures. "The question is what's the chicken and what's the egg." Team member Irene Souter says that either way, the findings suggest obstetricians should be



on the lookout for placenta problems in women who required multiple attempts at IVF.

Most people who have IVF in the US switch to using donor sperm or eggs after about four failed attempts, although some carry

on for many more treatment cycles with their own sperm or eggs, if they can afford it, says Souter. The findings were announced today at the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology meeting in Vienna.

Can your gut bacteria really make you a better runner?

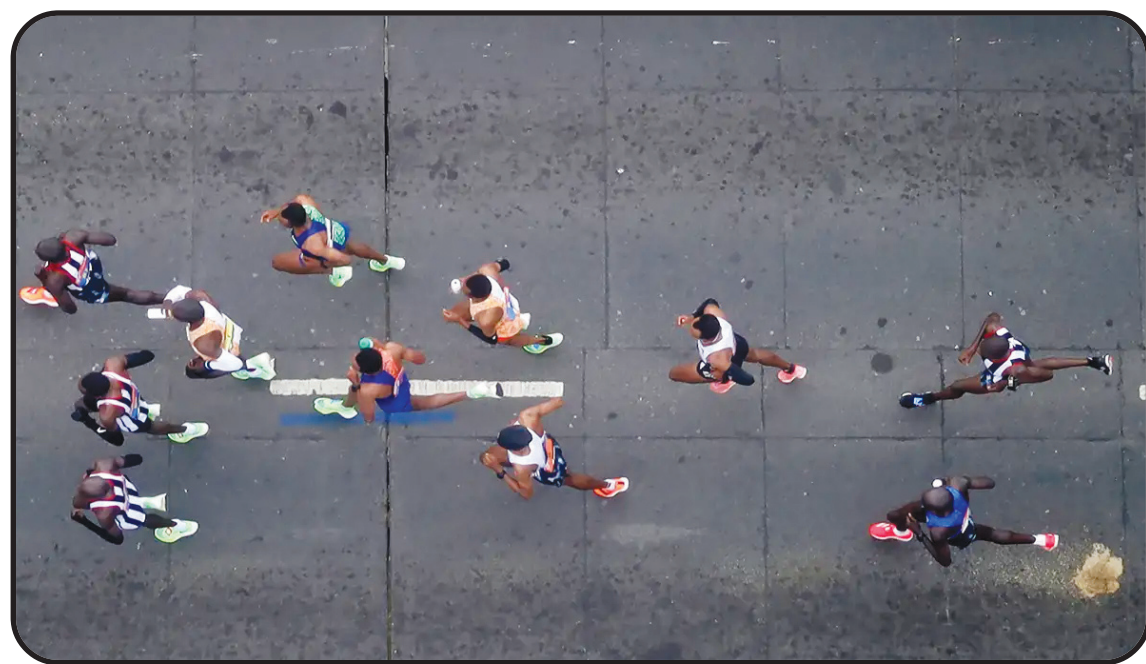
Want to become a better runner? You're probably going to have to run faster, smarter and longer. But a piece of the puzzle may lie in a surprising place: the bacteria in your gut.

We know exercise can alter the gut microbiome. Now George Church at Harvard University and colleagues say that the microbiome may be a critical component of physical performance. The Boston marathon is famously tough to get into, due to its ever-faster qualifying times. The researchers took daily stool samples from 15 runners in the 2015 race, one week before and one week after they ran, along with a sedentary control group, to see what was in their gut. A genetic analysis found a significant increase in one genus of bacteria,

Veillonella, post-marathon. The results were then successfully replicated by analysing the stool samples of 87 ultramarathoners and Olympic trial rowers before and after exercise.

The correlation raises the prospect of a causal link between the bacteria and physical performance, the researchers say. To find out more, one strain of Veillonella taken from one of the Boston marathoners was then put in mice. It allowed them to run 13 per cent longer on a treadmill than a control group without it. Further tests saw the team put forward the idea that the bug has a role in breaking down lactic acid, which can lead to fatigue during running.

The research potentially points the way to a future where probiotic supplements could



change your microbiome and make you a better runner. But it's too early to tell if that will come to pass, Church says. "This is worth enjoying as pure science for now. Until we complete the human trials, it is merely an interesting correlation in humans and a much stronger cause and effect shown in mice."

Marathon mice

We simply don't know if Veillonella-boosted humans will be able to run longer like the mice, and there are reasons to be cautious given the large differences not just between

humans and mice, but among humans too, says Church.

David Relman of Stanford University says he likes the fact the study is looking for a plausible chain of links between the microbiome and exercise performance. But he doesn't think the bar has been cleared in terms of the observations to back up the paper's conclusion. For example, there is no control group for the 87 rowers and ultramarathoners. "We don't know that if running up and down the stairs here in a middle-aged white guy wouldn't produce the same thing," says Relman.

Fifteen Boston marathoners is a very small sample, says Patrick Schloss of the University of Michigan. He would like to see a study over a longer period of time, beyond just before and after exercise. His verdict is: "they need to do a lot [more] to show that it's [the bacteria] enhancing performance." A tailored probiotic supplement doesn't exist yet, and may be a long way off. In 2017, Jonathan Scheiman at sports biotech firm FitBiotics and part of the research said he hoped to have a product launched by the end of 2018, but that has come and gone.



Watching Sathyaraj on 'Munjya' set was like an acting class for Sharvari



Actress Sharvari said that watching acclaimed star Sathyaraj, who is known for his iconic role as Katappa in the 'Baahubali' franchise, on the sets of 'Munjya' was like attending an acting workshop every day.

Sharvari said: 'I am a huge fan of all of Rajamouli sir's work and of course his epic cult blockbuster Baahubali. I have seen both films multiple times. So, when I first learnt that Sathyaraj sir is part of Munjya, I was excited beyond words.'

Sharvari picked up a lot from him by seeing the actor carry his scenes perfectly. 'Watching Sathyaraj sir on-set was like attending an acting workshop every day. His versatility, patience, and sheer talent transcended everything,' she said. She said that Sathyaraj's acting prowess made every scene come alive. 'Whether it was a comic scene or an intense moment, Sathyaraj sir's consistency and ease made every scene come alive,' said the actress, who began her career in 2015 as an assistant director for filmmakers Luv Ranjan and Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The 27-year-old actress is grateful for the opportunity she got. 'I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have shared the screen with such a phenomenal actor and I hope to have the opportunity to collaborate with him again,' said Sharvari, who made her acting debut with Kabir Khan's war drama series 'The Forgotten Army - Azaadi Ke Liye' in 2020. A supernatural horror comedy, 'Munjya' is directed by Aditya Sarpotdar. It is the fourth film of the Maddock Supernatural Universe and also stars Mona Singh and Abhay Verma. The storyline revolves around the legend of Munjya, inspired by Indian folklore and mythology. The film is being produced by Dinesh Vijan and Amar Kaushik. 'Munjya' will be released in cinemas on June 7.

Bhumi Pednekar starts shoot for maiden series 'Daldal'



Actress Bhumi Pednekar has announced that she has commenced shooting for her debut series, 'Daldal', and even offered a glimpse from the set.

Bhumi took to Instagram and shared a picture with her back facing the camera. The actress is seen wearing a brown shirt and has a long ponytail. Due to the dim lighting, not much is visible in the photo. 'The past never stays buried for long. Rita's journey with #Daldal commences from today,' she captioned the image.

'Daldal' is a thriller that tells the story of DCP Rita Ferreira, who is haunted by the guilt of her past while dealing with the demons of her present. She is investigating a series of murders committed by a cold-blooded serial killer. The series is directed by Amrit Raj Gupta and is reportedly based on the book 'Bhendi Bazaar' by Vish Dhamija.

When the announcement about 'Daldal' was made in March, Bhumi shared that she would be playing a woman who has shattered the glass ceiling by being appointed as the DCP of Mumbai.

Bhumi tagged her character as a 'super achiever' in a man's world.

'I think a character like this will resonate with the times that we live in because a woman is no longer shackled down and is ambitious and independent,' she said at the time.

Bhumi began her career with 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha' and has since appeared in films such as 'Toilet: Ek Prem Katha', 'Shubh Mangal Saavdhan', 'Bala', 'Pati Patni Aur Woh', 'Govinda Naam Mera', 'Saand Ki Aankhi', and 'Dolly Kitty Aur Woh Chamakte Sitare'. Her last major role was in the crime thriller 'Bhakshak', based on the Muzaffarpur shelter case.

Sunny Leone issues stern warning to Rushali on 'MTV Splitsvilla X5'

In the upcoming episode of the dating reality show 'MTV Splitsvilla X5', host Sunny Leone gives a stern warning to contestant Rushali after noticing she is hiding something.

The episode features high-voltage drama during the 'Dome Session' as Arbaz and Nayera are announced as the 'Lit Couple'. The session kicks off with heated arguments. Harsh expresses his disappointment at not being chosen as the 'Lit Couple' with Rushali despite their friendships.

Shubhi accuses Harsh of deliberately underperforming to stay with Rushali. Rushali and Harsh whisper to each other, and when questioned, Rushali tries to keep it a secret.

Seeing this, Sunny issues her a stern warning, saying, 'But the problem is, Rushali, you two are whispering on this side, so I have to ask you what the hell is going on. That is your fault.'

Meanwhile, Sunny's co-host Tanuj asks Shubhi if she's considering new connections. She hints at DevKaran, Lakshay, and even Sachin, shocking everyone.

As the 'Dome Session' progresses to eliminations, the safe couples get to save one contestant each, while the unsafe ones choose who to send to the Oracle.

'MTV Splitsvilla X5: ExSqueeze Me Please' is available on MTV and JioCinema.



Shivangi Verma opens up on shooting bold scenes for 'Tera Ishq Mera Fitoori'

Actress Shivangi Verma has opened up on the bold scenes in the show 'Tera Ishq Mera Fitoori', sharing how it was comfortable and not 'ezabardasti', and how they executed it smoothly and beautifully. Shivangi shared that executing bold scenes depends a lot on the co-actor, and she did not face any problems as far as being comfortable was concerned.

'It was very comfortable because it totally depends on your co-actor, and I was totally blessed with it. Sehan Azim was really comfortable to work with; in fact, he made me comfortable, and the director, the producer, and everybody else were there on the set, and they kind of created an environment to



make both of us feel comfortable, so it was not like a 'ezabardasti', but it was part of the story, and we did it smoothly and beautifully, and I am sure the audience will love it,' she said.

Calling the show a passionate love story, Shivangi said: 'It's an intense love story. It is deep, it's all about love. It's basically a musical love story, and it's just about love.'

The actress further shared that the shooting went like a breeze.

Shivangi said: 'It was really interesting to meet the cast; it was interesting to shoot the story with them, and we did the entire shoot outdoors, so we were in Igatpuri, Maharashtra, and we had a great time; we had a blast. We used to shoot, and then we used to chill together. I think all these were really interesting for me.'

'Tera Ishq Mera Fitoori' will go on air on June 7 on Atrangii.

Sanya Malhotra wins best actress award at New York Indian Film Festival for 'Mrs'



Sanya Malhotra has bagged the best actress award at the prestigious New York Indian Film Festival 2024 for her role in the movie 'Mrs'.

Helmed by Arati Kadav, 'Mrs' is reportedly the Hindi remake of the critically acclaimed Malayalam film, 'The Great Indian Kitchen'. The movie has been described as a captivating account of a woman's strength and resilience, focusing on the journey of Richa, portrayed by Sanya Malhotra. Richa's story is one of self-discovery as she navigates the demanding responsibilities of the kitchen and household.

The film features an impressive cast, including Nishant Dahiya and Kanwaljit Singh, in key roles.

The official handle of Jio Studios confirmed the news on social media. It said, 'Congratulations to the incredibly talented @sanyamalhotra07 on winning the Best Actress Award at the prestigious New York Indian Film Festival for the film Mrs! Produced by #JyotiDeshpande Produced by #PammiBaweja & #HarmanBaweja, Cast @sanyamalhotra07 #NishantDahiya @kukuhere, Directed by @AratiKadav, Co-Produced by #SmitaBaliga #JioStudios @bawejastudios @nyindianfffi.'

In addition to 'Mrs', Sanya Malhotra has an exciting lineup of upcoming projects. She will soon be seen in Varun Dhawan-headlined 'Baby Johni' with dialogues by Atlee, 'Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari' (Varun Dhawan and Jahnvi Kapoor), Mani Ratnam's forthcoming Tamil action drama, 'Thug Life', and an as-yet-untitled Anurag Kashyap directorial.



Exclusive pictures from Red Carpet Premier of Pawan Chauhan movie Highway 905, that was released in USA recently.

Sargun Mehta explains why she made 'Badall pe Paon Hai': 'Wanted to learn stock market trading'

Sargun Mehta, the producer of the upcoming show 'Badall pe Paon Hai', opened up about the unique concept of the show, which explores the relatively untapped domain of women in stock market trading, presenting a fresh and progressive perspective.

On how she came up with the idea of the show, Sargun said: 'I have wanted to learn stock market trading for a very long time, and all my friends, my father, my brother, and even now my sister-in-law do stock trading. While I was learning about stocks, this idea popped into my head, and I went back to thinking about why I wanted to do it and what kind of people are into stock market trading.'

'That's when the character of Baani came into being. Not only is it different from all my shows, but it is also different from all the television shows. Firstly, it is a completely different world. For the longest time, women only did stitching or cooking because there was a lack of career options for women. So whatever skill set they learned, they turned it into a career,' she said.

'But today's generation is not bound by a certain skill set. They have opened up new career paths for themselves. Women are doing everything today, so

why not stock market trading,' shared Sargun, who is known for her work in movies like 'Qismat', 'Saunkan Saunkne', etc.

Shedding light on Baani's character, played by actress Amandeep Sidhu, Sargun said: 'The character comes a lot from how I have been brought up and how my mother is. We are people who dream really big. So we have a girl who is questioning everyone who says that 'yahi hamari kismat hai, aur ham isi mein khush hain'. So she is challenging that societal norm.'

What made Amandeep Siddhu the right choice for Baani?

Sargun said, 'I instantly connected with Amandeep when we saw her first audition. My director and I became 100 per cent confident when we did the mock shoot with her. However, I hadn't met Amandeep till then. But when I met her for the first time and narrated a few scenes to her, I saw a spark in her eyes.' 'She gave me instances from her life where she also behaved like Baani. That moment, I was convinced that she was Baani. Amandeep was so close to Baani, and I feel she was just waiting for this character to fall in her lap. I can confidently say that she has a Baani of her own,' added Sargun.



Mukesh Modi received most prestigious award of Dada Saheb Phalke Award as the best International Film Producer on their 155th Dada Saheb Phalke Jayanti in Mumbai on May 30th 2024 with many other Bollywood celebrities #uditnarayan #DarshanKumar #archanagautam #PoonamDhillon #DeepakTijori #rajpalyadav #rajshreeproduction #rakeshbedi and many more.

Blue Sapphire Films Partners with World Cinema Partners USA to Produce Exciting New Feature Film "THE VIRAL VIDEO"



[London, New York, USA, 28th May 2024] - Blue Sapphire Films, in collaboration with World Cinema Partners USA, is thrilled to announce the production of their latest venture, "THE VIRAL VIDEO." The announcement took place at the prestigious 77th Cannes Film Festival, where producers Mr. Avnish Sharma and Raaj Rahhi, accompanied by actress Keshavi Jaharia, took center stage to unveil the title.

Set against the picturesque backdrop of the UK and Europe, "THE VIRAL VIDEO" promises to be a youth-oriented comedy thriller that will captivate audiences worldwide. With a stellar global cast, the film is poised to deliver an exhilarating cinematic experience like never before.

"We are excited to embark on this cinematic journey with 'THE VIRAL VIDEO'," stated Mr. Avnish Sharma, one of the producers of the film. "This project represents a fusion of creativity and entertainment, and we believe it will resonate with audiences of all ages." Joining forces with Blue Sapphire Films and World Cinema Partners USA in co-producing "THE VIRAL VIDEO" is SRMADC Ventures India, represented by Gaurav Mittal and Jagruth Kondapally. Their collaboration adds further depth and expertise to the project, ensuring its success on a global scale.

"This collaboration symbolizes the coming together of talent and vision from across the globe," remarked Raaj Rahhi, Director Producer of the film. "We are confident that 'THE VIRAL VIDEO' will leave a lasting impression on audiences worldwide."

Scheduled for a 2025 release, "THE VIRAL VIDEO" is poised to make waves in the international film industry, offering a unique blend of comedy and suspense that will keep viewers on the edge of their seats.

For more updates and information about "THE VIRAL VIDEO," stay tuned to Blue Sapphire Films and World Cinema Partners USA's official channels.

About Blue Sapphire Films: Blue Sapphire Films is a renowned production house committed to creating innovative and captivating cinematic experiences for audiences worldwide. With a focus on quality storytelling and cutting-edge visuals, the company continues to push the boundaries of filmmaking.

About World Cinema Partners USA: World Cinema Partners USA is a leading film production and distribution company dedicated to bringing compelling stories from around the world to audiences everywhere. With a diverse portfolio of projects, the company remains at the forefront of the global film industry.



How Rahul-Akhilesh swung the polls in Uttar Pradesh away from BJP

For the BJP, the irony couldn't have been harsher—losing even the seat where the Ram temple stands. The five factors behind INDIA bloc's impressive show in the state

By Prashant Srivastava

When the Congress and the Samajwadi Party (SP) firmed up their alliance for the Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh, many analysts thought it stood little chance against the BJP's formidable grip over the state, the party's double-engine narrative (Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath) and the emotive quotient of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

But as UP Ke Do Ladke (Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav) showed, clever strategies on the ground and a real connect with people's issues can undo even mega election campaigns run on hype, emotion and controversial narratives.

When the Lok Sabha results poured out on June 4, UP inflicted the biggest loss to the BJP, pulling its tally down to 33 of the total 80 seats, from 62 in 2019. The SP was the biggest gainer in the state, winning 37 seats and around 33 per cent



of the votes. The Congress too ramped up its seat count from just one in 2019 to six, winning both bastion Raebareli for Rahul and Amethi for Gandhi family aide Kishori Lal Sharma, who defeated heavyweight sitting MP Smriti Irani.

For the BJP, the irony couldn't have been harsher—it lost even the seat of Faizabad, under which Ayodhya falls. Here are the factors that swung the elections in UP in favour of the INDIA bloc:

Smart ticket distribution

The ticket distribution by Akhilesh is being considered the game-changer. The SP, which was known to bank on the M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) vote-bank experimented with wider social engineering this time. Of its 62 candidates, only five were Yadavs (all from the Saifai family) and four Muslims. There were 10 Kurmis and

six Kushwaha-Maurya-Shakya-Saini (castes considered close to the BJP for several years) candidates. The SP also appointed Shyamlal Pal, an OBC, as state president. Its decision to field Dalit candidates in Meerut and Faizabad also paid off.

Unity in alliance

Forming an alliance with the Congress helped the SP consolidate the minority votes in their favour. The SP-Congress alliance presented a national narrative, which was missing in the state in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Both SP and Congress functionaries worked together at the local level to showcase their unity—a trend confirmed by Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi as well to INDIA TODAY during the election campaign.

Akhilesh's PDA (Picchhda, Dalit, Apsankhyak) slogan also created a positive

vibe. After the results, Akhilesh announced that his party's performance was a victory of the INDIA bloc as well as the IPDA strategy. "This victory belongs to the strong alliance of backward-Dalit-minority-tribal groups, half the population (OBCs), and the disadvantaged among the upper castes, embodied in the PDA," he wrote on social media platform X.

Raising real issues

Raising the unemployment problem went hugely in favour of the SP-Congress campaign in a state that had not long ago witnessed intense youth protests over the leak of a police recruitment exam paper. Such paper leaks and the short-tenured Agniveer recruitment scheme, which pushed

those joining the military into an uncertain future, had contributed to disenchantment among the youth. Both Rahul and Akhilesh raised these issues to good effect.

Avoiding polarisation

The Congress and SP kept their campaign low key. They did not do too many roadshows in the minority pockets to avoid polarisation of votes. Not a single joint rally was conducted for the first phase of polling. SP functionaries claim it was all part of their strategy as the party did not want to give the BJP a chance to polarise voters.

Shift of the Dalit vote

A large chunk of Dalit voters also seems to have shifted towards the INDIA bloc in UP after Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati dropped nephew Akash Anand as her political heir as well as her party's national coordinator, citing that he needs to attain maturity. Several BSP functionaries, on condition of anonymity, admitted that a section of BSP supporters had shifted to the SP-Congress, making the election bipolar in most seats.

Anshu Awasthi, Congress spokesperson in UP, also credited the Dalit community for voting for the Congress-SP in huge numbers, and said the party was committed to increasing their representation. Awasthi added that upper caste youths, including from among Brahmins and Thakurs, had voted against the BJP and that the saffron camp's decline in UP had begun.

Stopping BJP: What Mamata did right that Naveen didn't

PM Modi's 'Jai Jagannath' cry on June 4 shows how the BJP considers the Odisha win a feather in its cap at a time of depleted strength in the Lok Sabha

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

Exit polls proved glaringly wrong in this Lok Sabha election. It had a 50 per cent strike rate in the eastern states of West Bengal and Odisha. While most pollsters had predicted a definitive edge for the BJP in both states, Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) showed how they had misread the mood on the ground in Bengal. However, Naveen Patnaik's Biju Janata Dal (BJD) not only lost majority to the BJP but was slashed down to less than half its strength in the legislative assembly.

In Bengal, the BJP won 12 Lok Sabha seats, six less than in 2019 and 20 of the 21 seats in Odisha. The remaining seat went to the Congress, routing the BJD out of the lower house of Parliament. Of the 147 assembly seats in Odisha, the BJP won 78 while the BJD was confined to 51. The Congress got 14 seats. In 2019, the BJD had won 112 assembly seats, the BJP 23 and



the Congress nine. In both Bengal and Odisha, the battle was to establish the political successors of the ruling satraps Mamata and Naveen. Mamata has been successful in her endeavour since nephew Abhishek Banerjee's position as the face of the TMC has been further cemented by the

party's landslide victory. However, in Naveen's case, one of the reasons for the 77-year-old, five-term chief minister's defeat was the perception that his legacy was going into the hands of former bureaucrat V.K. Pandian, a Tamilian. The TMC winning 29 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats can be

largely credited to Abhishek and his strategies. The Diamond Harbour MP, who won by a record margin of over 700,000 votes, took the fight to the BJP's doorstep and beat them. From playing the sub-nationalism card of projecting the saffron camp as anti-Bengal, because the Union government

was not releasing funds under NREGA and PM Awas Yojana-Grameen, to coming up with a suitable counter to the Sandeshkhali fiasco, he played according to plan. Abhishek handpicked at least half of the candidates and ensured victory for most of them. On the other hand, while Pandian played a major role in strategising for the BJD, replacing incumbent MPs and MLAs and trying to set a pro-development narrative, nothing worked to expectations. The narrative that a Tamilian was calling the shots in Odisha appeared to have trumped all other factors. The BJP played on Odia nationalism, questioning Pandian's supremacy in the state government.

A political analyst who keeps a close watch on Bengal and Odisha said it was interesting to watch how the projected successors had stopped the BJP juggernaut in one state but got rolled over by it in another.

BJP fell victim to own propaganda... Gandhi sibling suspense finally solved

Finally, there is clarity in the Gandhi sibling suspense now that Rahul Gandhi has won both seats - Wayanad in Kerala and Raebareli in Uttar Pradesh.

Rasheed Kidwai

The performance of the INDIA alliance in this Lok Sabha election turned the result day into a thriller as the group managed to restrict the BJP-led NDA under the 300 mark. While there's much to deliberate on, here are the five big takeaways.

1. NDA growth story stunted - The INDIA bloc punctured a hole in the 'Modi magic' factor the BJP sold on the plank of welfarism, nationalism and cultural identity. Not only did the opposition successfully restrict the NDA to less than 300 seats despite the aggressive and polarising campaign, the Congress also doubled its 2019 tally at 99 seats.



The BJP, for the first time in three terms, could not cross the majority mark of 272 on its own at 240.

2. BJP-NDA falls victim to its own

propaganda - The BJP-NDA campaign machinery went overboard with its '400 par' slogan. Naturally, when the bar is set so high, coupled with the validation

Minister Yogi Adityanath was not effectively used as a campaigner outside the state. 4. Gandhi sibling suspense solved - Finally, there is clarity in the Gandhi sibling

suspense now that Rahul Gandhi pollster Prashant Kishore and exit polls, the 240 seat victory of the BJP made it look like Modi has suffered a defeat. 3. Marginalisation of regional satraps in BJP - The BJP failed to make full use of its regional satraps such as Vasundhara Raje, who could have checked the return of the Congress in Rajasthan. There is also a view that Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was not effectively used as a campaigner outside the state. 4. Gandhi sibling suspense solved - Finally, there is clarity in the Gandhi sibling

suspense now that Rahul Gandhi has won both seats - Wayanad in Kerala and Raebareli in Uttar Pradesh. The Congress growth in vote share also proves that Rahul's strategies worked and the Bharat Jodo Yatra led by him had a major role to play. Rahul, who turns 54 on June 19, has become an acceptable and respectable leader while Priyanka Gandhi has emerged as an effective campaign planner. The verdict -- This Jodi is here to stay. 5. Dalit votes can break or make Delhi durbar - With the new equations in the block, Dalit votes can now make or break the Delhi dream. All eyes are on the Haryana and Maharashtra state elections in October this year, which will tell whether the group is moving further away from the NDA and joining the INDIA alliance.