

AIADMK support to Pondy Govt

Chennai, May 16

THE THREE-MEMBER AIADMK legislature party today agreed to extend outside support to the Congress-TMC combine to form the Government in Pondicherry, where Assembly elections produced a fractured verdict.

The AIADMK's decision was conveyed by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalitha to senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee who called on her at her residence here this afternoon.

"I formally sought the support of Jayalalitha for the formation

of a Government in Pondicherry and she has agreed to extend the support," Mukherjee said.

Earlier, Jayalalitha, addressing newsmen after paying homage to her mentor and late Chief Minister M G Ramachandran, said AIADMK would support Congress in Pondicherry. She did not reveal if the party would join the Government or not.

Asked whether it was a conditional support, Mukherjee replied in the negative. "She did not put any condition. She said AIADMK is not interested in joining the Government".

In the May 10 elections to the

territorial Assembly, the Congress-TMC combine won 13 seats to emerge as the largest group but fell short of the majority by three seats in the 30-member House. AIADMK, which contested the polls in alliance with PMK, won three seats.

"I hope it will be stable," Mukherjee said though the party was not part of the ministry.

Replying to a question whether factionalism would pose any problem in deciding on the Chief Minister, he said the issue would be dealt with by CWC member and in charge of Pondicherry party affairs Ghulam Nabi Azad.

Earlier, Mukherjee, who arrived here last night, also met TMC president G K Moopanar and held discussions with him for over 30 minutes.

Asked whether the TMC would merge with Congress, Mukherjee said "Logical conclusions will come at a logical time."

Pondicherry Chief Minister P Shanmugham also met Moopanar. A meeting of PCC office-bearers and the newly elected MLAs in the Union Territory will be held tomorrow to take stock of the situation and inform president Sonia Gandhi of their views, Shanmugham said.

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Pondy Cong. rejects PMK ultimatum

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, APRIL 7. The Pondicherry Chief Minister and senior Congress leader, Mr. P. Shanmugham, today rejected the PMK leader, Dr. S. Ramadoss' "ultimatum" to the Congress that it should decide its alliance strategy in the Union Territory in two days.

"None of our allies have imposed such a deadline. The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, has not said it," Mr. Shanmugham told *The Hindu* before leaving for Delhi for confabulations with the Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi.

Mr. Shanmugham held discussions with the Tamil Maanila Congress president, Mr. G.K. Moopanar, at the latter's residence for nearly half an hour this afternoon. Reacting to Dr. Ramadoss' statement that the Congress would be given only nine seats by the AIADMK front, Mr. Shanmugham said, "We are in an alliance with the AIADMK. And Ms. Jayalalitha has not made such a proposal. She is nice to the Congress".

As for the possibility of avoiding a third front in Pondicherry, Mr. Shanmugham, who asserted on Wednesday that a "united secular front will be forged in Pondicherry", was non-committal today. "Let us see. Our party high command has to decide".

The Congress would finalise its alliance in Pondicherry tomorrow, he indicated.

But Congress and TMC sources admit that the PMK leader's outbursts had thrown the seat negotiations for cobbling up a united

secular front off the rails.

But the TMC leadership appears to make last-ditch efforts to avoid a third front as it wants the Tamil Nadu alliance pattern, where the Congress-TMC have joined the PMK-inclusive AIADMK front, to be extended to the Union Territory.

Cong. meet today

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 7. Congress leaders from Pondicherry led by the Chief Minister, Mr. P. Shanmugham, would hold a meeting here tomorrow with the party's Central leaders to finalise stand ahead of the Assembly elections.

The Congress, which reiterated its unwillingness to share power with the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) in Pondicherry preferring to go with the Tamil Maanila Congress, would take a view after Mr. Shanmugham arrives here.

The Pondicherry Congress chief, Mr. V. Narayanaswamy, told *The Hindu* that the leaders were awaiting the response from the AIADMK chief, Ms. J. Jayalalitha, with whom Mr. Shanmugham held talks. He said that as per initial reports available here, the response of the AIADMK chief was "good".

Both Mr. Shanmugham and Mr. Narayanaswamy along with Mr. M.O.H. Farook, MP, and the former Chief Minister, Mr. Vaidyalingam, would meet the AICC general secretary, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, in-charge of party affairs in Pondicherry, here tomorrow.

THE HINDU

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Cong. wants majority of seats in Pondy

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, APRIL 6. The Congress(I) today reiterated that it would not share power with the PMK in Pondicherry and indicated that the Congress(I)-TMC combine would keep 20 seats and give the remaining 10 to the AIADMK.

The party also made it clear that it favoured the 1996 formula, under which it contested a majority of the seats in Pondicherry. Emphasising his party's position as the major party in the Union Territory, the AICC(I) general-secretary in-charge of Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, said the bottom line was that his party was in power and had won nine of the 19 Assembly seats it contested, besides winning the lone Lok Sabha seat. "We must lead the government since we are the main party."

In a bid to keep the AIADMK in good humour, Mr. Azad said the Congress(I) would welcome it if that party joined the government if the secular front came to power. But he also made it clear that the offer was limited to the AIADMK and did not include the PMK. "Our decision on the PMK remains," Mr. Azad said. The Congress(I) would have no objections if the AIADMK chose to share its seats with the PMK in Pondicherry.

He said what the party was proposing was based on the principle of allowing the Congress(I) and the AIADMK to form governments in their areas of influence. As for Tamil Nadu, it had been decided that the AIADMK alone would form the government and the Congress-TMC combine would stay out of it.

Mr. Azad pointed out that the two parties had agreed to delink the Pondicherry issue during the negotiations in order to facilitate an alliance. According to him, the Congress(I) had made it clear that not only would it not share power with the PMK

but would also want the Congress(I)-TMC combine to contest 20 of the 30 seats.

The issue, according to Mr. Azad, had come back into focus since local leaders of the secular front had been talking about it. He said he would confer tomorrow with the Pondicherry Chief Minister, Mr. P. Shanmugham, the PCC(I) chief, Mr. V. Narayanaswamy, the former PCC(I), Mr. Vaidyalingam, and the Lok Sabha MP, Mr. M.O.H. Farooq.

Cong. must finalise stand in 2 days: PMK

By Our Staff Reporter

PONDICHERRY, APRIL 6. The PMK founder, Dr. S. Ramadoss, today said he would talk to the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, on the need for setting a time-frame of two days for the Congress to finalise its strategy.

Talking to reporters here, he said there would be no compromise on the PMK stand that it would head the Government during the first half of the five-year term if the secular front won the election. Also, the PMK would not give up its share of the seats finalised under an agreement with the AIADMK.

If the Congress did not finalise its stand in the next two days, the PMK would go ahead with the campaign in Pondicherry. The party, along with the AIADMK, could win about 20 seats without the Congress' help, he said. This view had also been communicated to Ms. Jayalalitha. Actual seat identification of the constituencies would be done shortly.

As the AIADMK had already said it would contest more seats than any other ally, only nine seats remained for the Congress, the TMC and the Left parties, he said.

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