

The Indian election: A new power in Asia

by Paul Zykofsky
Asia Correspondent

The awesome victory of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in last week's Indian elections has dramatically shifted the strategic and political reality in the entire South Asian region. After two-plus years of an unstable coalition government in India, a period characterized by rising communal, caste, and regional tensions and economic collapse, there will now be a strong stable central government in India. Mrs. Gandhi has proven herself one of the toughest political fighters around anywhere in the world today, carrying out a political comeback from the depths of personal and party defeat in 1977 when she was judged "finished" in Indian politics.

A Gandhi-led India is certain to play a strong role, not only in Asia but globally, particularly if the Indian economy can realize the tremendous potential represented by its present status as one of the top 10 industrial nations in the world. Mrs. Gandhi made economics one of her major issues in the election campaign, hitting hard at the inflationary decay of the economy since the Janata party came to power in 1977 and going further to identify the policies of the Charan Singh/Lok Dal government, which succeeded Prime Minister Desai last summer in a split of the Janata coalition, as anti-industrial. She is committed to restoring industrial growth, attacking on one nationally broadcast speech the World Bank's doctrine of "appropriate technology" and dismissing the populist demagoguery of Singh's countryside versus the cities campaign.

The scale of the Congress (I) majority is in the range of two-thirds, which has a special significance in giving them the ability to amend the Indian constitution in the parliament. The victory was nationwide, leaving by the wayside predictions of the ascendant role of regional, caste, and communal (Hindu versus Muslim) factors becoming dominant in Indian politics. Hardly anyone predicted an outright majority for Mrs. Gandhi with the exception of the Indian weekly *New Wave*, whose editor Ganesh Shukla told this writer well before the election that: "When the Indian people move, they move in vast waves." Those who were predicting a close call simply failed to appreci-



The election results

(as of Jan. 9)

Party	Seats*
Congress (I)	349
Lok Dal	41
Communist party	
Marxist (CPM)	35
Janata	32
Congress (U)	13
Communist Party	
of India (CPI)	10
DMK	16
AIDMK	2
Muslim League	3
National Conference	
Akali Dal	1
Independents	6
Others	12

* with 522 out of 525 seats reported
NOTES: The DMK and AIDMK are regional parties in Tamil Nadu, the former allied with Congress (I); the Akali Dal is a Punjab-based party; the National Conference is Kashmir-based and allied with the Congress. Muslim League is also Congress-allied.

How the states voted

1. Andhra Pradesh 42 seats

41 — Congress I
1 — Congress U

2. Assam 14 seats (only 2 contested)

2 — Congress I

3. Bihar 54 seats**

29 — Congress I
8 — Janata
5 — Lok Dal
4 — Congress U
4 — CPI
3 — Others

4. Gujarat 26 seats

25 — Congress I
1 — Janata

5. Harayana 10 seats

5 — Congress I
4 — Lok Dal
1 — Janata

6. Himachal Pradesh 4 seats**

3 — Congress I

7. Jammu and Kashmir 6 seats**

1 — Congress I
1 — Congress U
2 — National Conference
1 — Others

8. Karnataka 28 seats

27 — Congress I
1 — Janata

9. Kerala 20 seats

5 — Congress I
4 — Congress U
2 — CPI
4 — CPM
4 — Others

10. Madhya Pradesh 40 seats

35 — Congress I
4 — Janata
1 — Independent

11. Maharashtra 48 seats

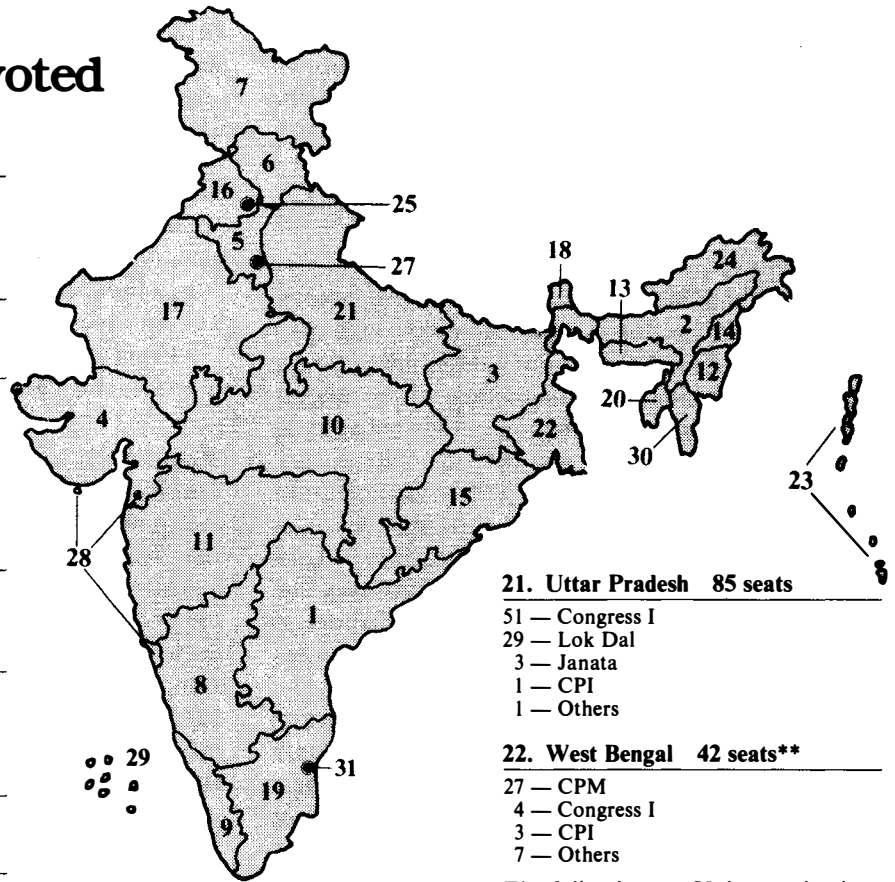
39 — Congress I
8 — Janata
1 — Congress U

12. Manipur 2 seats**

1 — Congress I

13. Meghalaya 2 seats**

1 — Congress I



14. Nagaland 1 seat

1 — Other

15. Orissa 21 — seats**

19 — Congress I
1 — Lok Dal

16. Punjab 13 seats

12 — Congress I
1 — Akali Dal

17. Rajasthan 25 seats

18 — Congress I
4 — Janata
2 — Lok Dal
1 — Congress U

18. Sikkim 1 seat

1 — Other

19. Tamil Nadu 39 seats

20 — Congress I
16 — DMK
2 — AIDMK
1 — Other

20. Tripura 2 seats

2 — CPM

21. Uttar Pradesh 85 seats

51 — Congress I
29 — Lok Dal
3 — Janata
1 — CPI
1 — Others

22. West Bengal 42 seats**

27 — CPM
4 — Congress I
3 — CPI
7 — Others

The following are Union territories:

23. Andaman and Nicobar Islands 1 seat

1 — Congress I

24. Arunchal Pradesh 2 seats**

1 — Congress I

25. Chandrigargh 1 seat

1 — Congress I

26. Dadra-Ngarhaveli 1 seat

1 — Congress I

27. Delhi 7 seats

6 — Congress I
1 — Janata

28. Goa, Daman, and Diu 2 seats

1 — Congress U
1 — Others

29. Lakshadweep Islands 1 seat

1 — Independent

30. Mizoram 1 seat

1 — Independent

31. Pondicherry 1 seat

1 — Congress I

** only those indicated were reported

ate the vast outpouring of support for the national leadership of Mrs. Gandhi, not out of simple disgust at the failures of the Janata, the now-clichéd explanation of her victory, but out of a strong commitment to the progress of the Indian nation, which Mrs. Gandhi represents more than any other individual.

The strategic implications

The U.S. and British press have hardly concealed their terror at the election outcome, complete with speculation over how soon Gandhi will lead India into the lap of the Soviet Union. In the context of the Afghan events, Pakistan is now depicted squeezed in between the Soviet Red Army on one side and a ferocious Mrs. Gandhi on the other—a view perhaps held in some circles in Pakistan itself. Such glib pronouncements ignore, as they usually do, the fundamental fact of what India is and who Mrs. Gandhi is—a nation with an identity that is not “Third Worldist” in essence and a leader who is, as she always says, not pro-American or pro-Soviet, but pro-Indian.

The most significant signals of where Mrs. Gandhi intends to take India will come at the end of this month when French President Giscard d’Estaing comes for a visit, providing a unique and early opportunity for these two “Gaullists” to forge a close relationship based on both mutual economic interests and appreciation for each other’s independent stance as powers in the world. It is certain that France already appreciates that India will no be *the* dominant power in the region, but that with chaos reigning in Iran and soon perhaps in Pakistan, India’s influence may extend far both to the West (into the Middle East) and to the East (into Southeast Asia).

The Soviet Union’s ties to India are longstanding and substantive, including in the economic area, but the Soviet leadership also missed the boat on Mrs. Gandhi’s comeback. The local pro-Soviet Communist Party of India waged a vigorous campaign against Mrs. Gandhi, reversing a traditional Communist policy of support for her and the Congress. Brezhnev and Soviet Premier Kosygin are reported to have immediately sent a warm message of congratulations to Mrs. Gandhi in an effort to mend some fences.

Mrs. Gandhi, for her part, has already made clear that she has no intention of playing games with the Anglo-American “arc of crisis” policy. In an interview with ABC-TV’s Barbara Walters immediately after her victory, she downplayed the import of the Soviet move into Afghanistan, stating that it was largely an internal affair of the Afghan government and its treaty relations with the Soviet Union. Rather she said the Soviet move was a response to the U.S.-China alliance in the region

and went further to warn that massive U.S.-Chinese arming of Pakistan would be seen as primarily a threat to India, not to the Soviet Union. Mrs. Gandhi had already pledged in the Congress election manifesto to recognize the Heng Samrin government in Kampuchea, a clear rebuff also to China which is still viewed in Delhi as India’s major security problem.

The unfolding of the Indian role will take place at the pace Mrs. Gandhi and the actions of others dictate, but it will be a new era which is unfolding in Asia under any circumstances.

From this standpoint, we turn to the election itself for a brief look at the returns and what they mean.

From disaster to victory

Gandhi fought her way to victory from the depths of the 1977 defeat with a combination of unflinching courage and the most acute political insight, unmatched by any Indian leader. While the Janata government plunged the country into economic chaos and a breakdown of stability marked by violent communal (Hindu versus Muslim) and caste clashes, Gandhi slowly rebuilt her own political machine despite repeated efforts by the ruling party to bar her from politics and even jail her.

Slowly over the last year, mainstream Congress forces have been brought back into the party. The electoral slates in every state in this contest were filled with Congress leaders knowledgeable in government and politics, in sharp contrast to the ruralist-dominated Janata and Lok Dal parties. The criteria of the voters was national interest, not the much talked about caste and communalist tendencies exploited by the ruralist candidates. The election was a referendum for prime minister. As one victorious congressman from Delhi put it, “Mrs. Gandhi was a candidate in every constituency.”

State-by-state trends

A quick view of the trend in the various Indian states shows this reality. The Congress-led alliance in Tamil Nadu, a traditionally regional-chauvinist dominated state, produced 37 out of 39 seats for the Congress. In Gujarat, the home state of former Prime Minister Desai, Congress took 25 of 26. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, known as strongholds of the Janata-linked Jan Sangh communalists, the Congress was handily winning.

The Hindi belt

The vote in areas which drove the Congress from office in 1977 was overwhelmingly in favor of the Congress this time around. New Delhi voters punished the

formerly Jan Sangh stronghold for urban lawlessness and unrelenting inflation—now at 25 percent. In New Delhi six out of seven constituencies went to the Congress where it had lost all of them in the last elections. In Uttar Pradesh, the heart of the Gangetic Plain and India's largest state where the Congress was swept from power in 1977, this time the Congress took the state with ease. In the south, where the Congress won in the last election, the margins were huge in its favor. The only national exception was West Bengal where the Communist Party-Marxist (CPM) was carrying the state.

Winners and losers

Leading the winners among individual political leaders was Gandhi, who won by a landslide margin of over 200,000 in Medok. Other notable winners were Congress General Secretary H.N. Bahuguna and numerous Congressmen including Mrs. Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi. Two other contenders for the Prime Ministership, Jagjivan Ram (the Janata head) and Charan Singh (Lok Dal and current Prime Minister) also won their seats as did former foreign minister and Jan Sangh leader Vajpayee.

Political pundits saw the voters as "apathetic" and "uninterested" but returns showed the contrary. Almost 60 percent of the total eligible voters cast their ballots (300 million voters). Some areas recorded much higher percentages.

After 24 hours of returns, no other party except the Congress had recorded double digit returns in the number of seats won. The Times of India explained the verdict in the following terms: "By electing Mrs Gandhi as their nominee to the Lok Sabha in an overwhelming majority, the people of India have given themselves another chance to renew the task of building a viable nation-state. This is the essential significance of the unprecedented victory of the Congress (I)."

The challenge ahead for Mrs. Gandhi

This defines the challenge ahead for Mrs Gandhi. Some indicators of the critical issues were evident in the first announcements following the Congress mandate. Gold and silver prices fell massively and the stock market stabilized for the first time in two and a half years. Commodity speculators and black marketers who enjoyed a field day under the Janata waited to hear from the new government. The reflection of this was the immediate fall in prices of essential commodities in all areas. One analyst, interpreting the stabilization of the stock exchange, said that it reflects that a consensus exists within the population throughout all walks of life who want economic growth.

Soviets poised

Iran break-up looms; what after Khomeini?

For months, this publication has reported details on a special plan of the British Special Intelligence Services to "balkanize" the Middle East into feuding principalities and tribal regions.

In particular, *EIR* has emphasized that this plan—named "the Bernard Lewis Plan" in honor of the Princeton University-based British Islamicist who authored it—was the basis for replacing the Shah of Iran by the British with the unstable and chaotic Ayatollah Khomeini regime: Iran was destined to be split into pieces, to trigger similar break-ups in Iraq, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and elsewhere.

In the past days Iran witnessed unprecedented levels of ethnic and regional unrest and, from all appearances, the Lewis scheme has taken on a life of its own. However, there is a growing danger in the situation that Lewis and his colleagues did not count on: The Soviet Union has made exceedingly clear with its move into Afghanistan that it will not permit the disintegration of the states on its southern flank into warring principalities. If Iran continues to deteriorate there is little doubt that the Soviets will intervene militarily to end the instability. In the meantime, the Soviets are prepared to use their influence inside Iran to secure the situation as best it can.

In addition, Soviet Ambassador to Iran Vinogradov reportedly told Khomeini last week, that if Iran falls under the sway of an anti-Soviet "Islamic Pact" or agrees too readily to aid the insurgents inside Afghanistan, the Soviets will not stand idly by.

"Death to Khomeini"

Since the weekend of Jan. 5, outbreaks against Khomeini have broken out on an unprecedented scale in both Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in northwest Iran, while civil and religious strife has erupted in Baluchistan in the southeast and in pockets in the oil-rich area of Khuzistan in the southwest.

In Kurdistan, in a case described by France's *Le Figaro* newspaper Jan. 8 as that of "rats leaving a sinking ship," the Khomeini-appointed governor-general of the region quit his post and joined the ranks of demonstrators who were protesting acts of repression by Kho-