

INDIA GENERAL ELECTION 2009

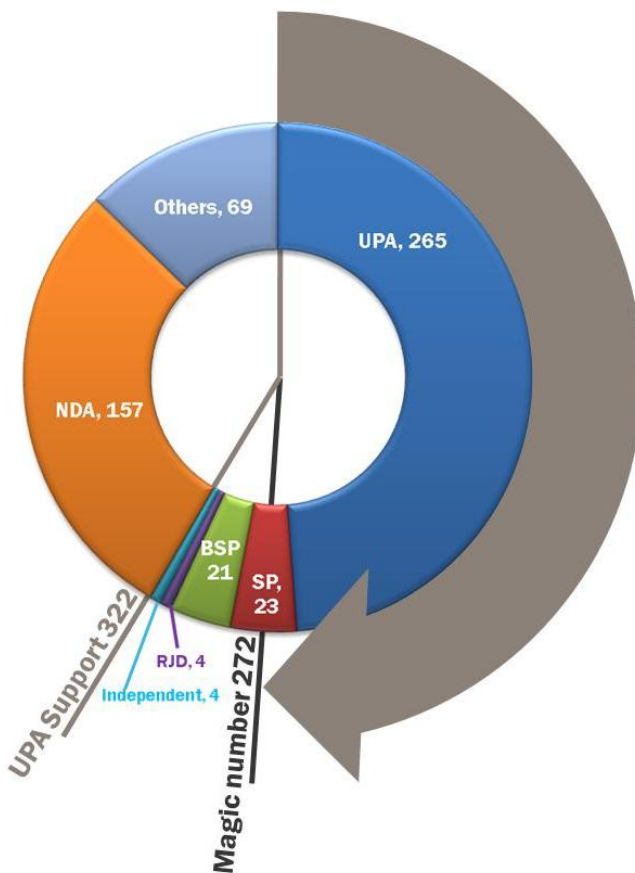
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THE VERDICT

All of the pre- and post-poll analysis that predicted a fractured mandate was proved wrong when the verdict was declared after a month-long polling exercise. In the 543-member *Lok Sabha* (lower house) of the Parliament, the incumbent United Progressive Alliance (UPA), led by Indian National Congress (Congress), came back to power with a “massive mandate” of a whopping 262 seats. This was the biggest election victory in the past two decades.

Support for the UPA Government in Lok Sabha



Total number of seats	543
Seats required for absolute majority	272
Seats won by UPA	265
Supporting parties	
SP	23
BSP	21
Independents	4
RJD	4
Total support for UPA	322

Six days after the verdict on May 20, the UPA, armed with the support of 322 members of parliament (MPs), including the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), swore in Dr. Manmohan Singh as the prime minister. With this, Singh became the third prime minister, after Jawaharlal Nehru in the 1950s and Indira Gandhi in the 1970s, to have come back to power immediately after a five-year term.

The Congress, which has emerged reasonably stronger after the elections, is confident that it will now be in a position to dictate its agenda.

Before the first session of the Parliament scheduled on June 1, the prime minister completed the task of forming the “biggest council of ministers” the country has ever had, consisting of 79 members, including several veterans as well as a number of younger faces. Most of the ministers are 50-60 years old, while five of the ministers are in their 30s and a dozen are in their 40s. With this, the average age of the Union Cabinet is now 63, down from 66 one year ago.

The phenomenon of youth in the parliament

The results of these elections prove the electorate’s strong preference toward youth being elected into the Parliament. Eighty-two Parliamentarians below the age of 40 were elected, twice as many as in the last election. Rahul Gandhi led the youth brigade effectively. His role in mobilising the youth power; his efforts at rejuvenating the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, India’s largest state, where the party machinery had virtually ceased to exist; and his defence of Dr Singh as the party’s prime ministerial candidate against the opposition’s onslaught were seen as his contributions to the party’s victory.

Keeping in line, the UPA government duly rewarded many young Parliamentarians by offering them berths in the government as ministers. Though Rahul refused to join the government, he is quite clearly being prepared to take on the important role of prime minister in the not-so-distant future.

THE NEW CABINET

While eight of the 27 cabinet ministers retained their portfolios, Dr. Singh sprang quite a few surprises with some shuffling of the pack.

Formation of Cabinet: Introduction & Shuffling

Ministry	Previous	Current
Finance	P Chidambaram/ Pranab Mukherjee *	Pranab Mukherjee
Home	Shivraj Patil/ P Chidambaram **	P Chidambaram
Defence	AK Anthony	No change
Commerce	Kamal Nath	Anand Sharma
Foreign	Pranab Mukherjee	SM Krishna
Agriculture	Sharad Pawar	No change
Information & Broadcasting	Priyaranjan Dasmunshi	Ambika Soni
Communication & IT	A Raja	No change
Health	Dr. Ambumani Ramdoss	Ghulam Nabi Azad
Education	Arjun Singh	Kapil Sibal
Power	Sushil Kr Shinde	No change
Road, Transport & Highway	TR Balu	Kamal Nath
Urban Development	S Jaipal Reddy	No change
Environment & Forest	S Regupathi (MoS)	Jairam Ramesh

* Additional charge after P Chidambaram was moved to Home Ministry post 11/28/08 Mumbai attacks

** Moved to Home ministry to strengthen national security post 11/28/08

THE AGENDA

Soon after he was formally elected as the Congress party's prime ministerial candidate, Dr. Manmohan Singh announced that the government will give top priority to sustain high economic growth. The ministers will be given time-bound targets for implementing the election promises and programmes with quarterly reviews for each ministry.



“Our first priority will have to be to re-energize government and improve governance. Equally important is the challenge of reviving economic growth and creating new employment opportunities.”

—Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh

Reflecting the same enthusiasm and urgency, his colleagues handling the ministries of finance, commerce, telecom, petroleum, surface transport, steel and corporate affairs have all come out with their immediate agenda with significant intent of reform.

The Road Map...

Commerce & Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No comprehensive review of recently announced FDI policy ▪ Possibility of new incentives for industrial and export sector ▪ Deliberations on opening up of sectors like multi-brand retail to be continued 	Telecom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3G WIMAX auction before August ▪ Subsidy for companies setting up IT/Telecom manufacturing hubs in the country ▪ BSNL disinvestment top agenda
Road & Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on making existing plans implementable by removing bottlenecks ▪ Bankers to be asked to ease credit squeeze for infrastructure industries 	Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intensification of oil & gas exploration ▪ Deregulation of oil & gas prices
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bill to open higher education sector to foreign entities to be reintroduced for approval ▪ Free & compulsory education bill to be passed in July 2009 	Home Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 100-day action plan to counter terrorism ▪ Multi-agency center to collect and coordinate and optimise flow of real-time intelligence ▪ Multi-purpose national identity number/card to every citizen in the country by 2011
Defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Measures to speed up defence procurement ▪ Zero tolerance for corruption 	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus on implementation of National Rural Health Mission
Foreign Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthen relationship with neighbours ▪ Consolidate strategic partnership with the United States, Russia, China, Japan and EU ▪ Resumption of composite dialogue with Pakistan depending on their adherence to dismantling the terror attacks 	Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus of incoming budget: Reviving the momentum of growth, employment creation and strengthening 'inclusive' elements ▪ Increased government spending, borrowing consequently

THE BUDGET

The next big event for the new government will be the announcement of the fiscal budget (the annual financial plan), scheduled to be presented in the first week of July. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee indicated that the broad economic agenda of the government for the next five years would be to induce next round of stimulus for growth in the form of economic reforms.

Going strictly by Congress's election manifesto, the government will use the next five years in power to strengthen its social base through welfare schemes. The government has clearly indicated that the priorities listed in the manifesto will be reflected in the coming budget.

THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Dr. Manmohan Singh | **Prime Minister**

As the finance minister from 1991 to 1994, Singh steered the country through the process of economic liberalization. This is the time when India abandoned the Soviet-style state planning and introduced free-market policies that helped the economy quadruple to \$1.2 trillion.

Again as the prime minister from 2004 to 2009 he took the challenge of facing a non-confidence motion by the Left Front that provided crucial outside support to his government for inking the Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal despite the Left's reservations against it. This was also the period when India's economy grew close to 9 percent on average each year, the fastest pace since independence in 1947, helped by a six-fold surge in foreign direct investments to \$38 billion.

Just after the swearing in, the Oxford University-trained economist in his early 80s pronounced that the implementation of policies aimed at boosting growth and the creation of employment opportunities in an economy hit by the global recession will be the top priorities for the new government.

Pranab Mukherjee | **Union Minister of Finance**

The 73-year-old "man for all seasons" returned to the finance ministry after a quarter of a century. Though he was the foreign minister in the last government, in the twilight months he was accorded finance as an additional portfolio.

In the past he held several key ministries, including external affairs and defence. As finance minister in Indira Gandhi's Cabinet from 1982-1984, he ran an economy that was almost closed and insulated from the global economy. He is considered to be an accomplished politician whose popularity cuts across party lines. This makes him invaluable when it comes to negotiating with tricky and temperamental political allies. According to Mukherjee, the government will continue to juggle with two different objectives – allocating more resources for social sectors and fiscal consolidation over the medium term.

P Chidambaram

Union Minister of Home Affairs

The articulate politician from southern Tamil Nadu state has had successful stints at the finance ministry and home ministry which he has retained.

The Harvard-educated lawyer spent the first four years of the last government as finance minister, overseeing a period of rapid economic growth.

Chidambaram is a firm believer in free trade and is known for his daring scheme to halt tax evasion. He is well-known for his pro-market reforms and for his bold steps to abolish red tape. His reputation for efficiency resulted in his appointment as the home minister after the deadly Mumbai attacks in November 2008.

His critics accuse him of being arrogant and say he lacks the ability to reach out to party cadres, perhaps a reason why he came close to losing the recent election. In the end, he won with a small margin of about 3,500 votes.

SM Krishna

Union Minister of External Affairs

An old Congress party hand, he served as junior minister for industry and finance in the past. Even though this is his first stint in the Union Cabinet, he has been in public life for more than four decades.

Krishna was the chief minister of Karnataka from 1999-2004, the period when Bangaluru (Bangalore) emerged as the country's information technology hub. A Fulbright scholar, he studied at America's Southern Methodist University and George Washington University. Analysts feel Krishna's background and education should stand him in good stead in the international arena. He is also an avid sportsman who plays tennis regularly.

After taking over as external affairs minister, Mr. Krishna said the new government's highest priority was to strengthen ties with the neighbours and further consolidate strategic partnerships with the United States, Russia, China, Japan and the European Union.

AK Anthony

Union Minister of Defence

During his previous tenure as defence minister in the last government, at least two defence deals, including that of Eurocopter, were cancelled after some malpractices by the manufacturers. This time just after his swearing-in, Mr. Anthony announced that the government would not hesitate to ruthlessly cancel contracts if malpractices are found in any acquisition. However, critics say that he delayed the purchase of equipment for the armed forces, affecting their battlefield capability. The 68-year-old, a three-time chief minister of the southern state of Kerala, is known for his clean image. Analysts say during his tenure, violence in Kashmir reduced considerably and his policies have made him popular with the army.

As defence minister, he toured most forward areas including the Siachen glacier – often described as the highest battlefield in the world - and came up with measures to improve the living conditions of soldiers.

Sharad Pawar

Union Minister of Agriculture, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

In 1999, Mr. Pawar split from Congress over Sonia Gandhi's Italian roots. But five years later he was back with his old ally, entering the governing UPA on the eve of the 2004 polls.

As the agriculture minister in the last government, Pawar faced his biggest challenge in the spiraling rate of farmer suicides, especially in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. In this second stint, Pawar called for a second green revolution in the country – an initiative in the mid-1970s and 1980s. Pawar's priority areas will include faster agricultural growth, improving rural infrastructure and implementing the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) to ensure food security and better Public Distribution System. For the time being he will concentrate on fulfilling the promises made during election.

Mamata Banerjee

Union Minister of Railways

Known to be an impulsive leader and the most reliable anti-Left force in its bastion of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee is the founder of the All India Trinamool Congress. During the NDA rule under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Mamata was railway minister in 1999 and minister for coal and mines in 2004. She was also a union minister without portfolio for a brief period in 2003-2004.

Mamata has come to be known more as a politician of street protests busy in rabble rousing. Taking up the issues of small farmers, Banerjee became a cheerleader for Bengal's rural poor, steadily making inroads into the Leftists' territory. Last year she led successful campaigns against the state government's initiative to acquire vast tracts of agricultural land in Singur and Nandigram in south Bengal for the car and chemicals industries respectively. Both projects were withdrawn in the face of resistance.

Just after taking charges of the railway ministry, Banerjee promised economic freedom for marginalized sectors to travel by rail and renew the rail system with a human face.

Kamal Nath

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways

According to analysts the appointment of Kamal Nath, as road transport and highways minister signals the government's intention to speed up the implementation of infrastructure projects which had slowed under the previous government.

As the commerce minister in the previous government, Nath was instrumental in effectively projecting the country's free-market image to the world. He upheld India's cause vigorously at the WTO talks. As transport minister, his focus will be on reworking the regulatory policy framework for road infrastructure of the country. Nath will talk to state governments over the next month and take all participants and stakeholders into confidence to remove bottlenecks and ring in changes.

Anand Sharma

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry

Sharma, who was the junior foreign minister in the previous government and has his roots in youth politics, has little experience of economic portfolios and is likely to toe the line set by his reformist boss, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Sharma is an articulate speaker and defended the controversial nuclear deal with the United States in Parliament last year. Sharma has always been in sync with the prime minister's line as a junior minister in the Ministry of External Affairs. Analysts feel appointment of Sharma as the trade minister puts the prime minister in the driver's seat in international trade talks.

After taking charge of the commerce ministry, Sharma assured that the government will take all possible steps to stabilise industrial production. Assuming charge as the commerce and industry minister Anand Sharma ruled out any "comprehensive" review of the new FDI norms.

Ghulam Nabi Azad

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare

Ghulam Nabi Azad is the tallest leader of the Congress party from the troubled state of Jammu and Kashmir. Known for his crisis managerial skills, Azad's inclusion in the Union Cabinet marks his comeback to the central government after his three-year stint in Jammu and Kashmir as chief minister of a Congress-PDP coalition government.

Hailing from Baderwah area of Jammu and Kashmir, the 60-year-old leader has risen from being a block secretary of the Congress in 1973 to being one of the key members of the party whose services are in much demand at all times.

After taking charge of the ministry, Azad insisted health as a sector that had not been given much attention and asserted that his priority would be to implement the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in "letter and spirit."

Ambika Soni

Union Minister of Information & Broadcasting

One of the closest aides of Sonia Gandhi, Ambika Soni's induction into the Cabinet was seen as a reward for her loyalty. As a minister of tourism and culture, she succeeded in marketing India as an attractive global tourist destination through the "Incredible India" campaign.

Terming the upcoming Commonwealth Games as her immediate priority, information and broadcasting minister Ambika Soni said its broadcast was the ministry's prime responsibility. "We are the host broadcaster, and we will work along with foreign broadcasters to ensure coverage of the games," she said.

Ambika Soni said she would take all the stakeholders into confidence before taking decisions on issues facing the media industry. She is expected to take up pending policy issues including policy on Headend-In-the-Sky (HITS), a move that will open doors for the digital delivery of cable channels across the country at one go using satellites. Also, expansion and review of Conditional Access System (CAS) in the rest of the country and expansion of private FM radio business are among the top priorities awaiting the attention of Soni.

A Raja

Union Minister of Communication & IT

Despite having run policy in a way that helped select firms get cheap licences and thus led to lower revenues for the government, Raja has been retained as the minister of communication and IT.

After resuming office again, Raja laid down the priorities of his ministry. First priority is to have early auctions for both 3G and WiMAX spectrums within the first three months. Disinvestment of the state-owned BSNL will be taken up through discussions with the stakeholders. The ministry will work toward reduction of STD and local tariffs.

In the mean time, implementation of an eGovernance Plan within five years is on the agenda. With the idea of making India a manufacturing hub for IT, the minister has announced a 20-percent subsidy on investments for companies that set up shop in these hardware hubs.

Dayanidhi Maran

Union Minister of Textile

Dayanidhi Maran, the newly appointed minister of textiles had an illustrious achievement in his short-lived role as the union minister for communications and information technology in the previous government.

Though he was the minister for a short period of just three years, he was able to turn the telecommunications and information technology sector upside down and start a revolution of sorts by reducing calling rates as well as Internet access rates.

Looking at his track record in the IT ministry, the textile sector has built a lot of hope and looks upon the new textile minister to help the textile and apparel industry survive through this crisis, since it is going through one of the worst phases of its existence.

However, Maran understands that this time it will not be as easy replicating his performance in the IT ministry. Back in 2004 it was a very nice stint because the world economy was booming, and it is easier to achieve a lot in a booming economy.

Meira Kumar

Lok Sabha Speaker

A diplomat-turned-politician and the Congress' dalit face, Meira Kumar, has become the first woman to be chosen to occupy the high office of the Lok Sabha Speaker. Ms. Kumar, who resigned as Union minister, is the daughter of late Congress stalwart Jagjivan Ram, and came out as a surprise choice over veteran Congressman from Andhra Pradesh, Kishore Chandra Deo, whose name figured prominently last fortnight as the person being tipped for the Speaker's post. The decision to choose her for the Speaker's post comes just two days after she took charge of the Water Resources Ministry.

A five-time MP, the 64-year-old Kumar had quit the Indian Foreign Service in 1985 to join politics. She resigned from the Congress in 2002 citing differences with the party leadership only to rejoin it two years later. Soft-spoken Kumar was elected to the Lok Sabha from Bijnore in Uttar Pradesh in 1985. With a degree in law and master's degree in English, she joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1973 and served in the embassies in Spain, the United Kingdom and Mauritius.

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