



PHOTO: AFP  
The opposition Congress Party supporters celebrate a surprising win in the Indian election as the ruling NDA coalition has already conceded defeat.

# Neglecting the poor spelt doom for NDA

AFP, New Delhi

The stunning election loss suffered yesterday by India's ruling Hindu nationalists was the price paid for their focus on the surging urban economy instead of the rural masses, analysts said.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) "India Shining" campaign slogan touted India's blistering eight percent economic growth, proliferating mobile phones and shiny highways -- a vision that jarred for the poor still struggling for food, water and electricity.

"The economic policies of BJP, which did achieve many things they had set out to achieve, alienated much of the electorate which are much too poor and marginalised to benefit from them," said political

analyst Pran Chopra.

"It has cost it the support of a very large section of the population. The sympathy and concern for the hardships of the poor were not reflected in the BJP's policies," he said.

Some two-thirds of India's billion-plus population lives off agriculture. Chopra said the common voter was more bothered about roads in their villages, not national highways or India's record 110 billion dollars-plus of foreign exchange reserves.

The government gambled on the election five months ahead of schedule after a strong monsoon brought a bumper harvest and amid consistently high personal ratings for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, a 79-year-old poet.

But analyst B.G Verghese said the BJP miscalculated by turning the election into a popularity contest between Vajpayee and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, who the Hindu nationalists denounced as unelectable because she was born in Italy.

"One of its main planks was Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, which was a bogus issue, and their touting Vajpayee that he was a good guy and vote for him. It was personality oriented and it bombed," Verghese said.

Instead of being a liability, Gandhi, the widow of slain former premier Rajiv Gandhi, seemed to have struck a rapport with women voters, he said.

# Vajpayee's biggest defeat at peak of popularity

PTI, New Delhi

Ironically the biggest defeat of his political career came when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was at the peak of his popularity as a statesman and a leader with pan-India appeal.

BJP, which has often accused Congress of promoting personality cults, fought the elections in his name on his record of leadership but voters did not buy brand Vajpayee.

In survey after survey Vajpayee came out as the country's most popular leader well ahead of Congress President Sonia Gandhi

with Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani trailing far, far behind.

An election that was supposed to have been won easily by Vajpayee turned out to be the worst moment in his distinguished public career.

Never a gambler, the 79-year-old leader chose to call the elections six months ahead largely at the insistence of his senior colleagues who spoke of so-called "feel good" and "India shining" factors.

The stunning electoral reverse could eventually mean a sad end to a very distinguished career which saw the rise of a Gwalior school teacher's son to the leadership of a billion people.

Vajpayee completed a rare hatrick of being sworn-in Prime Minister three times consecutively though his first tenure was cut short in 13 days and the second in 1998 in 13 months. May 13, 2004 turned out to be unlucky for him.

Astute parliamentarian, warm and persuasive leader and a sensitive poet, Vajpayee has been described as the moderate and tolerant face of "hardline" party.

He was first sworn in as Prime Minister on May 16, 1996 but resigned 13 days later when he failed to muster a majority on the floor of the House.

# Jubilant Congress celebrates win

AFP, New Delhi

Ecstatic supporters of India's Congress party danced to thumping Hindi pop on car tops, flashed victory signs and waved flags across New Delhi after their surprise win in national elections.

Traffic came to a stop as a sea of party workers in dozens of vehicles flocked to the Congress headquarters in the heart of the capital amid drumbeats and shouts of "We want Sonia Gandhi to be the prime minister."

Party activists hanging precariously from the side of trucks held up for the cameras a toddler wearing a cap emblazoned with Congress's hand symbol, vying for attention with an old man draped in clothes

covered with party emblems.

Leaders of the 119-year-old party, led by Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, heir to India's most famous family, opened boxes of sweets and embraced one another as they took in the news from television and their own counting office.

Exit polls during the marathon five-round election had predicted losses by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalists, but none predicted they would be routed by Congress.

"It is a stunning surprise," Congress senior leader Jairam Manesh told reporters as he came outside, as a giant drum was rolled into the office for the celebrations.

A giant balloon in the shape of

the Congress hand symbol was anchored to the ground waiting to be released as a chain of firecrackers burst.

"Heartiest congratulations for your win sir, particularly in Gujarat. That must have been so sweet," wished a bystander to party member Shakeel Ahmed Khan.

Congress was forecast to have made inroads in Gujarat, the western state ruled by the Hindu nationalists where 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, died in bloody religious riots in 2002.

"The result in Gujarat shows that the people have rejected the BJP's communal policies. They have instead given us a clear-cut mandate to rule," Khan told AFP.

# Communists taste victory in Kolkata after 15 years

PTI, Kolkata

Repeatedly shunned by the voters in the metropolis in the past few Lok Sabha elections, Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) today (May 13, 2004) caused a major upset by wresting the prestigious Calcutta Northwest seat, thanks to the presence of the rebel Nationalist Trinamool Congress (NTC) leader Sudip Bandyopadhyaya.

Deeply entrenched in rural Bengal, CPM had won in a Kolkata constituency last time in 1989 when Biplob Dasgupta defeated sitting Congress MP Bholanath Sen in Calcutta South.

The CPM candidate Sudhangnu

Sil's victory this time around in the traditionally anti-Left Calcutta Northwest was all the more significant as the previous instance of the left tasting success from the constituency was way back in 1956. Then, Left-supported independent Mohit Moitra had emerged victorious in a by-poll.

Sil defeated his nearest Nationalist Trinamool Congress rival and Kolkata Mayor Subrata Mukherjee by a margin of 42,823 votes.

Bandyopadhyaya had won the seat twice on a Trinamool ticket in 1998 and 1999, but fell apart with NTC supremo Mamata Banerjee last year and was denied ticket by the party this time.

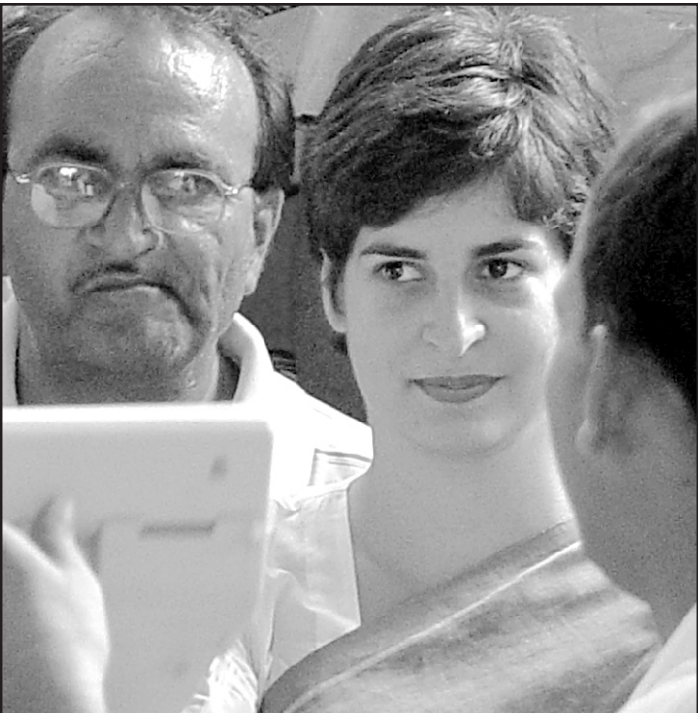


PHOTO: AFP  
Priyanka Gandhi, daughter of Congress President Sonia Gandhi, attends the counting of votes in Rai Bareilly yesterday.

# US will work 'closely' with new PM

AFP, Washington

The United States congratulates India on its national elections and will work "closely" with a new government there when it is formed, a senior US official said yesterday.

"The United States and India have a strong and close relationship, and we look forward to working closely with the new Indian government when it is formed," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

The official declined any specific comment on Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's resignation after his Hindu nationalists' shock defeat in the national vote.

"We congratulate the people of India on the completion of their parliamentary elections," the official said.

# 13 finally proves unlucky for BJP

PTI, New Delhi

The number 13 finally proved to be unlucky for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee as also the BJP, which once boasted that it always favoured the number.

Number 13, condemned as inauspicious in the West, was considered 'feel good' for the ruling party as also Vajpayee.

The first time BJP came to power in 1996 at the Centre, it lasted for 13 days.

The next time it assumed reins in New Delhi in 1998, the BJP-led coalition's tenure lasted 13 months.

It again came to power in 1999 emerging triumphant in 13th Lok Sabha, with Vajpayee assuming office on October 13 causing the BJP leaders to be carried away by the 'magic' of 13. They started boasting that now their rule would last for a minimum period of 13 years.

# BJP pays price for diluting ideology: RSS

PTI, New Delhi

The RSS today said one of the reasons behind the NDA's setback in the Lok Sabha election was the public perception that the BJP had diluted its ideology.

"The credit goes to Atal Bihari Vajpayee for whatever the alliance has won, but politics is all about perception. The core voter and cadre developed a disinterest as there was a perception about dilution in its [the BJP's] ideology," RSS spokesperson Ram Madhav told reporters at the BJP headquarters.

Madhav also regretted absence of ideology as an issue in the elections.

"As a result, local issues came up prominently," he said.

## WINNERS



Laloo Yadav, RJD

Jyotiraditya Scindia, Congress  
Sachin Pilot, Congress  
Akhilesh Yadav, SP  
Sharad Pawar, NCP



Maneka Gandhi, BJP

Mamata Banerjee, TMC  
Mehbooba Mufti, PDP



Navjot Singh Siddhu, BJP

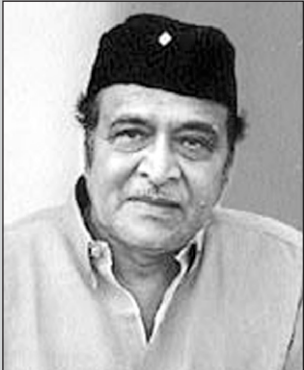
Mayawati, BSP  
L.K. Advani, BJP  
Nitish Kumar, JD(U)  
Ajit Jogi, Congress



Omar Abdullah, NC

## LOSERS

Ram Naik, BJP  
Manohar Joshi, Shiv Sena  
Arif Mohd Khan, BJP



Bhupen Hazarika, BJP

Naresh Gujaral, SAD  
Ujjawala Shinde, Congress  
Moushumi Chatterjee, Congress



HD Deve Gowda, JD(S)

Sharad Yadav, JD(U)  
Shahnawaz Hussain, BJP



Smriti Irani, BJP

O Rajagopal, BJP  
Ram Vilas Vedanti, BJP  
Arif Mohammad Khan, BJP



Yashwant Sinha, BJP

# Rahul sails easy



AFP, Lucknow

Rahul Gandhi, the political heir to India's charismatic Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, yesterday won by a staggering margin in his family's traditional stronghold in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, officials here announced.

The 33-year-old Gandhi

defeated his closest rival, Chandra Prakash Matlari of the regional BSP party, by a margin of 391,000 votes in the Amethi constituency, which had returned his father Rajiv Gandhi to parliament three times until his 1991 assassination.

Election officials said Gandhi, a former financial consultant who was standing for parliament for the first time, grabbed 70 percent of all votes polled in the constituency.

Rahul's mother Sonia Gandhi, who is poised to sweep into power following a spectacular electoral victory by her Congress and its allies in the national election, had won from the same seat in 1999 with a margin of 314,000 votes.

"For Rahul we had expected nothing short of this," said Akhilesh Singh, president of the regional chapter of the Congress party.

# Pakistan hopes peace process will continue

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan expressed hope yesterday that the shock election defeat of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee would not hinder the peace process he kickstarted between the rival nuclear-armed states.

Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri said Pakistan acknowledged the Vajpayee's contribution in initiating the peace process between the two countries and pledged to work with his successor to resolve longstanding differences.

"Pakistan looks forward to seriously and closely engaging with the next government in India to promote this process of peace and resolution of differences and disputes," Kasuri told reporters.

cere in carrying forward the peace process... and hope the next government in Indian will join us in this endeavour so that this historic opportunity for peace in South Asia is not missed."

Meanwhile, India's opposition Congress party, which is poised to take power, said yesterday it was committed to the ongoing peace process with nuclear rival Pakistan.

"The Congress is committed to working towards creating lasting peace in the region," Congress spokesman Anand Sharma told AFP.

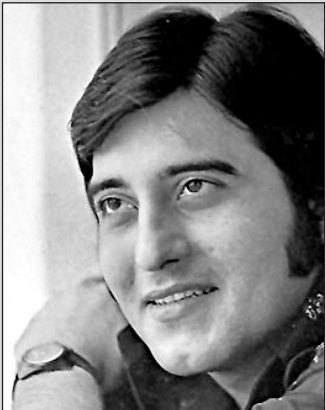
Information Minister Sheikh Rashid earlier told AFP from Kuala Lumpur, where he is attending a Non-Aligned Movement conference, "the desire for peace is not linked to individuals."

He said: "Pakistan is very sincere in carrying forward the peace process... and hope the next government in Indian will join us in this endeavour so that this historic opportunity for peace in South Asia is not missed."

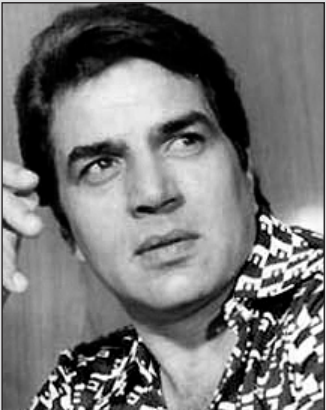
# BOLLYWOOD SCORES AGAIN



Veteran actor and politician Sunil Dutt did not let down his party Congress and won again in Mumbai North-West.



Vinod Khanna, famous for his action movies lived up to the expectations of his party BJP and won in Gurdaspur.



Another action hero Dharmendra survived the scandal about his second marriage during the campaign and won in Bikaner for BJP in his first stint with politics.



Debutant in politics, Govinda danced his way to winning the seat in Mumbai North for Congress, just like the way he does in his movies.



Raj Babbar helps his party Samajwadi Party to retain its strong foothold in Agra.



Similarly, actress Jayaprada who has been in active politics for some time wins in Rampur for Samajwadi Party which she recently joined.