

THE BYELECTIONS

THE EMPHATIC VICTORIES scored by the Chief Ministers of the two new States — Mr. Ajit Jogi from Marwahi in Chattisgarh and Mr. Babulal Marandi from Ramgarh in Jharkhand — are indeed in line with the established pattern in the sense that these have had more to do with their position as Chief Ministers than with the “popular” support of their parties. The byelections in these two constituencies had become significant only in the sense that Mr. Jogi and Mr. Marandi needed to win the seats in order to fulfill the Constitutional requirement — to be members of the Legislative Assembly within six months of being sworn in Chief Ministers — and that has been achieved. Their position as Chief Ministers was indeed a factor that must have influenced the voters.

If there was any cause for concern in the two camps — the Congress(I) in Chattisgarh and the BJP in Jharkhand — it must have been in the context of the opposition from within their own parties. It is a fact that both Mr. Jogi and Mr. Marandi were nominated to head the Government in the new States in the midst of strong challenges from within their parties. That Mr. Jogi could win the Marwahi seat despite having earned the “wrath” of the Shukla brothers (whose hold over the voters in Chattisgarh was substantive even until a few years ago) is clearly an indication of the changing times. And in case of Mr. Marandi too, his nomination as Chief Minister against the claims by Mr. Karia Munda did appear to be building into a crisis within the BJP and the NDA. The results have not only shown that the intra-party crisis was only at the apparent level but also established the fading away of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) in the region. The JMM nominee was pushed to the third place in Ramgarh and this indeed is consistent with the trend witnessed in succes-

sive elections — the decline of the JMM — during the last decade.

Be that as it may, the byelection results from elsewhere are bad news for the Congress (I). The fact that the party nominees failed to retain Hindoli in Rajasthan (Ms. Rama Pilot vacated this seat after her election from the Dausa Lok Sabha constituency) and Shahpur in Madhya Pradesh are significant not only in the context of the fact that the Congress(I) is in power in these two States but also in the context of the larger crisis that has gripped the party at the national level. That the Congress(I) could not even emerge as a party in the reckoning in Uttar Pradesh — the Congress(I) nominees in the three Assembly constituencies that went to polls this time were nowhere in the picture — and the recent development involving its MLA, Mr. Surendra Awasthi, vacating his seat and inviting the Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, to contest cannot be glossed over by Ms. Sonia Gandhi and her managers. It is the same story from Andhra Pradesh too; the Congress(I) could not wrest either of the two seats from the TDP. Meanwhile, the outcome of the polls in the three Assembly segments spread across Uttar Pradesh points out to the fragmentation of the polity in the State, the BSP's victory from Siwal Khas against Mr. Ajit Singh's nominee is significant. Apart from signalling that the BSP continues to be a force, the result clearly suggests further erosion of Mr. Ajit Singh's hold in this part of the State. And as for the Samata party's victory in Asthawan (Bihar), while it is too early to conclude as to whether it is the Samata party or the Lok Janshakti that can emerge as the rallying point against Mr. Laloo Yadav, the fact remains that Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan's efforts to snatch the mantle away from the Samata party are yet to take off.

THE HINDU

28 FEB 2007

Curfew back in Ranchi areas

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

RANCHI, Dec. 31. — Curfew was reimposed in the five police station areas here after relaxing it for few a hours today.

According to district control room sources, curfew was relaxed for three hours in the Daily Market, Lower Bazar, Arogora and Hindpiri police station areas from 2.p.m.. In Doranda, curfew was relaxed for five hours from 10. a.m.

The law and order situation is under control. No untoward incident had been reported from any part of the town during the curfew relaxation period, deputy commissioner, Mr Sukhdeo Singh said.

Armed policemen have been deployed in sensitive areas and intensive patrolling conducted by the paramilitary forces to instill confidence among the people.

The Congress today said it would approach the human rights commission in the wake of the killing of three people belonging to a minority community by the the police on Thursday.

The Jharkhand Congress unit has demanded the constitution of a judicial committee to look into the incident.

It has termed the administrative inquiry by the state government a "sham".

JRCC spokesman, Mr Gulfam Mizibi said a party delegation had visited the families of those killed in Thursday's police firing and assured them of all possible cooperation.

It was unfortunate that no case had been registered so far by the government against the deputy superintendent of police "responsible" for the firing, the spokesman added.

The delegation comprised party legislator, Mr Pradeep Balmuchu and senior leaders, Mr Roshan Lal Bhatia, Mr JP Choudhary, Mr Gulfam Mizibi, Mr Devdutt Sahu and Mr Sashi Bhusan Rai.

Meanwhile, a few political leaders trying to bring out a peace march from the Anjuman plaza in the main town area were prevented by the local residents. Political intervention would further deteriorate the situation which was fast returning to normal, they said.

The JMM chief, Mr Shibu Soren has demanded an all party meeting in view of the recent violence in Ranchi. He charged the Marandi government with having failed to maintain law and order and protect the minorities in the state. Mr Babulal Marandi had no moral right to continue in power, he claimed.

The police firing could have been averted had the administration maintained restraint.

Mr Marandi had proved to be a weak chief minister, dancing to the tune of his bureaucrats, Mr Soren said.

The presence of Mr Prabhat Kumar as the governor of Jharkhand had boosted the moral of fundamentalists. Mr Kumar should be immediately recalled by the Centre, he added.

INJURED COP DIES

RANCHI, Dec. 31. — Deputy superintendent of police, Mr UC Jha, injured by arsonists on 28 December, died this evening. Mr Jha had received serious head injuries while trying to bring an irate mob near the Rajendra roundabout, under control.

Mr Jha was held responsible for "indiscriminate" firing on "innocent" demonstrators by the Opposition parties including the Congress, JMM, CPI and the CPI-ML. — UNI

THE STATESMAN
1 JAN 2001