

## BY INVITATION

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# Giving up without a fight

## Congress' weakest ever campaign paved way for an easy victory for BJP

**A**T NO point during the campaign in the past 10 weeks was there any doubt of UPA losing rather badly and Modi forming the next government. In fact, commenting on a survey finding more than a month ago, I had said that this Lok Sabha poll will be the easiest to forecast — wave or no wave. Of course, suspense was there with regard to the number of seats different parties were to get. Today, we have the confirmation. BJP has won more than the majority on its own, leaving no scope for any bickering, even within NDA.

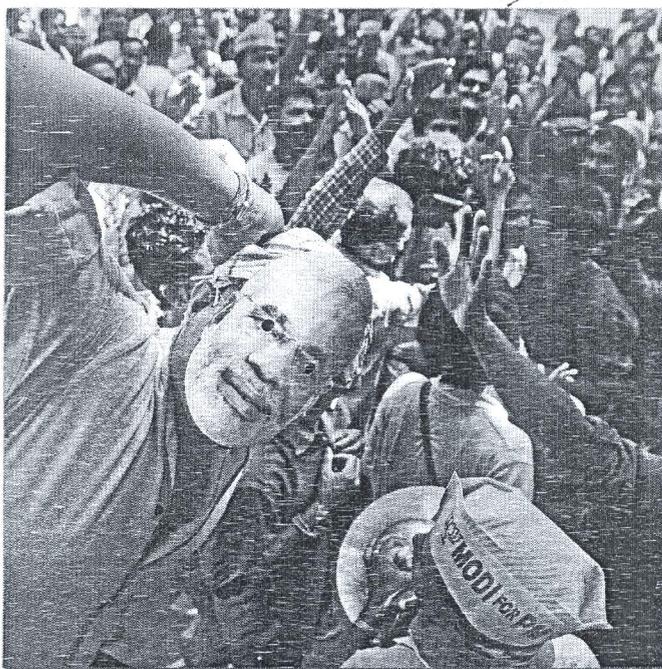
But what should be celebrated is that after 1984 the country is heading, hopefully, for a stable government with one party getting a clear majority. This result, however, should not mean the end of coalition politics.

UP and Bihar voters are the game-changers. By contributing around 90 seats, they have ensured Modi's win. Although the five-party alliance of BJP in Tamil Nadu hardly gained, it helped Jayalalitha win more seats than she would have expected.

Decline of the Congress is all over, even in Maharashtra, Assam and Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, where assembly elections were held simultaneously, it was a rout of Congress. In Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh assemblies too, Congress made no gains.

In Telengana, where Congress was expecting some reward for forming the state, it has to contend with only two Lok Sabha seats. In Seemandhra, it is a sweep of TDP. Because of the alliance, BJP could win all the four seats in Seemandhra and two in Telengana. In Odisha, Navin Patnaik's BJD is voted for the fourth time with a much higher majority.

AAP may have won only four seats, but has changed the paradigm of poll politics in India for good. Decimation of Mayawati's BSP in



**DECISIVE TRIUMPH:** A BJP supporter wears a mask of the party's prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi and celebrates poll results outside the party office on Friday

UP reminds us of the vacuum in Dalit leadership.

We can forget the idea of a third front for now. Regional parties have gained all across, though the numbers of Mulayam and Mayawati have declined significantly. Jayalalitha and Mamata have improved significantly. An idea of federal front with Mamata also will not take off now even if Congress openly comes out for it.

But this massive mandate is that of Narendra Modi's, more than that of BJP's. This never-before-seen massive campaign was conceived and coordinated from Gandhinagar and not from BJP headquarters in New Delhi. There was never a doubtful moment once Congress decided not to nominate Rahul Gandhi as its candidate for prime ministership after weeks of suspense.

Being an active observer

over the past four decades, I can say for sure that never before in all the previous elections to Lok Sabha has the Congress campaign been so rudderless and innocuous as in 2014. That's how Congress lost the plot even before it took off. Even AAP lost its steam midway.

Never before were so many opinion polls covered in media — all indicating BJP as the front-runner. Pre-poll surveys, more than exit polls, could claim being right and justify poll surveys. What difference so many surveys made in making voter sensitive and discriminative in their voting would be interesting to go into separately.

So what factors helped Modi's impressive numbers? Most importantly, talk of a future with specific promise, instead of a distant past. Showcasing a model and not tampering seriousness with rhetoric of past.

Reflecting countrywide urge for a decisive leadership. Displaying not just modernity but command over technology. Appealing to the new generation Indian by offering them opportunities and active responsibility. Relying on a research-based strategy, instead of getting bogged down with poll surveys. Talking big and national but with regional identities that capture local emotions.

Campaigning for Lok Sabha poll cannot be half-hearted; it has to be backed fully with resources. Modi campaign must have cost much more than everyone else's put together. Oratory skill in conversational style appealed better at even large public meetings and in social media. Also, Modi strategists were apparently determined mission managers. They ensured that every instrument of mass persuasion was used in a phased way. They were prompt to convert every op-

ponent move into an opportunity as in the case of Chawala.

Some critical reasons for Congress losing rather miserably could also be recalled. This is a classic case of an establishment. There was no evidence of UPA taking corrective measures. UP government failed miserably to communicate some of its own good initiatives. Ironically that having ignored involving party cadres at grass roots, it claimed credit just on the eve of this poll.

Manmohan Singh's style as PM added to the insensitivity of the government. Even more, the way Singh responded to the series of scams caused angst about performance of the government. Without grace and grace no leader emerges. Rahul Gandhi was also on a "different tune". Despite repeated assertions that candidate will be finalised three months before, the party could announce name only at the nick of time always. This has sent out message that things a party are not going his way.

There was no evidence that overall poll strategy and campaign of Congress had the benefit of applied research. Congress has to reinvent itself for future prospects. Congress cannot expect to re-emerge without bettering its base in UP, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Bihar and Seemandhra.

Going by voter turnout phase wise, no wave was there. In fact, from fifth phase onwards, turnout had declined to less than 60 per cent from 70 per cent in the first four phases. UP had a six-phase poll. The turnout in the first two rounds was above 62 per cent. But in the later three phases of UP, turnout declined to near about 55 per cent. Modi wave would have meant progressive increase in turnout.

*(Rao is founder chair man of CMS and a pioneer in studying polls and political campaigns for over last four decades)*

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