

## **Chance of Government at the Centre**

**Or**

## **(Elections to the 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha 2004)**

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Democracy is a government, said Abraham Lincoln, by the people, for the people and of the people. India is the biggest democracy in the world. Elections are held here after every five years. Any citizen of India who is of 18 years or more, can cast his vote in favour of his own candidate whom he or she wants to elect. Any candidate who gets the maximum number of votes is declared the winner. Thus, it is the will of the electorate that finally rules the roost.

During the last 5 years, the country was being ruled by a coalition government headed by Sh. Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Since no party had been able to capture a majority of seats in the 540-member Lok Sabha, the BJP, the single largest party was invited to form the government. I took several other parties with it and forged a majority alliance named National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that ruled the country for 5 years. The leader of the BJP in the Lok Sabha, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee became the Prime Minister.

Fresh elections were held this year in April-May. A large number of election forecasts and pre-poll surveys predicted that the NDA would be voted back to power, though with a reduced majority. The election results, however, proved all the predictions wrong. The maximum number of seats were bagged by the Indian National Congress led by Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. The BJP had to be satisfied with the second position only. All anti-BJP parties took no time in announcing their support to the INC who on its own had failed to muster a majority in the 540-member House. Among the parties that came out in support of the Congress were the Communist Party of India, the CPM, the DMK and Rashtriya Janta Dal led by Laloo Prasad Yadav. The Congress Party and its allies, therefore, formed a group known as United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and staked their claim to form the government.

Even when everybody in the country expected that Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the President of the INC, who had led her party to victory at the hustings, would be the next Prime Minister, she sprang a big surprise by declining to take up this high office. However, her party men and colleagues tried to prevail upon her, she did not budge an inch. Instead she suggested that Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister, should be elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and asked to take charge as Prime Minister.

In deference to her wishers, Dr. Manmohan Singh was elected leader of the party. The President then invited him to form the government. So, a new government consisting of the INC and her supporters, took charge at the Centre. The Communist Party of India (M) which had pledged its support to the Congress-led coalition government stayed out of power. The Major partners in the coalition government are the Congress, the NCP led by Sharad Pawar, the DMK led by Karunanidhi and the RJD led by Laloo Prasad Yadav.

It is hoped that the United Progressive Alliance would take the country forward on the basis of its agreed programme (Common Minimum Programme) in the next five years.