

GENERAL ELECTIONS 2009

Aspiring MPs seek out feng shui for electoral luck

As the country goes to vote to elect a new Government, many prospective MPs and politicians have been making seeking out feng shui magic to woo lady luck.

"With feng shui, one can improve one's chances of getting more from life. You can arrange the environment in such a way that the balance falls in your favour. Many politicians are showing a deep interest in this and have come to me seeking advice," says a New Delhi-based feng shui master Mohandeeep.

Feng shui is an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics. It believes in using the laws of astronomy and harnessing the forces of the earth to recharge *qi*, or positive physical energy.

It is conceptually similar to the Indian system of *vaastu shastra*. In India, there are many who have studied feng shui and *vaastu shastra*. Now, politicians are turning to them for guidance.

Mohandeeep's clientele includes a host of big and small politicians.

"I look at their date of birth, floor



plans of residence and office. Then I give them advice so that their environment can be made positive — like how to position their table and chair or ensure they sit against a wall," Mohandeeep says. Sitting with the back to an entrance or exit point could spell

trouble for the person in his office or internal party conflicts, Mohandeeep warns.

At feng shui shops across the country, like Kriti Collections at New Delhi's Khan Market, totems and artefacts for enhancing luck are flying off the racks. "Since the elections were announced, we have had a lot of customers coming in and asking for 'something' to enhance their political luck or help them get a ticket to contest elections," says Kriti's owner Sharad Goyal.

Totems like the Ruyi stick for power and authority or the chesty-looking Quang-kong king statuettes, painted in bright red, gold and green and even the dragon-headed tortoise for fortune, power and support are a big hit, Goyal says.

Measures like placing a set of three, eight or nine miniature horses in the southern corner, or a crystal lotus to overcome obstacles or even an auspicious six-rod wind chime could do the

trick, feng shui experts say. At many shops, a few customers skitter in inconspicuously, whisper to the patron in hushed voices.

A few nods later, the customer is on his way with a brown bag tucked under his arm.

"Often we have concerned family members or a politician's aides who come to us seeking advice. This is because the person doesn't want to be seen in public... We tell them which article to get and tell them where they should keep it in their homes," Goyal says.

"Keeping the objects in offices is also out of the question for those who want to be discreet. So, many use very small mobile charms that can be attached on to your phone or kept in your pocket or wear bands," Goyal adds.

These items are charged with Reiki energy by a trained master and when placed in the right positions they work "with you" to facilitate your aspirations, he says.

Special arrangement for proxy voting for defence personnel

The Election Commission has made arrangements for proxy voting by defence personnel, Deputy Election Commissioner J.P. Prakash said in New Delhi on April 6.

The Commission has also conducted a special campaign to enrol defence personnel living with their families in Service areas as a general voter in the area, Prakash told reporters.

"To use the proxy voting facility, the Service voters will have to identify the persons (who is authorised to cast proxy votes) and an intimation should be sent to the returning officer in a prescribed format," he said.

The ink mark would be made on the proxy voter's second finger, the Commission official said.

Prakash said that polling in inaccessible areas would be covered by video and photographs would also be made to ensure the poll process was transparent.

The Commission would set up mobile polling stations in Jaisalmer and Barmer areas of Rajasthan and in Jharkhand's Palamu district.

EVMs to make voting tamper proof

The Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) has just got smarter. It not only does the obvious — record your vote — but also notes the exact time you cast it. The new and improved machines will also give hourly updates of balloting.

Amol Newaskar, general manager of Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bangalore, which is one of the two public sector companies manufacturing EVMs for the Election Commission, said the machines, which have been supplied for the April-May elections have more improvised features than the older ones.

"BEL has been manufacturing EVMs for a long time and since 2000 we have supplied 650,000 EVMs. However, the ones manufactured from 2007 onwards — which will be used in the April-May general elections — have improvised features such as in-built clocks which record the exact time a ballot is cast," Newaskar said.

"Not just that, the EVM also records

the exact time, when the whole balloting process starts and when the last vote is being cast. It gives an hourly update of the number of votes cast, and if there is any unusual trend in the process, it can be easily detected. Thus the whole process becomes tamper-proof," he added.

For instance, if there is a heavy rush in polling at a particular hour, the officials can be on alert or if a voter thinks that his vote is being tampered with, the exact time when he cast his vote can be retrieved.

The Election Commission, according to Newaskar, placed an order for 102,000 EVMs to BEL for the 2009 general elections — all of which were supplied by January.

Besides BEL, the other company authorised by the Election Commission to manufacture EVMs is the Hyderabad-based Electronics Corporation of India Limited (ECIL). Both the companies supply an almost equal number of EVMs.



Snapshot: First phase of general elections



Total electorate: 143.1 million
Total candidates: 1,715
Total woman candidates: 122
Seats with the highest number of candidates: Pradesh Mahboobnagar (Andhra Pradesh) and Raipur (Chhattisgarh) — 32 each
Seats with the largest number of women candidates: Mehboobnagar and Raipur with 5 in each
Party-wise list of candidates:
 BJP: 102, Bhujan Samaj Party: 111
 CPI-M: 23, INC: 111
 NCP: 14, CPI: 15, RJD: 18
 Other state parties: 136
 Independents and others: 1,185
Polling stations: 185,552
Polling staff: 900,000
EVMs: 300,166

Google India launches online election site

Now voters from across the country can go online to confirm their voter registration status, discover their polling location or even view their constituency on a map, thanks to Google India's online election centre launched on April 6.

The bi-lingual site in Hindi and English was launched in collaboration with a group of leading NGOs.

Voters can also peruse relevant election-related news, blogs, videos, and



quotations, a statement said. The NGOs partnering Google India include the Association for Democratic Reforms, Indicus Analytics, the

Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy, the Liberty Institute, and PRS Legislative Research.

Shailesh Rao, managing director, Google India, said: "Keeping in mind our global mission of organising information and making it universally accessible, we have created this election centre to highlight some of the most important information available to voters in India today."

Sanjoy Narayan, editor-in-chief of

Hindustan Times Media Limited, which is co-marketing the site, said: "The idea behind the site was to empower our reader to make the right choice while exercising his or her franchise."

He said the age group between 18 to 35 accounted for almost 40 percent of the electorate. "This chunk of young voters is good with technology and wants to make sure they elect the right people," Narayan said.