



JPNN|Srinagar | Dec 23, 2014|PDP today emerged as the single largest party closely followed by BJP in second spot in Jammu and Kashmir assembly polls, in a highly fragmented mandate that threw open various options of government-formation. Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won 28 seats, a gain of 12 seats from the previous poll, followed by BJP with 25 seats, its best show. Both the parties on their own fell far short of the 44-seat mark required for majority in the 87-member House. National Conference and Congress, which ruled the state for the last six years but decided to go separately in the polls, managed to win 15 and 12 seats respectively. NC had won 28 seats in the last poll and Congress 17. However, BJP, for whom Prime Minister Narendra Modi carried out an extensive 'Mission 44+' campaign in the Assembly, failed to make any breakthrough in the Valley and Ladakh where it drew a blank out of 50 seats up for grab. While PDP has come a long way from winning 16 seats in their maiden assembly elections in 2002, BJP was the biggest gainer this year by adding 14

seats to its tally of 11 in the last assembly. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who lost from Sonawar constituency, was among the 16 ministers tasting defeat but he managed salvage some pride by winning from Beerwah segment in central Kashmir. Separatist-turned-mainstream politician Sajjad Ghani Lone will enter the assembly for the first time as his People's Conference managed to win two seats - Handwara and Kupwara. Prominent among the losers are Deputy Chief Minister Tara Chand, Health Minister Taj Mohiuddin, Tourism Minister Ghulam Ahmad Mir (all Congress), Finance Minister Abdul Rahim Rather and Social Welfare Minister Sakina Itoo (both NC) and Agriculture Minister Ghulam Hassan Mir (Democratic Party Nationalist). Given the ideological differences between the two front-runners for power PDP and BJP, Sajjad Lone and independent MLA Sheikh Abdul Rashid

who won from Langate are expected to play an important role in government-formation. CPI(M) leader M Y Tarigami, who won a fourth consecutive term from Kulgam constituency and Peoples Democratic Front leader Hakeem Mohammad Yaseen, who won a third term from Khansahib, are also expected to be key players in post-poll scene. While Congress has offered unconditional support to PDP to form the new government, the regional party is playing a wait-and-watch game before entering into an alliance. PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti left everyone guessing on her party's course of action. "Our priority will not be to cobble together a government by hook or crook. It will take time to explore possibilities and formation of government to meet the people's expectations and good governance. It is difficult to say when it will materialise." However, even if PDP and Congress join hands, they will fall short of the majority mark. BJP President Amit Shah said all three options were open for the party. "The option of forming the government, the option of supporting a government and the option of participating in a government are all open," Shah told reporters in Delhi. He said BJP's parliamentary board will meet tomorrow to discuss the situation. Agency