

BJP's 'severe setback' is actually an incredible achievement

It took the prime minister to remind BJP's despondent karyakartas and supporters across the country that the combined INDI Alliance, despite their euphoria, has not even been able to match BJP's tally of 240 in an election where BJP has supposedly been "humbled", "rebuked", and Narendra Modi's "aura of invincibility punctured". The Opposition, that came together to stop the Narendra Modi juggernaut, stopped at 234 seats with Congress chalking up the highest number of seats at 99. It is easy to get carried away by the rhetoric, more so in the age of social media when algorithms box us into neat little echo chambers, but the fact remains that with BJP-led NDA alliance winning 292 seats, Modi is poised to become the only leader since Jawaharlal Nehru to assume the prime minister's chair for three consecutive terms. What's more, if he manages to stay in office till 2029, Modi will create a record since Nehru died two years into his third stint as PM. These are no mean feats and yet, despite leading his party to unprecedented heights, Modi has delivered a win that feels very much like a defeat for the BJP. There are several reasons for this, but the primary one is that of self-created burden of expectations. Modi had kicked off the election campaign with an oft-stated goal of 400 seats for NDA. That had set the bar of expectations so high that 240 seats at the end of two consecutive terms, which is an incredible achievement despite the obvious headwinds of anti-incumbency and would have been considered quite an accomplishment for the party that was knocked off power in 2004 by a Congress-led coalition, now seems like a shocking setback. Remember that in 2004, when Congress led UPA-1 pipped Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP to power, it had 145 seats in its kitty. Five years later in 2009 when the UPA-2 earned a second mandate, Congress's figure stood at 206. Despite its performance being adjudged as 'dismal', the BJP has broken through in Kerala, demolished the BJD in Lok Sabha as well as Assembly elections and has substantially increased its vote share in Tamil Nadu. The party has acquired nearly 2.5 times the number of seats of its nearest rival, but such has been the frame of reference in these polls that BJP's failure to get 272 seats on its own is being interpreted as 'severe underperformance'. The median of Indian politics has perhaps shifted forever. Conversely, Congress, that limped to 52 seats in 2019 and was written off before the 2024 campaign had commenced, set its own bar of expectations so low that 99 seats seems to have catapulted the party into the seventh stage of delirium. Rahul Gandhi has already thundered that "Modi doesn't have the mandate to return to power". It may be just a rhetorical exercise but is equally an indicator of the belligerent mood within the Opposition that may not only pose a tougher challenge for Modi in the next five years but may also upset all calculations if it manages to snatch away key allies from the NDA camp and either prevent BJP from coming to power or engineer a collapse in the near future. All these are in the realm of speculation but what isn't, is that

Tuesday's results mark India's re-entry into the era of coalition politics. After the 'wave elections' of 2014 and 2019, when Modi's appeal cut through the local issues and made the contest into presidential affairs, 2024 signals at least a partial return to 'normalcy' as Modi appeal wanes, and though the prime minister may have been able to lend a decisive edge to some of the seats for BJP, the absence of a dominating narrative was evident. The elections developed into many cornered, localized contests with factors ranging from caste, community, candidate selection, inflation, unemployment, dissent against sitting MP and sundry other issues coming into play. In this revised scenario, suddenly regional satraps such as



Akhilesh Yadav, Mamata Banerjee, or even Nitish Kumar and N Chandrababu Naidu gain renewed significance. The coalition era will also be a new challenge for Modi and his trusted lieutenant Amit Shah as the duo, since their days in Gujarat,

has never been short of a simple majority in forming and running a government. Forming the government will be the easier part. Modi may find that his reputation as 'strong leader' who never falters from taking tough decisions is getting severely tested since the 32-seat deficit makes it imperative for him to take along allies who may extract their suitable price. It has become conventional wisdom that Modi is unsuitable for the vagaries of coalition politics. We shall soon know. The author is Deputy Executive Editor, Firstpost. He tweets: @sreemoyalukdar. The views expressed in the above piece are personal and solely those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect Firstpost's views.

Surprise wins in Indian elections: 2 terror suspects, assassin's son

New Delhi - Two alleged separatist politicians currently imprisoned on terrorism charges, and the son of an assassin of India's third prime minister, Indira Gandhi, have emerged Tuesday as surprising winners in the Indian elections. One of these victors is Amritpal Singh, who won a parliamentary constituency in Punjab, a northern Indian state that has endured years of a deadly separatist movement seeking an independent homeland for Sikhs - a religious minority in India but a majority in the state. Singh, running as an independent candidate, was arrested in April last year for allegedly radicalizing Sikh youth for the independent state of Khalistan, challenging India's sovereignty, integrity, and security. He is the chief of Waris Punjab De, a Sikh volunteer political group based in Punjab, and was charged under the stringent National Security Act, which allows for extendable pre-trial detention of a suspect threatening national security for a minimum of 12 months. Currently lodged in the Dibrugarh jail in the northeastern state of Assam, Singh's election affidavit indicates he has 12 criminal cases against him. The other victor with alleged separatist

links is Engineer Rashid, a fiery politician from the troubled Kashmir Valley. Rashid is imprisoned in Delhi's Tihar Jail, facing charges of receiving funds for terror activities in Kashmir - a disputed region that has suffered decades of armed separatist rebellion seeking either independence or merger with Pakistan. A vocal critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Hindu nationalist ideology, Rashid contested from the north Kashmir constituency of Baramulla, his home district. He achieved a stunning victory and proved to be a giant slayer by defeating heavyweight and former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah. In Rashid's absence, his son, Abrar Rashid, ran the electoral campaign, striking an emotional chord with his supporters. Rashid began his political career in 2008 after resigning from his job as a construction engineer. He previously won the regional assembly election in 2014 as an independent candidate and unsuccessfully contested the parliamentary polls in 2019. Controversially, he hosted a beef party in Kashmir at the height of the BJP's demand for a blanket ban on cow slaughter in



India in 2015. He was arrested and charged with terror activities after Modi revoked Kashmir's semi-autonomy in August 2019 and has since been in jail, awaiting trial. Another surprise from the elections is Sarabjit Singh Khalsa, son of Beant Singh, one of the bodyguards who assassinated then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984. Khalsa contested from Faridkot in Punjab as an independent candidate, securing an unsailable lead of more than 70,000 votes against his nearest rival. India's electoral law does not bar anyone, including imprisoned suspects, from contesting elections unless they have been convicted. A conviction, however, leads to disqualification from running in elections.

After Smriti Irani's Defeat In Lok Sabha Polls 2024, Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi Co-Star Mouni Roy Backs Her!

Amethi: Smriti Irani, who had famously defeated Rahul Gandhi in 2019, lost to Congress candidate Kishori Lal Sharma in Lok Sabha Elections 2024 by a margin of 1,67,196 votes. After not being elected for the Amethi Lok Sabha seat, the former actor took to Instagram and penned a post accepting her defeat and highlighting her hard work over the years. "Such is life... A decade of my life going from one village to another, building lives, nurturing hope & aspirations, working on infrastructure -- roads, naali, khadanja, bypass, medical college and more," Smriti Irani wrote. She also expressed gratitude to those who stood by her through her thick and thin. "To those who stood by me through loss and victory, I am forever grateful. To those celebrating today, congratulations. And to those asking, 'How's the josh?' I say- it's still high, Sir," Smriti Irani added. Not only fans reacted to the post but Smriti's friends



from the entertainment world also chimed in the comment section to show support to her. Actor Mouni Roy, who shared screen space with her in the famous daily soap 'Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi', commented, "Always with you (red heart emoji).""Keep working hard that's it," veteran actor Neena Gupta commented. Actor Sonu Sood dropped a red heart emoji in the comment section. Actor Aashka Goradia also showed support to Smriti Irani. "With you EVERYDAY! Nothing has and

nothing will ever stop you from the good that you do! Full Power," she wrote. A few hours after the declaration of the results, Smriti Irani also held a press conference where she said that she gave 10 years of her life to Amethi and will continue to serve the area in times to come. "I express my gratitude to all the BJP party workers and supporters, those who have worked in the service of the constituency and the party with dedication and loyalty. Today, I am grateful to PM Narendra Modi and CM Yogi Adityanath that their governments have completed the pending works of 30 years in just 5 years. I congratulate those who win. I will continue to be in the service of the people of Amethi," Smriti Irani said. "We will strengthen the organization. We are the ones who have served the area with devotion. I went to every village in the area and worked. I gave 10 years of my life to this area," she added.

