

# Time For That Lofted Six

## IPL, or Indian Political Leadership, must play to win

Harsh Goenka

2009 is the new 1991. Or could well be. The general election results have confounded pundits, and thrown up a decisive mandate - give or take a few seats - for the ruling Congress-led UPA. It's quite like how the Rajasthan Royals, led by the talent and intelligence of Shane Warne, won the first IPL series comfortably, dumbfounding all the experts.

That the UPA has managed to garner significantly higher numbers in this election is a pointer to several things. Having tasted a number of coalitions and their after-effects, these results are the clearest signal yet that India has tired of witnessing, the coming together of some of the unlikeliest allies, merely to cobble together the semblance of a coalition. Most such experiments have failed, leaving a lasting negative impression in the minds of people, and causing considerable damage both socially and economically. For another such case study, you only need to look at the plight of the Kolkata Knight Riders, with everyone speaking in different voices, and the team doing poorly.

This time round, it's different. The people have given a clear mandate in favour of one pre-poll formation, as opposed to another, leaving very little scope for the confusion of earlier years or the need for hectic confabulations to stitch a government together. There is no need for Buchanan and Shah Rukh Khan and Sourav Ganguly and Brendan McCullum to negotiate and argue and compromise. There is no doubt in anyone's mind who the leaders are, whose writ will run. More importantly, this time, the UPA will be largely unfettered by the demands of any particular section and will be able to function cohesively and implement its policy roadmap without much hindrance.

The UPA has an opportunity it must not frit-

ter away. The people have voted for stability and consistency. Whether viewed from the political or economic standpoint, the results must be seen as the biggest opportunity in recent times to make a tangible and lasting impact. The challenge for the UPA will now be to turn this opportunity into reality, make a change significant enough to outlast the five-year tenure which this new government will, hopefully, be able to complete.

The results are startlingly similar to the 1991 mandate, when, again, the Congress fell short of majority, but with no threat to stability. We have seen what the outcome of that election meant for the country. That single man-



date was enough to alter the economic history of India forever, with Manmohan Singh, then finance minister, unshackling the power of Indian enterprise like never before. He will now be prime minister for the second time, with a decisive mandate in his favour. It is as if history is sending a clear signal to the political establishment to get going, take India to a higher growth trajectory. The reforms unleashed by Singh in 1991 had provided the foundation on which India's economic growth story has been scripted thus far. Now, with mandate 2009, it's time to take that story forward.

The challenges are many. The global economic environment remains morbid, and while India remains somewhat insulated be-

cause it is not excessively export-dependent, the industrial production figures released recently show there's a lot of work to be done domestically as well. The economy will need more booster doses. It has taken hits of late, with declining demand, layoffs in some sectors and a ballooning fiscal deficit. The new government will need to play off these crucial middle overs carefully if it has to put up a solid score. There's no time for or luxury of a tactical break.

There's a lot of work to be done - education, healthcare and infrastructure are three crucial areas where the new government will need to provide emphasis. Providing basic education needs to be top priority if the foundation of the future is to be secure. There have been steps initiated on infrastructure; these need to be taken forward proactively. The government will need to move ahead on providing access to affordable healthcare and take forward its initiatives in the rural economy, ensuring that growth becomes more inclusive. A combination of all these factors will be the best recipe for a more dynamic India.

For the first time in many years, we see the hope of youth, brimming with energy, guided by a clutch of experienced people of great maturity and sagacity. Matthew Hayden and Adam Gilchrist, and the likes of Yusuf Pathan and Jean-Paul Duminy, hungry to make their mark, eager to take their team to newer heights. Yes, the most important positive takeaway from this election has been the emergence of young faces, people who have the determination, courage and the spirit to take things forward. Rahul Gandhi has rightly been stressing the urgent need to bring the country's youth into the mainstream of political activity. As IPL has shown, a judicious mix of youth and experience can guarantee pretty dramatic results. I am confident that Singh's second innings, minus the pressures of his earlier one, will prove to be as far-reaching as the budget which the good doctor first rose to present in 1991. Time to hit that lofted six!

The writer is the chairman of an industrial group.