

## Poor strategies, organisation led to defeat: Congress

Congress leaders were Sunday stunned by their defeat in Karnataka, with some saying that even party chief Sonia Gandhi was to blame for the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the southern state.

Publicly, party leaders cited many reasons - the division of secular votes for which they blamed the Janata Dal-Secular (JD-S), rising food prices, delays in the delimitation process and the Election Commission's refusal to revise voter lists.

But privately almost all senior leaders admitted that the party had bungled.

'The party leadership, including Sonia Gandhi, should realise that having a state unit is not enough to win state elections. It needs constant intervention and monitoring to ensure that it works in discipline and that there should be a proper strategy for winning elections,' a party leader told IANS on the condition of anonymity.

The Congress won only 77 seats in the 225-member Karnataka assembly, just 12 more than in 2004, while the BJP bagged around 110 seats and was set to form its first government in a southern state.

The JD-S managed 32 seats while the remaining went to independents and smaller parties.

'We messed up ticket distribution, selection of candidates and the entire poll strategy. Nobody was serious about the state election,' rued a senior Congress leader.

According to political analyst N. Bhaskar Rao, Karnataka was another bad news for the Congress ahead of the 2009 parliamentary elections.

'This proves that the Congress has not learnt its lessons from its defeats in Gujarat, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. The party had no strategy, no insight, and they were far away from ground realities,' Rao told IANS.

Rao said the rout in Karnataka was also 'bad news' for Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, who had campaigned in the state.

'It is worse for Rahul because he has proved to be a failure in the urban as well as rural areas. His campaign did not make any difference.'

Senior Congress leaders admitted that no leaders other than those who were in charge took the elections seriously.

'Each leader has his own personal interests. Nobody bothered to ensure that the winnable candidates were fielded. The publicity was bad - the party did not even make arrangements to celebrate the fourth successful year of the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government nor did it try to propagate its achievements,' a Congress minister explained.

Party spokesperson Jayanti Natarajan admitted that the rising prices of food items - an issue used

by the BJP to attack the Congress-led UPA government - had contributed extensively to the opposition's advantage.

Significantly, the Congress lost heavily in seats reserved for Scheduled Caste (SC). Dalits used to be the party's traditional supporters.

Of the 36 reserved seats it contested, the Congress could only win seven. The BJP was at the forefront in 21.

'The party needs to introspection. The organisation has to be strengthened. If we do not roll up our sleeves and start working now, the story of our defeats will be repeated in the general elections too,' said the minister.

*Liz Mathew ( © IANS / India eNews)*