

THREAT TO LALOO

Rebels emerge within the RJD

IT is unlikely that the banner of revolt that Ramdas Rai has raised against Rabri Devi's proxy Government by resigning will yield the desired result. Rai and the rebels do not have the numbers to take the revolt to its logical conclusion. The social combination in the form of a backward coalition and a caste-party compartment that Laloo has created to stay in power is powerful and enduring. The nexus of criminals, contractors and corrupt officials that Laloo has built will not easily break. He can be up to anything, including his fabled dirty tricks, to torment his detractors. But what is unprecedented by Bihar standards is that a "double MA Minister" has resigned because he refuses to work under a cabinet minister who hasn't passed even the VIII standard. Also novel is his public assertion that MLAs with him would present a new chief minister to the people as a new year gift. This is the first time in a decade of Laloo-Rabri raj that RJD dissidents have succeeded in naming an alternative. The logic of Rai's refusal to work under an "intellectually inferior" minister is a ruse. After all he knows that the educational qualifications of Rabri Devi herself are no better. Also Rai hasn't been truthful in saying that his popularity led to his wings being clipped. It is his close proximity to Ranjan Yadav, the working president of RJD, that made Laloo insecure.

Laloo has reason to be concerned about Ranjan Yadav's ambition and political skills. Having known him since his student days and forced him to embark on a "successful" political career, Ranjan has been his friend, philosopher, schemer and guide. He knows much more about Laloo's darker deeds than what the fodder and bitumen scams together have unravelled so far. Laloo himself is scared that Ranjan could be his nemesis. He has always humoured him. He made him the working president of RJD when all the scams, including the fodder, surfaced and he was charge sheeted. He also knows that Ranjan at present has the support of a dozen RJD MLAs. But then his potential to emerge as a threat is real. Already Taslimuddin, minister for building construction and once Laloo's Man Friday, has made common cause with Ranjan. No wonder Rai wants to see Ranjan as the new chief minister. Ranjan has maintained a scrupulous silence. What an insecure Laloo does to check the dissidence in his party remains to be seen.

THE STATESMAN

SPLITTING UP

Paswan forms his own unit

AS if we did not have enough political parties, another was born on Monday boasting the name of Jan Shakti. Ram Vilas Paswan, the supremo of the new party had been threatening precisely that for the last couple of months — he fulfilled himself by walking out with 4 of the 10 JD-U MPs. Of these, one is his brother Rameshchandra Paswan, not an entirely unexpected development. Some MLAs may also leave for the Jan Shakti, but to put it into perspective it is important to consider exactly how much of a force is the parent JD-U? Not much. So it is unlikely that a splinter group from not much will amount to very much. The Janata Dal of V P Singh which came to power in a coalition government in 1989 has gone through so many splits that it is hard to keep track. With a whole host of leaders coming together to form a Janata Dal it was to be expected that egos would clash sooner rather than later. Any leader who had a few MLAs and MPs supporting him felt he had the requisites to split the Janata Dal and form a party of their own. Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav were the first to go and after that there have been umpteen cracks and splits so much so that the parent Janata Dal is unrecognisable.

Ram Vilas Paswan's break with the JD-U is also caused by the usual problem — ego. The ostensible reason given is that MPs and ministers from Bihar are ignoring their state and constituencies now that they are in power. They are not acting in the parochial manner that he would like them to. But the real reason that is eating Paswan is sour grapes. He has been sidelined, not finding a berth in the ministry and also being tossed over for the brief stint as Bihar chief minister when Nitish Kumar was chosen. With an outfit of his own, he will call the shots, so what if there aren't that many for him to lord over. Apart from his constituency of Hajipur, he will be hard put to find support — but that does not seem to matter. His calculations obviously are that he would rather be a large fish in a small pond than a small fish in an ocean.

THE STATESMAN

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JD(U) split may trigger fresh alignments

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 27

COMMUNICATION MINISTER Ram Vilas Paswan's exit from the Janata Dal (U) to float his own party may trigger fresh alignments in Bihar politics and among the several social justice groupings, which had earlier broken free from the parent party.

Though Mr Paswan seems to have limited support as of now, the seventh split in the JD's decade-long existence could set into motion an efflux from the JD(U) and the Samata Party. Both these NDA allies have their share of dissatisfied elements who might opt for the Janshakti party to be launched at a public rally here tomorrow by the Communications Minister.

On their part, the truncated JD (U) can, in a synchronised action with former fellow-travellers in the Samata, move closer to Mr Laloo Yadav's RJD, when the need arises. For the present, the Sharad Yadav-Nitish Kumar duo, whom Paswan has accused of being in cahoots with the RJD boss, might not want to disturb the NDA applecart.

In immediate terms, the split engineered by Mr Paswan — who

JANATA DAL TOTAL RECALL

(Seven divisions in 10 years)

- 1990** Chandra Shekhar and Devi Lal break the party with 54 MPs from the shortlived BJP Government
- 1992** Ajit Singh breaks away to form Janata Dal (Ajit)
- 1994** George Fernandes and Nitish Kumar lead rebellion against Laloo Yadav in Bihar. Thirteen MPs leave Janata Dal to form Samata Party
- 1997** Laloo Yadav forms the Rashtriya Janata Dal at the height of the fodder scam controversy
- 1997** Split in the Orissa unit of Janata Dal with most party men joining Hareesh Patraik to form the Biju Janata Dal. It is now part of the NDA
- 1999** H.D. Deve Gowda forms Janata Dal (Secular) after Sharad Yadav, along with Ram Vilas Paswan and J.H. Patei, decides to join the BJP-led NDA
- 2000** Ram Vilas Paswan and three other MPs break away to form Janshakti party



Graphic by SANJAY

Be that as it may, the Dal's loss is evidently the BJP's gain, whose blessings appear to be with the Janshakti experiment.

Mr Paswan stated at a Press conference today that his move to split the JD(U) would not affect the viability of the NDA, as he would continue to be a part of it. While denying any move on his part at the moment to wean away more MPs from either of these two parties, the Dalit leader hinted that his doors were open for all those who were disenchanted with the leadership in JD(U) and Samata.

He said the Janshakti party would take the coming State Assembly elections as a challenge and field its candidates in UP, West Bengal and Assam which go to polls early next year. The party would work for the upliftment of Dalits, backward classes, minorities, women and other deprived sections, he added.

Meanwhile, the JD(U) lashed out at Paswan today for breaking the party and demanded that he resign from the Cabinet and Lok Sabha to fight election afresh. Party spokesman Mohan Prakash claimed that there was no split in JD(U) but only a break in the parliamentary group as none of the State units had gone with Paswan.

indeed is a Dalit leader of some consequence — has left the JD(U) much weaker at the social and political levels.

If, with the passage of time, Mr Paswan gets closer to the BJP, Mr Laloo Yadav's need for repairing

his OBC base would compound. And perhaps at that stage, he might consider burying the hatchet with fellow clansman Sharad Yadav and Nitish Kumar, a Kurmi leader who was among the first to part company with the RJD chief.

Janata Dal fails to get united

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 6. — The proposed unification of the Janata parivar fell apart today with the Samata Party deciding to stay out of the Janata Dal (United).

The Lok Shakti led by Mr Ramakrishna Hegde, however, merged with the JD-U.

The Samata Party led by Mr George Fernandes decided to stay out of the JD-U and contest the coming Bihar elections on its own symbol.

The Samata Party national executive decided to stay out following the "refusal" of Mr Sharad Yadav to step down as JD-U president. Another point of discord between the two parties were Mr Yadav's "reluctance" to sort out seat adjustments in Bihar.

However, the Samata general secretary, Mrs Jaya Jaitley, said coordination among the JD-U constituents would continue in Parliament. She added that the Samata would now go for seat adjustments with the JD-U in Bihar.

Even though the JD-U leaders claimed that the "doors for negotiation" were still open, Mr Yadav stated that he "believed in the politics of ideology and not grasping of power". He, however, refused to go into details. The JD-U leaders felt that it was made clear to all the constituents that the leadership issue could be taken up after the Bihar elections. "The need of the hour was to put up a united front against the corrupt regime of Bihar," a JD-U leader said.

It is learnt that a section of JD-U leaders, including the Telecommunications Minister, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan and the former Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr JH Patel, tried for a last-minute patch-up and urged Mr Fernandes to go ahead with the merger.

"If these leaders were so keen, instead of pleading with Mr Fernandes they could have urged Mr Yadav to step down,"

a Samata leader said.

It was also disclosed that during last night's JD-U steering committee meeting, Mr Yadav and his close aides refused to discuss the issues of leadership and seat sharing. Mr Yadav insisted that the leadership issue could be discussed after the Bihar polls. He was also reluctant to discuss seat-sharing, sources said.

They claimed that the issues were raised during an earlier meeting of the JD-U top brass in December. Then, too, instead of resolving matters, Mr Yadav had decided to take them up before the merger.

Of the 324 Assembly seats in Bihar, the Samata had wanted 124.

Since Mr Yadav was reluctant to discuss the issue, the Samata then stressed on the question of leadership. The party made it clear that it wanted Mr Fernandes to head the outfit, since Samata was "more powerful" in Bihar.

Mr Yadav maintained that the matter would be sorted out before the merger. He waited for his call, which never came. Only Mr Paswan and Mr Patel called up urging Mr Fernandes to merge his outfit," a Samata leader said.

The Samata is stressing on the leadership issue since it is apprehensive that during the ticket distribution, Mr Yadav being president of the JD-U could allot symbols to candidates of "his liking". The Samata also accused Mr Yadav of trying to set up parallel units in states where it is powerful.

The Lok Shakti, however, had resolved yesterday to rally behind Mr Yadav. It was not willing to accept Mr Fernandes as leader of the outfit and continued to hold him responsible for Mr Hegde's exclusion from the Union Cabinet.

The merger meeting of the JD-U was attended by almost all top leaders, including Mr Hegde, Mr Paswan, Mr Yadav and Mr Patel.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 JAN 2000

New twist to JD (U) merger drama

Anil Anand
New Delhi, January 19

THE JANATA Dal (U)-Lok Shakti-Samata Party merger drama has taken a curious turn. The Lok Shakti is seeking the Election Commission's (EC) permission to use its own election symbol in next month's Assembly elections. Four States will be going to the polls.

Both the Lok Shakti and the Samata Party have submitted fresh information, which is in contradiction to the earlier claims by their respective office-bearers. The information was sought by the EC for the ensuing Assembly election purposes.

From the Lok Shakti's plea, it

would seem that the party proposes to contest the ensuing Assembly polls on its own, regardless of the fact that it (unlike the Samata Party) had recently merged with the JD(U).

The EC has been taken aback by the stand taken by both the Lok Shakti and Samata (which have earlier submitted that they have merged with JD-U). It has now issued notices asking the two parties to clarify their position by 3 pm tomorrow. The urgency is because the process for Assembly polls in the four States has already started. According to EC sources, both Mr Rama Krishna Hegde and Mr George Fernandes had, during the course of hearings on the Janata Dal split case, submitted affidavits

declaring themselves to be members of JD(U).

But yesterday, the Samata Party wrote to the EC, saying that Mr Fernandes, Mr Manjay Lal and Captain Jai Narain Nishad were its president, vice-president and executive committee member respectively.

Another affidavit submitted by the party on December 24 had shown these three leaders as JD(U) members.

A similar discrepancy existed in the Lok Shakti's case too. While Mr Hegde and Mr V. Srinivas Prasad (in their affidavits submitted in December last year) had claimed to be the members of the JD(U), they were shown to be Lok Shakti office-bearers in the list of

office-bearers submitted to the EC on January 12. It was also in contradiction to the party's earlier claim made during the dispute case hearings, where it had declared its merger with the JD(U).

The EC source further said that these contradictions became apparent after the Commission had sought afresh details about the office-bearers of these parties. The information was required for the purpose of identifying their functionaries for dealing with poll-related functions like signing forms 'A' and 'B' relating to grant of party mandate to the candidates.

The EC was also reported to have taken note of the existing status of the Samata Party members in the Lok Sabha.

Samata seeks separate identity in LS

Dal jolt to BJP Bihar conquest

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 21: Laloo Yadav landed an unexpected bonus on the eve of the Bihar Assembly polls with the Samata Party splitting from the Janata Dal(United) and deciding to seek recognition as a separate entity in the Lok Sabha.

The Samata move came after the Election Commission yesterday de-recognised George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar and other MPs as party office-bearers on an affidavit by the JD(U), saying that Samata had merged with it before the general elections and the parties had contested on a common symbol.

Fernandes today requested Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi to recognise a 12-member group as a separate party. If Balayogi grants Fernandes' request, he will be named leader of the new parliamentary group which will be allotted separate seats and an interim name. Jaya Jaitley is the new Samata president.

Following the split, Samata MP Jainarain Prasad Nishad today crossed over to the JD(U). Fernandes claimed his group had

the backing of Lok Shakti member and Union minister Sreenivas Prasad. However, sources said, Prasad had not taken any decision and would clarify his position only after meeting Balayogi on Wednesday.

Today's developments have cast a bigger cloud on the Bihar seat-sharing talks between the BJP, JD(U) and Samata, headed nowhere over the past five days. A breakthrough had looked possible yesterday when home minister L.K. Advani managed to bring around the bickering leaders — Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan of the JD(U) and Fernandes and Nitish Kumar of Samata — with a "mutually acceptable" formula.

But the JD(U) today again insisted it would contest the same number of seats as Samata, which refused to concede the demand. If both parties stick to their guns, BJP sources fear one might have to part ways with the National Democratic Alliance.

Kumar, however, dispelled the fears, maintaining that talks were still on. "We have already scaled down our demand and expect others to reciprocate," he told reporters. Jaya Jaitley said the split in the JD(U) would not affect the

Vajpayee government as the new party — to be formally christened — would support it.

Another round of talks is likely tomorrow. BJP sources said if this, too, is inconclusive, the only option left will be to seek Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's intervention. With 48 hours to go for withdrawal of nominations for the first phase, Vajpayee's task — to ensure that there is no repeat of the Karnataka drama — appears cut out.

During last night's talks, the BJP and Samata suggested that based on the number of seats contested in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP would fight 174 constituencies, Samata 96, the JD(U) 42 and the Bihar People's Party (BPP) 12. Everybody, except the JD(U), accepted the formula, prompting Samata also to raise its demand to 108 seats.

The BJP took a grim view of the developments. Sources said that even if a tenuous truce is brokered by Vajpayee and Advani, the effect might not percolate down to the cadre.

"Our fear is Bihar is going the Karnataka way. There is too much bad blood and the workers are quite demoralised," a BJP office-bearer said.

THE TELEGRAPH
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JD(U) ranks gripe over tickets

HT Correspondent
Patna, January 31

NEGLECT OF the backward castes and sections committed to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in distribution of tickets by Janata Dal (United) leadership, has left the party's rank and file rebellious. And perhaps this is the reason why the leadership is yet to release its list of candidates.

The general feeling among workers is that party leaders were guided by personal interests in finalising the list and that they ignored the social composition which had paved way for the NDA's victory in the last Lok Sabha polls.

JD-U national general secretary, senior leader Mangani Lal Mandal and state functionary Laxmi Sahu have blamed the party leadership

for ignoring its interests.

Mr Sahu told *The Hindustan Times* that the party's prospects had been badly hit by the late decision in finalising the list. It should have been done by January 24, the



last date for filing nominations for the first phase of polling. He said there was grave resentment against the move in the party ranks.

Mr Sahu also rapped Mr Mangani Lal Mandal for resigning from his party posts and the Parliamentary board at this crucial hour, "which had sent a wrong signal to the people". He blamed Mr Mandal for not creating any cell of the most backward castes despite

being a member of the Legislative Council for the last 14 years. The infighting appears to have widened the gulf in the organisation.

On the other hand, Mr Mandal said he had resigned to protect all those who had been ignored by the leadership. The resignation was also against arbitrary distribution of tickets, he said. Backward castes like Kushwahas, Sahanis, Chamars and others who had voted for the NDA, had not found favour with the leadership. Mr Mandal was also sore over the violation of the criteria to allot tickets to sitting MLAs and to those who had finished second in the last Assembly polls. He said the workers were in an aggressive mood. Mr Mandal was denied ticket from Phulparas, represented by Mr Devendra Prasad Yadav in the Lok Sabha.

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