

All-win situation for Samata in Manipur

SANJAY SINGH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

55-8 2/6

NEW DELHI, June 1. — The political instability and possibility of imposition of President's rule in Manipur has put the Samata Party in an all-win situation. The Centre will take a decision on Manipur Governor, Mr Ved Marwah's recommendation of President's rule in the state by this weekend.

Given the state's current political situation, the Centre is left with two options — accepting or rejecting the recommendation. If the Centre accepts it, it would vindicate Samata Party's stand. Samata Party had been demanding imposition of President's rule since the Radhabinod Kojam government fell on the Assembly Floor.

If the Centre rejects the Governor's recommendations, Mr Radhabinod Kojam would be asked to continue as caretaker chief minister till a popular government is formed. In effect, this would mean reinstatement of the Kojam government, Samata's initial demand.

Sources said the President would send the report to the Prime Minister through the Cabinet secretary and seek the Centre's opinion. A copy will also be sent to the home minister. Since Mr Advani is in Leh today to inaugurate the Sindhu festival, a decision is unlikely to be taken tonight.

The Prime Minister will tour quake-affected areas in Gujarat on Sunday. The Centre could take a decision tomorrow when all the top leaders would be in Delhi.

In its bid to buy peace with Samata Party, the BJP president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, had said his party and the Samata would not take part in formation of the government in Manipur and would stay away from attempts made by other parties or groups.

Senior BJP leaders had, however, differed with their ally and said they did not want popular mandate and democratic process to be subverted in the state. They even foresaw a split in the party.

The Manipur political situation continues to be fluid. The Speaker, Mr S Dhananjay Singh, withdrew his claim to form the government. But in his enthusiasm, he made a grave technical error. He staked claim while still being the House Speaker and thus flouted Supreme Court ruling. He could also not muster requisite support. Mr Dhananjay Singh has yet not resigned from the post. But his position has been diluted after the incident.

THE STATESMAN

AD-11
2/5

'Manipur developments internal matter between BJP, Samata'

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MAY 21. Although the Manipur developments did not figure at the NDA meeting at the Prime Minister's residence this evening, the BJP made its position quite clear — it could consider imposing President's rule in the State, it insisted that a whip had been issued and disciplinary action could follow against MLAs who violated it, and the party would not stake claim to form a Government.

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, briefing newsmen on the NDA meeting, responded to a number of questions on the Manipur developments and its impact on the BJP's relationship with one of its key allies, the Samata Party. He said the issue was an "internal matter between the BJP and the Samata Party" and did not concern the NDA. He also refused to accept that the Samata Party's initial reaction to the defeat of its Government at the hands of the BJP in Manipur was a "threat." The Samata had earlier in the day said it could consider walking out of the NDA Government and also withdrawing support to the BJP-led Government in Jharkhand.

Mr Singh said the Manipur developments were not a betrayal by the BJP but the result of "extreme factionalism." He insisted



The Samata Party leaders, Mr. George Fernandes, Mr. Digvijay Singh and Ms. Jaya Jaitly, on their way to attend the party's national executive meeting in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: R. V. Moorthy

that "the BJP had issued a whip" to party MLAs to support the Radhabinod Kojiam Government, but 24 of its 26 MLAs violated the whip.

It will now be up to the party president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurti, to consider what disciplinary ac-

tion could be and should be taken against the MLAs, Mr. Singh said.

Mr. Singh also refused to accept that the Samata leader and NDA convenor, Mr. George Fernandes, had stayed away from the NDA meeting as a mark of protest. He said the reason of his absence was

the national executive committee meeting of his party. But this did not explain the fact that the executive committee meeting had been fixed with the knowledge of Mr. Fernandes, and he as convenor had also called the NDA meeting. Moreover, it was known days earlier that the Kojiam Government would be seeking a vote of confidence today and there was every possibility of the BJP MLAs not supporting it. The Samata Party had itself been warning of this eventuality.

Mr. Singh made it clear that a short spell of President's Rule in Manipur could be one way of getting out of the Manipur mess, but reports from Manipur suggest that the BJP-Samata crisis could deepen with the BJP staking claim to forming a Government. If the BJP continues to claim that was happening without a green signal from the central leadership, it would be tantamount to accepting that indiscipline had reached new heights in the party.

In fact, the BJP-Samata crisis could spill over to Jharkhand from Manipur, with the Samata planning to pull back support to the BJP-led Government there, but BJP may have plans to keep some of the Samata's men who are in government there — after all, it is not easy to say no to Cabinet berths offered as lollipops, and the BJP knows it only too well.

THE HINDU

22 MAY 2001

Koijam on edge, Samata edgy



HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Imphal, May 20

THE PRIME Minister today stepped in to resolve the Manipur deadlock as the Samata Party renewed its pullout threat from the Vajpayee Government after the BJP failed to issue a whip to its MLAs to support the Radha Binod Koijam ministry in tomorrow's trust vote.

BJP chief K Jana Krishnamurthi's promise from Mussoorie to back the Manipur Chief Minister failed to soothe the Samata's nerves, given the rebellious mood of BJP MLAs. The anxiety was duly reflected in Jaya Jaitly's tone as she said, "Krishnamurthi's assurance from Mussoorie will have to reach Manipur. Why is the BJP delaying a whip to its MLAs?"

Koijam also said the BJP should clearly spell out its stand and alleged Speaker S Dhananjay Singh was supporting the dissidents to install a BJP-led Government. He said 25 of the 26 BJP MLAs had been locked up at the Speaker's bungalow and "even their wives and children are not being allowed to meet them".

Jaitly, however, made it clear that even if the Samata pulled out of the Vajpayee Government, it would stay on in the NDA. At an hour-long meeting with Samata leader and NDA convenor George Fernandes, Vajpayee assured him that he would try to solve the problem.

Notwithstanding his leaders' promises, dissident BJP leader R K Dorendra Singh said he was preparing to win the trust vote by "all means". All the 35 legislators loyal to him have

CHAUTALA THREATENS SUPPORT RETHINK

ANOTHER NDA constituent, the Indian National Lok Dal, on Sunday said it would rethink its support to the Government if Rashtriya Lok Dal leader Ajit Singh is made a minister. "Our party would be forced to reconsider its support to the NDA Government if Singh is inducted in the Cabinet," said INLD chief Om Prakash Chautala. There are five INLD MPs in the Lok Sabha

PTI, Kosi Kala

been camping at the Speaker's residence since May 5.

BJP MLAs are dead against propping up a Samata Chief Minister any longer as the party's strength in the 60-member Manipur House has shot up to 26 after admitting 13 MLAs of the Progressive Manipur State Congress.

Since the Samata has only 13 MLAs, Koijam was advised to seek a trust vote after a meeting between Fernandes and Krishnamurthi, who promised the BJP would not destabilise the Samata ministry.

But Manipur BJP leaders, who want Dorendra Singh to replace Koijam, told the central leadership that Koijam did not command a majority in the House.

The crisis began to unfold on May 14 after two coalition partners, the NCP and the Federal Party of Manipur (with two legislators each) withdrew support to Koijam. The Chief Minister promptly sacked four BJP and two FPM ministers, alleging that they had links with militants. Seven more ministers resigned in protest.

Samata threatens pull-out

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 19. — The NDA government faces a serious crisis as its oldest and most trusted ally, Samata Party, today threatened to quit the coalition. The provocation: BJP's alleged attempt to destabilise the Samata-led government in Manipur.

"The BJP is bent upon breaking the coalition dharma in Manipur where our party leader Radhabinod Kojiam heads the coalition government," said the Samata general secretary, Dr Sambhu Srivastava. The party's national executive will meet on Monday to decide on the issue.

Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, had assured the Samata leader and NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, that the BJP would continue to support the Kojiam government.

But the latest development suggests the party is backing out of its stand. Mr Srivastava said: "If the BJP, the principal party in the Vajpayee government, can't honour an assur-

ance given to the NDA convener, what is the point in continuing in the government? The coalition government is based on trust and we expected the BJP to reciprocate the same trust that we reposed in them."

He, however, said if the Samata pulled out of the government, it would extend outside support. Mr Srivastava said if the BJP wanted Mr Kojiam to be replaced by one of its leaders, it should have informed Mr Fernandes.

The relationship between the two parties were further strained today after the BJP refused to send a senior leader to Manipur on the plea that the leaders will have to attend the party's Mussorie convention to be held on Sunday and Monday.

The Manipur Assembly will vote on Mr Kojiam's trust motion on Monday. Mr Fernandes today wrote to Mr Krishnamurthy requesting him to issue a three-line whip to BJP MLAs in Manipur asking them to vote for the government. The BJP, however, didn't comply with it.

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THE STATESMAN

10 MAY 1991

Warrant out for Laloo in fodder case

HT Correspondents
Patna/Ranchi, May 8

RJD CHIEF and former Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav may surrender tomorrow before the CBI court in Ranchi. The sudden turn of events follows non-bailable arrest warrants issued by CBI special judge A B Shekhar against him as well as Jagannath Mishra and others accused in the Rs 950-crore fodder scam case.

The interim charge-sheet named 110 persons, eight out of whom have died. Former ministers Vidya Sagar Nishad, Chandradev Prasad Verma, Dhruv Bhagat, ex-chairman, PAC, Bholu Ram Toofani (dead) are the other politicians named in the chargesheet.

Though Yadav remained incommunicado, RJD national spokesman Shivanand Tiwari and Road Construction Minister Abdul Bari Siddiqui said today that the former Bihar Chief Minister would honour the CBI court's directive and surrender.

Tiwari said the CBI had acted in gross violation of the Patna High Court full Bench's directive. The Bench had ruled in its judgment on transfer of the fodder cases to Jharkhand that the Patna High Court would decide the fate of conspiracy-angle cases, in which investigations were not

complete. The RJD leaders expressed shock over the haste, which marked the filing of the charge-sheet and procurement of the non-bailable arrest warrant. Documents on various cases relating to the Animal Husbandry scam were lying with the Patna High Court, they pointed out.

"We expected that the CBI would seek the Patna High Court's directive before filing the charge-sheet. The CBI, it seems, has concealed the rulings of the full Bench and the monitoring bench from the CBI court at Ranchi". This was tantamount to contempt of court. "A contempt of court will be filed against the CBI very soon," the RJD leaders said.

Launching a scathing attack on Additional Director of CBI U N Biswas, Tiwari said Biswas had acted in league with his political masters in New Delhi and filed the case to destabilise the Rabri Devi Government.

Trying to buttress his argument, Tiwari said the timing and schedule of filing the charge-sheet would confirm such suspicions.

"Biswas was given extension in service by the NDA Government. Now he is trying to repay his masters by serving their political interests. He has become a tool in the NDA and the RJD dissidents' hands," he added.



Children look at a poster of Mamata Banerjee on the back of a wall in the city on Tuesday.

Armed escorts for Midnapore terror victims

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 8

THE ELECTION Commission has arranged armed escorts for political refugees of Midnapore on polling day, so that they can cast their votes.

Escorts will also be provided to people not living in refugee camps, if they feel threatened and seek the EC's help to vote.

There are three camps at Midnapore town, and one each at Garbeta, Moyna and Ghatal. There is no camp at trouble-torn Keshpur, which is the place most of the refugees fled from.

Chief Electoral Officer, Sabyasachi Sen said the EC would do everything in its power to help these people vote without fear.

Midnapore's district magistrate and SP have extensively toured the sensitive areas of Garbeta, Keshpur, Sabong and Pingla to build up confidence in voters. Paramilitary forces and state police have been keeping watch in the sensitive areas.

The EC has held meetings with the authorities of Assam and Bihar about sealing off the borders and checking cross-border movements during the elections.

The BSE, Sen said, has been doing a good job on Bengal's border with Bangladesh. The CEO has no reports of any infiltration. Extensive raids have been conducted, on the EC's direction, to seize arms. The CEO said preparations for free and fair polls are nearly complete.

This election will see the max-

KESHPUR CANDIDATE

THE TRINAMOOL Congress candidate from Keshpur, Rajani Doloi, tried to enter the constituency with his supporters on Tuesday, but was turned back by CPI(M) cadres. "In protest, I have decided to stick to my decision to withdraw from the poll fray," Doloi told *Hindustan Times*.
HTC, Midnapore

imum deployment of security forces, Sen said. Hundred-and-seventy companies of paramilitary forces have been deployed, the highest so far in any election. Most of these forces will be deployed in the districts.

On the voter's identity card, Sen said "identification" is mandatory, not the card. The EC will however encourage people to carry identity cards, if they have them. But voters who don't have them won't be stopped from voting.

The EC has listed 21 alternatives to the card, any of which will suffice: passport, driving licence, PAN card, Employer's ID card, ration card, deed of property, arms licence, conductor licence, pension book, passes of railways and bus, handicapped certificate, Kisan Vikas Patra or National Savings Certificate, Employment Exchange Card and for the MLAs and MP, identity cards issued to them by the House to which they belong.

Property deeds and ration cards in the name of the head of the family will suffice for the rest of the family, he said.

BACK IN CONTROL: Former Bihar chief minister and RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav at the national executive meet of his party at S.K.V. Hall in Patna on Sunday. A photograph by Krishna Murari Kishan

Rebels confused as RJD meet ends

BY SOROOR AHMED

Patna, April 29: As the two-day national executive of the RJD ended after reposing full faith in the leadership of Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav and demanding reservation in judiciary and constitution of judicial commission by the Union government, uncertainty prevails in the rebel camp here.

The crossing over of dissident ministers Monazir Hassan and Akhitesh Singh and MLAs like Mr Sheetal Ram and Mr Surendra Prasad Singh just on the eve of the national executive meeting came as a big blow to the Laloo loyalists.

Apart from former ministers Shankar Prasad Tekriwal, Ram Das Rai and Mr Ilyas Hussain (all MLAs) and three MLCs Upendra Prasad Singh, Mohammad Shamim and Kumar Rakesh Ranjan there is nobody left in the rebel camp here.

As Mr Hussain, Mr Rai and Mr Tekriwal are no longer the members of the Rabri Cabinet and the other three are members of the Upper House, the government faces absolutely no threat.

Although RJD spokesperson Shivanand Tiwary said that the leadership was till now not aware of any split in the RJD Parliamentary Party, the fact is that Mr Laloo Yadav is not bothered about what is going on in New Delhi.

However, it was announced on Sunday that the RJD chief would undertake a nationwide tour after May 10 to launch an agitation against the economic policy of the Centre.

Mr Laloo Yadav's task has been made easier by the change in the strategy of Dr Ranjan Yadav.

Sensing that bringing down the Rabri government is nearly an impossible task, the RJD breakaway group is now concentrating more

in ensuring a place in the National Democratic Alliance and subsequently getting ministerial berth in the Vajpayee government.

The Union agriculture minister, Mr Nitish Kumar, has already made the offer to join NDA and Dr Ranjan Yadav has been in touch with Union civil aviation minister Sharad Yadav and others.

This sudden change in approach of the dissidents has dismayed some of the trusted lieutenants of Dr Ranjan Yadav in Bihar, as they will not benefit from this development in New Delhi.

However, political observers feel that Dr Ranjan Yadav is not in a bargaining position, as he is the member of the Rajya Sabha.

However, the RJD general secretary of the party, Mr Ram Kripal Yadav, told *The Asian Age*: "Gaddaron ko jagah mil sakti hai (The traitors can get place in the Vajpayee government.)"

THE ASIAN AGE

30 APR 2001

Samata, Paswan's party support RJD rebels

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, April 29. - Having split the RJD in the Lok Sabha, the breakaway group led by Mr Ranjan Yadav today said they were in touch with forces opposed to Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav to topple the Rabri Devi government even as the Samata Party and Lok Janshakti openly supported the rebels.

RJD (Democratic) spokesman Mr Anwarul Haq (MP) said 10 MPs in the Rajya Sabha would split soon and claimed that seven of them were with Mr Ranjan Yadav. "We will meet in a day or two and finalise the split in the upper House," rebel MPs - Kunkum Rai and Dhamma Viriyo - said.

The rebels claimed that 60 out of 115 RJD MLAs did not attend the RJD national executive meeting in Patna yesterday and described them as supporters of Mr Ranjan Yadav. They said presidents of 11 state units did not attend the meeting.

The RJD (D) leaders said they would visit Patna soon to unite anti-Laloo forces. Asked if they would accept support from a scam-tainted party to dislodge another scam-tainted one, they said: "for Bihar's development we are ready to do anything."

Refuting Mr Laloo Yadav's statement that he had expelled Mr Ranjan Yadav, Nagmani and Bhante Dhamma Viriyo, all MPs, from the primary membership of the party, Mr

Haq said they had quit on their own much before the RJD chief's announcement. Mr Haq described the RJD chief as "Hitler" and alleged that 'jungle raj' prevailed in the state.

They alleged Mr Laloo Yadav was only interested in ruling Bihar through "remote control". "He has got his wife installed as the chief minister. Then he will see that his daughter takes over and then finally his son."

Mr Ram Vilas Paswan said: "We will support Mr Ranjan Yadav to form an alternative government."

RJD organisational polls would be held from 5 June to October, UNI adds from Patna.

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THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2001

Ranjan expelled, RJD heads for split

HT Correspondents
New Delhi & Patna, April 28

THE RASHTRIYA Janata Dal Parliamentary Party headed for a split on Saturday with the expelled leaders forming a separate group, the RJD (Democratic), in the Lok Sabha.

The leader of the new group and Chatra MP Nagmani wrote a letter to the Lok Sabha speaker G M C Balayogi requesting him to accord recognition to the new group.

Speaking to the *Hindustan Times* from New Delhi on telephone, Nagmani said that he had formally communicated to the Speaker for the recognition of their new party. The other two members of the new group included Anwarul Haq (Sheohar) and Sukhdeo Paswan (Araria).

The RJD has altogether seven



Laloo Yadav and Rabri Devi at the national executive meeting in Patna on Saturday.

MPs in Lok Sabha out of which four have remained with the group led by Laloo Prasad Yadav. The dissident camp, however, has not yet approached the

Rajya Sabha chairman for recognition of their group.

The swift move follows the expulsion of Ranjan Yadav from the RJD by Laloo Prasad Yadav.

Reacting to this, Yadav told the *Hindustan Times* from New that he felt liberated and expressed satisfaction that he would not be a party to the destruction of the RJD.

Dubbing his expulsion as an autocratic act he said the RJD chief had not adhered to the party constitution before convening the national executive meeting. He claimed that most of the national executive members had boycotted the meeting including state presidents and members drawn from eight States.

As Ranjan Yadav fumed and fretted in New Delhi his supporters in Patna appeared divided. Many of the known dissidents like Monajir Hassan, Akhilesh Prasad Singh, Sheetal Ram and Surendra Singh attended the national executive meeting

Laloo sacks party chief to pre-empt rebellion

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Patna, April 18: In his first major strike against the backbench revolt in his party, Laloo Prasad Yadav today removed Ranjan Yadav from the post of working president of the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

The pre-emptive move failed to provoke an immediate backlash in the party barring unrest among a small group still projecting Ranjan as an alternative leader.

He (Ranjan) has been sacked. He has failed to honour his post. His performance as Rajya Sabha member of the party has been dismal," Laloo said after returning from Delhi at a time when the rebels were holding a meeting at Monvair Hussain's house.

Only six rebel leaders, led by former Bihar finance minister Shankar Prasad Tekriwal and youth and welfare minister Monajit Hussain, had got together at

Hussain's residence this afternoon claiming they would step up their campaign for a change of guard.

"Laloo Yadav has remained a past master of manipulation. He circumvented provisions of the party constitution for his personal gain," Ranjan, who is now in Delhi, said. Laloo, he added, had written to the parliamentary affairs minister that "I was the working president of the party. Now he is saying who is Ranjan Yadav? Only party workers would understand the import of the statement."

Of the six MLAs who met today, only two were ministers - Akhilesh Singh, minister for health and welfare, and Hussain. Another so-called rebel leader, Jagtanand Singh, a minister in Rabri Devi's Cabinet, was absent.

"We are watching the scenario closely," said a cautious Hussain. When Tekriwal said that he did not consider Laloo president of

the RJD, Hussain differed saying "Laloo Yadav was still his president".

Though they sounded cautious, the rebels asserted that an alternative leadership was in the process of being evolved. "A new arrangement will be made by April 30 when the ongoing panchayat polls are over," Tekriwal said.

Laloo came down heavily on Ranjan. "In the constitution of my party there was no provision for a working president. Yet I had made him one like I had promoted Sharad Yadav once. That was a mistake. But now I have rectified my mistake," he said, adding that there was a provision to appoint a vice-president.

He said he might soon appoint one but made it clear that there would not be any working president.

"Like in the Sharad Yadav case, this time too, Ranjan Yadav ganged up against me in collusion

with the BJP and failed to represent the party's interest in the Rajya Sabha..." Laloo said but added that he would not remove him from the party.

In an open challenge to the rebels, Laloo said the battleground was now open and he was ready to take on anyone. "If the rebels want they can form a party of their own," Laloo said at his residence where he was accompanied by Jagtanand.

RJD insiders said the party chief cleverly exploited two situations to corner the rebels and win over some.

One was the Siwan incident which saw a flare-up between the police and MP Mohammad Shahuddin. Laloo transferred the SP and the DM and then ordered a judicial probe. Finally, he ordered a CID probe. This took the wind out of the minority lobby and disarmed minority leaders like Ezzul Haque.

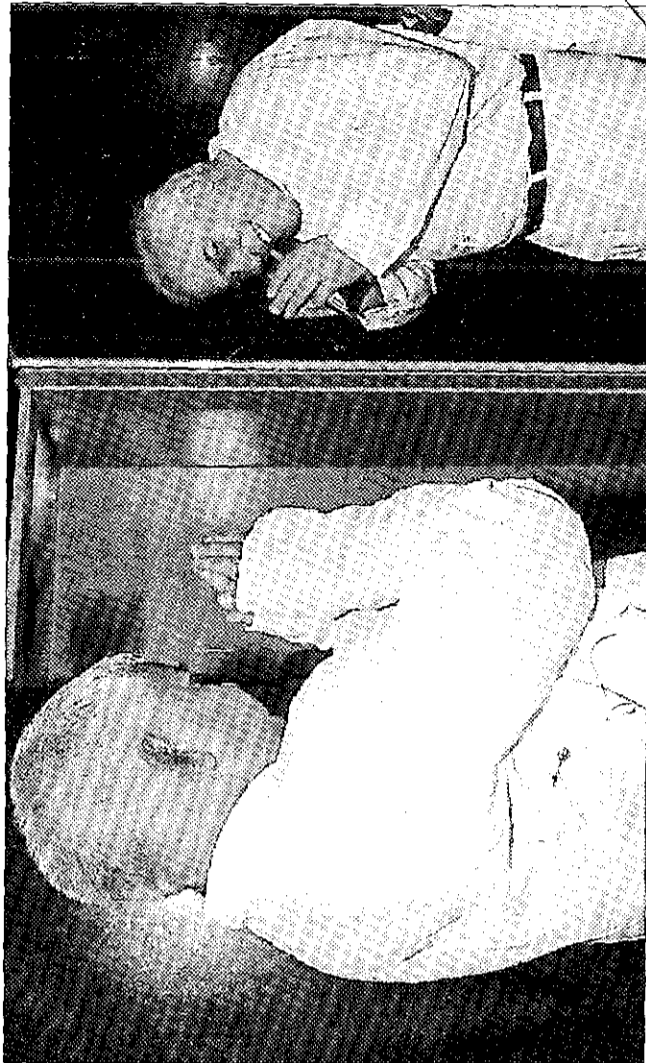
The lobby of non-Yadav MLAs

like Jagtanand also seems to have been won over with promises, Jagtanand, sources said, may be made finance minister with additional responsibility of water resource. Laloo is also likely to appoint a backward leader vice-president of the party.

"In a timely move, the RJD chief has emerged stronger and he will be popular with others for not being vindictive. Laloo Yadav is essentially a man with democratic principles," Jagtanand said.

Laloo has also promised to concentrate more on the state's development front after the panchayat polls. The rebels have been accusing him of neglecting this aspect.

With the crisis appearing to blow over gradually, Laloo, sources said, could breathe easy though he might have to go to jail again, probably in Ranchi, in connection with another fodder scam case.



Laloo Yadav with Kabil Sibal in Delhi. Picture by Jagdish Yadav

THE TELEGRAPH
19 APR 2001

Samata faces split

New Delhi, March 19

A THREAT of split loomed large over Samata Party tonight as it plunged into a crisis over the issue of the withdrawal of resignation of three of its ministers from the Union Cabinet with six dissident party MPs opposing the move.

The rebels, accounting for half of the party's strength in the Lok Sabha, held an emergency meeting at the residence of Manjay Lal and drafted a six-page letter addressed to George Fernandes to protest the decision, dissident MP Prabhunath Singh told mediapersons. Prabhunath Singh went to the extent of saying that he had decided to quit his Lok Sabha seat as he was "hurt" by the decision.

"What will the people in our constituencies say if these Ministers do such drama of resigning one day and withdrawing it

another day," he asked. He claimed though George Fernandes had said that the Samata Parliamentary Party was unanimous in its decision, at least half of the MPs had a different view.

Asked why he did not air his views at the meeting, the dissident MP said, "I came out of the meeting barely for a minute and when I returned, I was told that the decision has already been taken. I was shocked and surprised." "We are hurt. The decision will be suicidal for the party," he said, adding he would send his resignation letter along with a letter to Fernandes.

Singh said the meeting was attended by Raghunath Jha, Manjay Lal, Arun Kumar, Brahma-nand Mandal and Mahendra Baitha. On the Tehelka expose, Singh said, "Anybody whose name figures in the tapes should be probed - be it a Minister or a PMO official."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 MAR 2001

Samata ministers' return stokes revolt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 19. — Three Samata Party leaders, Mr Nitish Kumar, Mr Digvijay Singh, and Mr Srinivasa Prasad, who had quit the ministry in solidarity with Mr George Fernandes, today withdrew their resignations and returned to work.

The decision has triggered a sort of rebellion in the party with at least six MPs calling it as a "climb-down and a betrayal of workers' aspirations." But the rebellion appears more of a hard bargain to get berths in the Cabinet.

The Samata Party said there was no "deal" behind withdrawing the resignations. It said Mr Fernandes's persuaded his colleagues to get back to work. "The three Samata Party ministers withdrew their resignations because Mr Fernandes prevailed upon them. He told them that even though he was no more in the government, the Sa-

mata Party was not only part of the NDA but even committed to strengthen it," the party spokesman, Dr Shambhu Srivastava, said. An upset party MP, Mr Prabhunath Singh, who had asked the Prime Minister to take action against the PMO officials named in the Tehelka tapes, protested the withdrawal of resignations.

He and five MPs — Mr Manje Lal, Mr Raghunath Jha, Mr Mahendra Baitya, Mr Arun Kumar and Mr Brahmanand Mandal — met at his residence and sent a letter to Mr Fernandes, conveying their unhappiness.

According to sources, they have reportedly argued that the withdrawal of resignations will result in the party losing face in Bihar. They reportedly said the decision was taken in a hush-hush manner overruling their feelings. Mr Singh has threatened to resign his Lok Sabha seat. His statement that six MPs are on one side suggested a possible split in the 12-member

parliamentary party. At the same time he talked of continued support to the NDA

In fact, these are the same six MPs who revolted against Mr Nitish Kumar when he mooted the merger of the Samata Party and the Janata Dal-U. Their "rebellion" may have more to do with lobbying for ministerial berths. Mr Fernandes's exit has left a 'vacancy' for the Samata quota in the government. Many of these MPs, including Mr Singh, have been aspirants for ministership.

Soon after voicing their protests, the six MPs joined their party colleagues for a dinner at Mr Nitish Kumar's residence. According to sources, Mr Fernandes is likely to meet them tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the six-member Janata Dal-U Parliamentary Party today passed a resolution criticising Mr Fernandes for withdrawing the invitation to Mr Ramakrishna Hegde to attend the NDA meeting last week.

THE STATESMAN

Samata has major role in NDA: Fernandes

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16. A day after his resignation as Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, today said he opposed the decision of his Samata Party colleagues in the Union Cabinet to follow suit. He was also "hurt" by the move of the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, to leave the National Democratic Alliance.

Speaking to reporters here, he said the Samata Party had a major responsibility towards the NDA Government having contested on a common agenda and urged his colleagues — Mr. Nitish Kumar, Mr. V. Sreenivasa Prasad and Mr. Digvijay Singh — not to insist on resigning from the Council of Ministers.

The three Ministers met this evening at Mr. Kumar's residence after Mr. Fernandes urged them to reconsider their decision. Mr. Prasad told *The Hindu* that they would meet Mr. Fernandes tomorrow before arriving at a final decision.

After a meeting late last night at Mr. Fernandes' residence, attended by party MPs and the acting president, Mr. V. V. Krishna Rao, the situation following the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's rejection of the Ministers' resignations, was discussed. The party also decided to remain in the NDA and continue supporting the Government from outside.

With Mr. Nitish Kumar taking the initiative of not remaining in the Union Cabinet after Mr. Fernandes had resigned in the wake of the charges, the other two also endorsed the decision, which was conveyed to the Prime Minister this morning, party sources said.

Commenting on Ms. Banerjee's action, Mr. Fernandes said he felt "very hurt" and claimed that after the scandal broke out, the Trinamool leader, Mr. Sudip Banerjee, had asked him not to resign, but fight the "calumny".

Mr. Fernandes said Ms. Banerjee had always turned to him whenever she faced a problem, but on this occasion she "did not even show the courtesy of talking to him".

It may be recalled, that Ms. Banerjee had sought Mr. Fernandes' assistance to highlight the CPI(M)'s "atrocities" against her party workers in West Bengal's Midnapore district last year. The issue became controversial after the Bengal Government objected to a Central Minister making inquiries in the State.

Addressing party workers and supporters at his residence this morning, Mr. Fernandes criticised the Congress and the Left parties for stalling Parliament proceedings. If the Opposition wanted him to resign, they could have made the demand in Parliament, not on the streets or through the media. He said the

Opposition parties did not have "even an iota of patriotism". Mr. Fernandes also defended Ms. Jaya Jaitly saying she was approached by the fictitious arms dealers in her capacity as the Samata president, and even then she asked them to donate the money to the party's national executive.

'Armed forces penetrated'

PTI reports:

Turning to the defence establishment, Mr. Fernandes said *tehelka.com*'s operation showed that "various levels in the armed forces have been penetrated", and felt it could only benefit the country's enemies.

"I have reasons to believe that it (the portal) has penetrated the defence establishment. My extreme concern is that by creating a fictitious organisation and a story and offering five-star hotel luxuries and booze, various levels in the armed forces have been penetrated. The illegal exercise might have cost crores of rupees," he said.

The nation's security had also sought to be subverted by those preventing a discussion on the issue in Parliament, Mr. Fernandes said. Attempts were being made by certain quarters to lower the morale of the troops posted along the borders and in Sichen by ensuring that reports about the "rubbish" defence deals reached them through radio and television without any discussion in Parliament.

JD(U) leader's action questioned

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16. The Janata Dal (United), a constituent of the NDA, was divided over the decision of its parliamentary party leader, Mr. Devendra Yadav, asking for the resignation of the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes.

Two party MPs, Mr. Nawal Kishore and Mr. Ram Jeevan Singh, joined issue with Mr. Yadav questioning his move to write a letter to the Prime Minister on the matter.

In a letter to the party chief, Mr. Sharad Yadav, the two MPs complained that when the JD(U) parliamentary party was yet to meet Mr. Yadav's action of writing the letter and circulating it was against propriety.

The MPs sought the intervention of the party chief and wanted to know if the MPs were bound by the party's decision or could chart their individual course.

THE HINDU

16 MAR 2001

Jaitly steps down as president of Samata Party

HT-9

16/3

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 15

BARELY A day after she firmly ruled out any chance of stepping down from her post, Samata Party president Jaya Jaitly today did a volte face and resigned saying that she wanted to save her party from "unnecessary attack and denigration".

She lashed out at the Opposition for their "irresponsible behaviour" in stalling Parliament since Tuesday.

The truth was not being allowed to come out in the House and her resignation was to protest against this, she said.

"During the last few days, there has been a deliberate campaign of calumny against a host of individuals based on dubious tapes accumulated by dubious characters.

"Unfortunately the Opposition, in complete disregard of propriety, fair play, democratic norms and national interest has stalled the functioning of Parliament," she told newsmen at her party office this evening while announcing her resignation.

Party vice president V K



JAYA JAITLEY

Erishma Rao has been appointed as the acting president.

Jaitly charged that the purpose of the tehelka tapes was to destabilise the NDA Government and certain people had connived with the Opposition to carry this out.

She said her party was seriously considering filing a defamation suit against tehelka.com, which had released secret tapes showing money being handed over in her presence at Defence Minister George Fernandes' house.

THE HINDU

'Can I give the packet to madam?'

A West End representative has gone to defence minister George Fernandes' house to meet Samata Party president Jaya Jaitly. The meeting has been organised by Surendra Sulekha. Major General Murgai is also there, besides MP Srinivas Prasad. Sulekha asks for Rs 2 lakh token money to give to Jaya Jaitly for the first meeting.

Surendra Sulekha: Packet is where?

Tehelka: Packet... that money's in the briefcase.

(Later)

Sulekha: Madam (to Jaya Jaitly), he is Mr Samuel.

Tehelka: West End.

Sulekha: He's dealing in electronics and...

Jaya Jaitly: Yeah.

(Later)

Sulekha: Now they'll be starting something with the defence. He's brought something for the party.

Jaya Jaitly: Hmm. [Laughs]

(Later)

Tehelka (proffering the packet of money, interrupts): Can I... can I give it to madam?

[Tehelka gives the package to another man standing to the right and folds hands. Jaya Jaitly acknowledges the gesture.]

Jaya Jaitly: Please send this to our minister, Mr Srinivas Prasad.

Tehelka: Yeah.

Jaya Jaitly: He is hosting the National Council.

Tehelka: Okay, okay, okay. Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: We have two days where about 500-800 people will be going.

Tehelka: Okay, okay, okay.

Jaya Jaitly: The National Council elects the national president.

Tehelka: Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: That is a once in two-year affair.

Tehelka: Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: And a new executive. The whole internal elections of the party finishes and democratically a new president is elected.

Tehelka: Okay, okay, okay.

Jaya Jaitly: So that process...

[Tehelka laughs. The rest of Jaya Jaitly's sentence is inaudible]

Jaya Jaitly: (continuing) ...We need some help because he said,

"Look, I can do 50 per cent expense. You do the rest."

[Tehelka laughs loudly]

Jaya Jaitly: (continuing): So the rest... whatever contribution...

Tehelka: Yeah, yeah.

Jaya Jaitly: (continuing) ...we can manage.

Tehelka: We need your blessing and (laughs)... we need your blessing also for this, our company.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: This company is making quality products. [Jaya Jaitly nods.] And now they are going in a big way for commercial selling. And also make a mark in Defence.

Jaya Jaitly: Hmm.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: That is what they're doing. And they are making these night-vision binoculars, cameras...

Jaya Jaitly: Naturally, probably as far as I know because I don't know much about these things, but you all have to... whenever some new entrant into the field, they have to test the things...

Maj. Gen. Murgai: So for that testing, a request has been made.

Jaya Jaitly: Hmm.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: That we would like to give and our item

should be tested. Generally what happens is that lot of requests keep coming. So we want that at least...

Jaya Jaitly: Eventually they go on quality and price.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: That's right. But initially they have to short-list.

Jaya Jaitly: Hmm. If there's any way... if they are refusing to test it, that's then we can step into the picture. In normal course, they would be.

Surendra Sulekha: They should be.

Jaya Jaitly: (continuing) ... if they are impressed with either the price or the look or whatever, there has to be something which would attract their attention...

Tehelka: Yeah.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: So somewhere the... if they don't, then probably your help may be required.

Jaya Jaitly: Yeah.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: ...at least test the equipment.

Jaya Jaitly: Yeah, if they don't, we can always say, "Look you mustn't treat anybody unfairly. Give everybody a chance."

Tehelka: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jaya Jaitly: If there is any unfair practice, we can step in... Because if we... if we try to favour anybody particularly, specially when we don't know a thing, then we may be doing injustice to somebody else.

Tehelka: Yeah.

Jaya Jaitly: But if we say, "Look, don't do injustice to anybody... And if somebody is being unfairly treated, not being called..."

Tehelka: Okay.



Jaya Jaitly: For the cause of the party? A file picture.

Jaya Jaitly: (continuing) ...somebody else is being favoured and you're not even being asked...

Tehelka: Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: (continuing) ...then we'll say, "Look, you please do, because then it's in our interest."

Tehelka: Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: ...it's in national interest to consider all.

Tehelka: Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: "You then take the best, which is at the best price."

Surendra Sulekha: Okay.

Jaya Jaitly: So if any that whole thing is going wrong, then we can step in if need be.

Tehelka: No, we need that, at this stage we need that. Two companies, they are... they are not allowing the third company to the picture.

Maj. Gen. Murgai: That's right.

Jaya Jaitly: No, why should they not?

Surendra Sulekha: First whether they do or not, then we will see...

Jaya Jaitly: First you'd be... you'd be applying. Then you'll naturally grab an opportunity to ask them, "Look, now I have applied. Are you going to respond to me at all or not?"

If they say, "No, no, we can't", "we don't know", "we'll let you know", and they don't sound very convincing, then we'll see... But otherwise after all when somebody applies, they can't just say, "We'll see."

Tehelka: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jaya Jaitly: If they say, "Yes, certainly we'll consider your thing and get back to you by such and

such a time... If they do that I really don't know how they function at all.

Surendra Sulekha: First, you have to apply, then you have to wait for the response.

Tehelka: That already. That process is over right now.

Surendra Sulekha: We'll have to wait the response. Then I... in case.

Jaya Jaitly: After a reasonable time you can chat with them and say send them a reminder. And then if they don't, we can ask.

Tehelka: Okay.

Maj. Gen. Murgai (addressing Tehelka): You see, sometimes, as Madam has very rightly brought out, things are moving in right direction.

Tehelka: Okay.

Samata silence after slur

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, March 13: The Tehelka revelations have not only dealt a blow to the Samata Party move to topple the Rabri Devi regime in Bihar, but also to the carefully-cultivated image of defence minister George Fernandes as a "crusader" against corruption.

According to the tapes, Jaya Jaitly was given Rs 2 lakh for influencing certain defence deals. The money was accepted ostensibly for "party funds".

After the Ajay Jadeja episode last year — when she kicked up a row over an income-tax raid at her residence in connection with match-fixing charges against the cricket star — Jaitly has again come under a cloud giving rebels in the party a foothold to relaunch a campaign against her.

There was no word from the Samata camp. All Samata leaders went underground immediately after word was out about the Tehelka tapes. Their phone calls

were not answered and cellphones were switched off.

Much of the incriminating conversation Tehelka conducted was with Samata treasurer R.K. Jain, who claimed that he acted as the link between arms dealers and Fernandes and Jaya Jaitly.

In her conversation with the Tehelka pointsman, Jaitly said money was needed for the party fund. She said party leader and Union minister of state Srinivas Prasad is hosting the Samata national council "where 500-800 people will be going". Giving details of the national council, Jaitly said: "We need some help because he (Prasad) said 'Look I can do 50 per cent expense. You do the rest... So the rest... whatever contributions.'" Bits of the conversation with Jaitly were conducted in Malayalam.

R.K. Jain, a little known businessman, was made Samata treasurer two years ago by Fernandes. Known as Fernandes' "briefcase" man, the Tehelka held a series of meetings with him to strike the deal.

According to Tehelka, he proved to be a "goldmine" of information on present and past defence deals.

Tehelka said the conversation "incriminated beyond redemption" the defence minister and the Samata Party. Jain said he was

handpicked by Fernandes for the job. "I am close to the boss because of money matters, he has to talk to the treasurer."

Jain talked about his role in the first defence deal after Fernandes became minister. According to Tehelka, when the Samata had no money and had just come to power, Suresh Nanda of the Crown Corporation paid Rs 1 crore for help in getting the order of 250 Armoured Recovery Vehicles for a Slovakian company. The tender was worth Rs 250 crore, Jain is quoted as saying. The other competitors were a Czechoslovakian and Polish firm.

Jain also worked for the Air Jet Trainers project. He said he was approached by Mapo-MiG people. "I went to boss (Fernandes) and told him, sir, this is something. This is very big job, worth Rs 4,000 crore, Rs 3,600 to be precise."

The commission was fixed at 10 per cent and in this particular deal, the Prime Minister is also going to be involved at one stage. It needs Cabinet approval. "So my party expects at least three per cent, PM House will expect at least three per cent," Jain is quoted as saying.

Jain admitted that Jaitly gave him permission to go to Moscow to sign the deal with the MiG people.

Split in RJD parliamentary party likely

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
PATNA, March 5. — A split in the RJD parliamentary party looks imminent. This, because at least nine of its 15 MPs (both Houses included), many state ministers and legislators boycotted the desh bachao gaon bachao rally organised by Mr Laloo Yadav yesterday.

The rebels have already projected the RJD working president, Mr Ranjan Yadav, as an 'alternative' to Mrs Rabri Devi. However, many people turned up at the rally, proving that the RJD supremo's magic with the masses still holds ground. At the same time, it proved beyond doubt that he has lost his grip over the party to a great extent.

This has happened when the CBI is preparing to chargeheet him in at least three more fodder scam-related cases. The RJD grapevine has it that the

rebels, led by Mr Ranjan Yadav, are colluding with the NDA government at the Centre to topple the 11-year-old Laloo-Rabri regime. The Bihar finance minister, Mr Shankar Prasad Tewari, reportedly met the Union home minister, Mr I.K. Advani, yesterday while Mr L. Yadav was addressing the rally at the Gandhi maidan here. Mr Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr Nitish Kumar have already offered to support Mr Ranjan Yadav in his efforts to 'replace' the Laloo-Rabri regime. So have the BJP. The rebels and their 'friends' in the NDA are counting on the CBI's move.

Two of the three cases Mr Yadav is likely to be charge-sheeted in originate in Jharkhand. One case (RC-63A/96) is related to the fraudulent withdrawal of over Rs 45 lakh from Bhangalpur, which falls in Bihar.

The NDA and the 'rebels' are

calculating that once the CBI submits its charge-sheet against Mr L. Yadav in the cases related to Jharkhand, the RJD supremo will have to spend his time in a jail in another state. He may not be able to maintain his grip over his partymen once he finds himself in a prison in an NDA-ruled state.

The NDA and the MLAs led by Mr Ranjan Yadav are calculating that the absence of Mr Laloo Yadav from Patna will provide them the opportunity to engineer a split in the RJD and topple the government. The NDA leaders are already smarting under the humiliation they faced at the hands of the RJD chief last March when Mr Laloo Yadav succeeded in getting replaced the seven-day-old Nitish Kumar government.

But the RJD rebels and their NDA friends may not find their

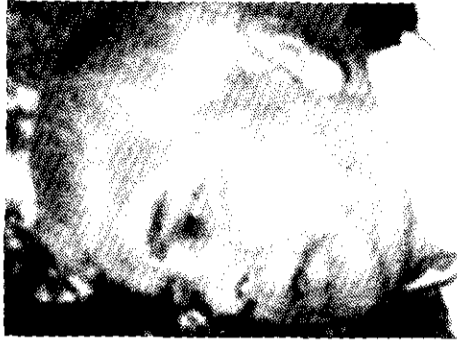
gameplan succeeding easily. This is because the rebels need at least 39 MLAs to engineer a split in the 115-member RJD legislature party. The split in the RJD may make Mr Ranjan Yadav's dream come true for the BJP has 35 MLAs and the Samata Party, Lok Janshakti and the JD-U together have 38.

The rebels may notch up a majority in league with the NDA constituents to replace the Rabri government. But it may be recalled that Mr Nitish Kumar, despite taking oath as the chief minister in March 2000 and having the support of a 'favourable' Governor and the Centre, had failed to engineer a split in the RJD. The RJD supremo was not free from troubles then. The CBI had charge-sheeted him and his wife in the disproportionate assets case soon after Mrs Rabri Devi became chief minister. Mr

L. Yadav was sent behind bars subsequently. Still, Mr Nitish Kumar and his 'well wishers' at the Centre couldn't succeed.

Compared to Mr Nitish Kumar who is a leader in his own capacity and has a solid support base at the grassroots level, Mr Ranjan Yadav is hardly a force to reckon with at the grassroots level. The MLAs will have to think more than once before leaving Mr Laloo Yadav to join hands with a leader who can not ensure their return in the next term.

On the other hand, despite the numerous cases of corruption against him, Mr Laloo Yadav continues to have a strong grip over the Muslim-Yadav vote bank which alone constitutes about 27 per cent of the state's electorate. Mr Yadav's grip over the masses will always come in the way of his political



Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav...

HP-13
17/2

Samata hopes to lead coalition in Manipur

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, FEB. 11. The Samata Party, which has the maximum number of MLAs among Opposition parties in Manipur at present, hopes it would get an opportunity to lead a coalition government in the State after the Manipur State Congress Party-led Nipamacha Government was reduced to a minority today.

In a House of 60, the Samata Party has 12 MLAs, 10 of whom led by Mr. Radha Binod Koijam joined the outfit last month leaving the Congress. The Samata is part of a five-party alliance called the Manipur Democratic Front (MDF) along with the BJP (six MLAs), the Nationalist Congress Party (two) and the Manipur People's Party (one) and Janata Dal-S (one).

"The Samata has the largest number of MLAs in the MDF and it expects to get the support of other partners to lead the coalition," the party general secretary, Dr. Shambu Shrivastwa, told *The Hindu*.

Dr. Shrivastwa was leaving for Imphal tomorrow to chalk out the strategy and assist the State unit and instal its MLA as the leader of the coalition.

Mr. W. Nipamacha, heading the coalition of the United Legislature Front, was reduced to a minority after eight Ministers left the Manipur State Congress Party. Mr. Singh's Government faced a no-confidence motion which was admitted by the Speaker of the Assembly, Mr. S. Dhananjoy Singh, on December 1, last year. But it could not be taken up since the Assembly was adjourned *sine die* after the motion was admitted.

The effective strength of Manipur Legislative Assembly is 59 following the death of a Samata Party MLA last month. The MDF would require support of 30 MLAs to prove its majority which it hopes to achieve with the support of eight MLAs who quit the MSCP Government today.

Much would depend on the role of the Union Minister, Mr. Th. Chouba Singh of the MSCP, who was earlier asked by the party to withdraw from the Vajpayee-led NDA Government. Mr. Singh left here this morning for Imphal.

A senior BJP functionary saw the MSCP threat pullout from the NDA as an internal matter of the party which, he said, was irked after the Samata Party, another constituent of the NDA, had earlier demanded imposition of President's rule in Manipur.

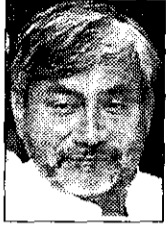
THE HINDU

12 FEB 2001

Tiffs in Samata over merger issue continue

By Vinayanand Jha
The Times of India News Service

PATNA: The stalemate in the state



Nitish Kumar

Samata Party appears to have ended with the declaration to hold elections for the state councils of Bihar and Jharkhand separately here on January 5 in the local Vidyapati Bhavan. But differences inside the party over the issue of the merger between the Samata Party and the JD (U) led by Sharad Yadav have not yet been sorted out.

A decision to hold the party's state council elections was taken here on Sunday by senior party leader and Union agriculture minister Nitish Kumar in consultation with the state legislature party leader Umashankar Singh and other leaders. State election officer-cum-spokesman of the party P.K. Sinha said that before announcing the date of elections, Mr Kumar had a long telephonic talk with the party's state chief Raghunath Jha. "In fact, it was on the suggestions of Jha that the date of January 5 for the elections was fixed," Mr Sinha said, adding that it had also been approved by the party's national election officer Ram Krishna Hegde.

In the state-level election, state president and members of the national council of the party would also be elected. Elections for both Bihar and Jharkhand would be held in Patna as the members elected to the national council would directly leave for Mysore to participate in the national council meeting to be held there on January 8 and 9.

But seven out of 12 Samata Party MPs, including Mr Jha, are still opposing any merger move with the JD (U). Mr Jha told this newspaper on Sunday that he was still holding the view that if Mr Kumar remained adamant on the merger proposal the party would split. Of the 12 MPs, 10 are from Bihar. "At no cost we will allow the merger to formalise," he said, accusing Mr Kumar of inviting trouble to the party. "What was the need for convening the party's legislature party meeting here by Nitish Kumar and taking an authorisation slip from party legislators for the initiation of the merger?" he asked.

His view that it was under a 'conspiracy' that the council meeting was not being convened stood vindicated with the declaration of the election date. On this issue Mr Jha said that this was a good step in the right direction, since the election of the national council of the party was also going to be held soon.

Mr Jha further stated that Mr Kumar, on the other hand, still held the same view that merger between the Samata Party and the JD (U) was the decision of the national council taken at its meeting held on January 6 last.

On the merger with the JD (U), Mr Jha said that the situation had completely changed from what existed in January last and any merger issues should be reviewed in the changed political scenario. "The JD (U) of today is a truncated one with the exit of communications minister Ram Vilas Paswan from it and his floating a new party, and any merger at this juncture would not help the alliance to consolidate backward caste votes in its favour," he stated.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 JAN 2001

Samata Party rebels firm on demands

By Our Staff Correspondent

MYSORE, JAN. 9. The internal bickerings in the Samata Party, brought to the fore by six rebel MPs of the party from Bihar, continue to persist despite claims to the contrary by the party president, Ms. Jaya Jaitly.

The dissident leader, Mr. Raghunath Jha, and his followers arrived here to attend the National Council meeting of the party which concluded today. Issues raised by the dissidents remain and are "far from over" as admitted by the party president.

Mr. Prabhunath Singh, one of the dissidents, refuted claims that the issues had been resolved just because they were attending the meeting.

"Nothing is over and we have come here only at the invitation of Mr. George Fernandes. The Samata Party will meet on January 14 to thrash out the issues and this includes the question of leadership in Bihar."

Asked whether the rebel MPs would be satisfied with the decision of Mr. Fernandes, he said "only if it was favourable to us". However, he expressed satisfaction over the statement of Mr. Fernandes that there was no proposal before the party for merger with any party. This issue might be treated as closed, he said.

Mr. Raghunath Jha said he had nothing personal against Ms. Jaya Jaitly, who was elected President of the party, but he would have been happy if Mr. Fernandes was elected to the post.

The Union Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, said he was not affected by the developments, and added that he could not please everyone.

The significance of the fact that Mr. Nitish Kumar did not share the dais with the rebel MPs



The Samata Party leader, Ms. Jaya Jaitly, with the rebel MP, Mr. Raghunath Jha, at the party meet in Mysore on Tuesday.

and instead preferred to sit with the audience throughout the session was not lost on those attending the meeting.

However, Ms. Jaya Jaitly said that the two-day conference ended successfully with delegates from all over the country attending it.

At a press conference, she parried all questions on the party's leadership in Bihar. She said it was purely an internal affair and was left to the party leaders in Bihar.

Earlier, participating in the plenary session, Ms. Jaya Jaitly said that the Samata Party was a major pillar of the National Democratic Alliance. She criticised the Opposition parties for seeking the resignation of the BJP leaders chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Ms. Jaya Jaitly endorsed the leadership and the policy initiatives of the Prime Minister, Mr. Vajpayee, and said the Samata Party would go by Mr. Vajpayee's words on the Ayodhya issue.

The Minister of State for Rail-

ways, Mr. Digvijay Singh, said the party was not deviating from its stand on issues such as Ayodhya and Uniform Civil Code.

Mr. Nitish Kumar said the Centre was planning to impose quantitative restrictions on imports to check dumping of goods and fall in prices of foodgrains.

He said 45 lakh tonnes of edible oil was imported as a result of which the price of oil crashed leaving farmers in the lurch. He reiterated the Centre's commitment to help farmers.

Mr. Nitish Kumar criticised the Opposition parties and some States for blaming the Centre for problems faced by farmers. The Centre could not procure all foodgrains, and the States should help resolve the problems of farmers.

The situation called for a policy on decentralisation of procurement, storage and marketing of agricultural produce. The Centre had constituted a committee of experts to suggest ways to help farmers to market their produce. The committee would submit its report

within three months, he said.

The Samata Party leaders also addressed a public meeting here.

PSU recruitment drive sought in J&K

The Jammu and Kashmir unit of the Samata Party has demanded that the public sector undertakings (PSUs) launch a special recruitment drive for the benefit of the unemployed youth in that State.

It also called for strengthening the peace process initiated by the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre.

In a memorandum submitted to the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, at a convention of the Samata Party being held here, the unit said that a special recruitment drive could be conducted by amending some rules. It would help in restoring peace in Jammu and Kashmir to an extent.

The unit urged the Centre to implement telecom and IT projects in Jammu and Kashmir to generate employment opportunities. It wanted priority given to completion of Qazigund-Bara-mullah and Jammu-Udhampur railway lines.

The party sought a CBI inquiry into the "wealth accumulated by the elected representatives through dubious means". The legislators and Ministers of that State should be asked to disclose the assets owned by them.

Security cover

The party alleged that the security cover given to leaders of various political parties was being withdrawn by the J&K Government. The Government was providing security only to the leaders of the National Conference. The party sought the release of innocent citizens languishing in various jails in that State.

Guwahati HC slaps notice on Jain

GUWAHATI, JAN. 9. The Guwahati High Court today slapped a notice on the Jain TV owner, Dr. J.K. Jain, for defaming a sitting judge of the court in the ongoing RAW-Jain-ISI controversy. Dr. Jain, through his channel Jain TV, had alleged that Mr. Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, stalled the appointment of Justice A.H. Saikia for his "alleged controversial link".

A division bench of the Guwahati High Court today issued notice to Dr. Jain to show cause as to why a contempt proceeding should not be initiated against him for "an attempt to malign and damage the reputation of a judge of Guwahati High Court."

RAW warning

In New Delhi, employees of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) defended their organisation and urged Dr. Jain to desist from raking up an "unwanted" controversy by claiming that the intelligence outfit had termed him as an "ISI agent" in its report to the Prime Minister's Office.

The Cabinet Secretariat (RAW) Employees Association, in a letter to Dr. Jain, said the report he was referring to did not mention that he was an ISI agent. "It seems your perception of being an ISI agent is self-conceived." — UNI

Maharashtra pays Rs. 114 cr. to Enron

MUMBAI, JAN. 9. The U.S. energy major, Enron, tonight received a cheque for Rs. 114-crore from the Maharashtra Government, a company spokesman said.

"We are pleased that the Government has provided for the State Electricity Board to clear outstanding payment to the Dabhol Power Company for October 2000. We look forward to resolving in a timely manner the outstanding for November 2000, which is Rs. 148 crore." — PI

THE HINDU

10 JAN 2001

MYSORE PLENARY / JHA AND REBELS 'MISS THE FLIGHT'

Samata Party is intact: Fernandes

By Our Staff Correspondent

MYSORE, JAN. 8. The Samata Party leader and the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, today denied that there was split in the party and dubbed it as media speculation.

Speaking after inaugurating the plenary session of the party's national council, Mr. Fernandes called on party members not to be swayed by media comments of a split and maintained that the party had notched impressive gains and was growing in popularity.

Jaya Jaitly reelected

Earlier, Ms. Jaya Jaitly was unanimously re-elected president of the party. Ms. Jaitly's name was proposed by the Union Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, and seconded by the Uttar Pradesh unit president, Mr. Ramashree Verma. The election of Ms. Jaitly was a foregone conclusion in party circles.

Ms. Jaitly was then authorised to nominate members to the national executive and other office-bearers.

The national council is meeting under a cloud with the dissidents, led by Mr. Raghunath Jha, Bihar unit chief, having threatened to keep off. However, Mr. Fernandes, had a different story to tell. "They were expected to reach here this morning, but heavy fog in Delhi delayed their flight. They waited at the airport for more than five hours and returned home for a wash when the plane took off, and Mr. Jha and others missed the flight." He blamed the media for portraying a mere difference of opinion as a split. The issue of merging with the Sharad Yadav-led Janata Dal (U) was not



The Samata Party leader, Ms. Jaya Jaitly (second from right), who was reelected party president in Mysore on Monday, seen with the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes (centre), and the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar (extreme right).

directly referred to by Mr. Fernandes, though he mentioned in passing that the party would keep its doors open and was not averse to growing with people who shared similar ideologies.

Mr. Fernandes dwelt at length to the "secular politics" being practiced by other parties and defended the NDA Government. He reiterated that the Government was committed to respecting the judgment of the Supreme Court on the Ayodhya issue.

He said even the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, had expressed similar views in his recent "musings" in newspapers and had condemned the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Yet, this was not being welcomed by the Opposition.

Criticising the Congress and the CPI(M) in West Bengal, Mr. Fernandes, said that it was during the reign of the former that more than

4,000 Sikhs were butchered in Delhi following the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984.

On Bihar, Mr. Fernandes, in the name of secular politics no development had taken place in the region for the last five years.

Central rule demanded

The national council passed three resolutions including one seeking imposition of President's rule on West Bengal and Manipur. The party expressed distress at the "politics of violence let loose by the Marxist Government of West Bengal against its political adversaries".

In another resolution, the party urged the Centre to make the restoration of democracy in Fiji and the reinstatement of Mr. Mahendra Chaudhary as Prime Minister a priority of its foreign policy agenda.

THE HINDU

9 JAN 2001

Samata factions call truce

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/MYSORE, Jan. 8. — The warring factions in the Samata Party have called a temporary truce. The six dissident MPs, who yesterday said they would boycott the party's national council meeting at Mysore, left Delhi this evening for the venue.

The signs of reconciliation were evident as party leaders chose to "unanimously" re-elect Mrs Jaya Jaitley as the president. Mr George Fernandes worked out a reconciliation formula.

The dissidents, including Mr Raghunath Jha, Mr Arun Kumar, Mr Prabhunath Singh, Mr Brahmanand Mandal, Mr Manjajlal and Mr Mahendra Baitha, left for Mysore by an Indian Airlines flight in the evening.

Inaugurating the meet, Mr Fernandes said dense fog in Delhi had made it impossible for their flight to take off. He said earlier that the dissidents

would take flight in the morning.

Mr Arun Kumar said: "Mr Fernandes had been in constant touch with us since last night. He again called up from Mysore this afternoon around 3 p.m. and informed us that the leadership was willing to consider our demands. He requested us to attend the meet where all senior leaders were present. Now since most of our grievances have been addressed and the remaining ones we have been told would be settled during the meet, there was no need to boycott the council meet. We all will be in Mysore by night."

He said they won't raise the contentious issue — party's proposed merger with the Janata Dal-United — since Mr Fernandes had said in Mysore that no such proposal was pending before the party. "Why should we rake up this subject when the top leadership is officially denying

the merger move? We are, however, not going to relent if somebody else raises it."

Another party leader said a change in the dissidents' belligerent mood came after Mr Nitish Kumar softened his stance, at least for now, and allowed the re-election of Mrs Jaitley. Mr Kumar was being considered a prime contender for the party presidency after the "split" since it was being speculated that the party would toe his line on issues of merger and Bihar party unit elections. The dissidents appeared cheerful about Mrs Jaitley's re-election.

Mr Fernandes said Mr Kumar's resignation was a thing of the past. He said while there was no proposal for a merger with any other party, the possibility could not be ruled out.

Mr Fernandes lashed out at Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, for their failure to support the government on constructive issues.

THE STATESMAN

9 JAN 2001

Samata rebels reject George plea to attend party meet

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 7. — Patch-up efforts by defence minister George Fernandes to end dissidence within the Samata Party failed today as the six rebel MPs rejected his request to attend the two-day national council meeting beginning in Mysore tomorrow.

They wanted him to rule out the Samata Party's merger with the JD-U and recognise Mr Raghunath Jha as president of the party's Bihar unit.

Mr Fernandes failed to give any commitment but promised to look into the matter after his return from Mysore, another rebel MP Mr Prabhunath Singh said after the meeting.

If an acceptable formula could not be worked out, the MPs would urge Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr GCM Balayogi, to recognise them as a separate group in Parliament, Mr Jha said.

The dissident group is opposed to Union agriculture minister Mr Nitish Kumar's merger proposal with the JD-U led by the Union minister Mr Sharad Yadav. These MPs term Mr Yadav as a liability, whereas Mr Kumar considers him an asset in his fight against the RJD government in Bihar.

However, a patch-up formula is not ruled out if the Mysore meeting adopt moderation and leave

the matter to Mr Fernandes. Mr Kumar, before leaving for the meeting, reportedly assured Mr Fernandes that he would abide by his decision.

With both Mr Kumar and the dissident MPs reposing faith in Mr Fernandes, possibility of a patch-up was not ruled out by party insiders. They calculated that Mr Fernandes might have to become the party president to put an end to the ongoing crisis.

To facilitate that the rebel MPs have already given time. "We will wait till January 14 and take a final decision," Mr Jha told reporters after the meeting. Both Mr Jha and Mr Prabhunath Singh refused to comment whether any compromise formula for a patch-up was being worked out. "Mr Fernandes asked us to give him a few days time and we have agreed to wait till Sunday," they said.

A Samata Party leader said that the decision of JD-U to merge with Samata Party would make matters easier for Mr Fernandes who could then head the same party both within and outside Parliament.

He had to resign as Samata Party president when the Election Commission objected to his heading the JD-U within Parliament but heading the Samata Party outside it. Mrs Jaya Jaitley was then made the party's ad hoc president.

THE STATESMAN

8 JAN 2001

Samata splits for third time

By K. Balchand

PATNA, JAN. 5. Spurning conciliatory moves of the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, the two factions of the Samata Party, went ahead with their parallel State council meetings virtually splitting the six-year-old party for the third time today.

The only binding factor for the warring groups was that they both happen to swear by Mr. Fernandes with the stress that his decision on party matters would be acceptable. This despite the fact that the two sides remained adamant on their stands caring little for his mediation.

While Mr. Fernandes' inclinations are not known as yet, the factions led by the Union Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, who has sent his resignation from the Union Cabinet to Mr. Fernandes, and Mr. Raghunath Jha, MP and State unit president, went through the motions of conducting an election process to the State unit president, the State executive and members of the national council, which is to meet in Mysore on January 8. With the two sides claiming themselves to be the real Samata Party, the showdown between the two sides threatens to shift to Mysore, till the party's central leadership cracks the whip on one of them. While the faction led by Mr. Kumar enjoys the majority support of 29 MLAs with almost 26 being on their side, and almost all the district presidents save for five, they can only count on six of the 12 MPs, including Mr. Fernandes, who, however, has not disclosed his stand.

On the other hand, Mr. Jha's faction comprises six of the 10 MPs hailing from Bihar. Needless to say, this faction too counts on Mr. Fernandes. There were at least two legislators, one each from Bihar and Jharkhand, who attended both the meetings in their bid for a patch-up.

The attempt for a rapprochement between the

two sides continued all through the night with the arrival of the Union Minister of State for the Railways, Mr. Digvijay Singh, with the formula suggested by Mr. Fernandes. Mr. Raghunath Jha agreed to call off his meeting provided the one convened by Mr. Kumar too was postponed. Sources maintained that Mr. Fernandes had also sought an assurance from Mr. Kumar that the merger move with the Janata Dal (U) would be shelved.

Mr. Kumar apparently was reluctant to retrace his steps and went through the motions with the consequence that Mr. Jha too held his meeting at a separate venue. The two sides accused each other for the split.

Mr. Singh, giving up his mediation, attended the meeting held by Mr. Kumar, where the latter was authorised to nominate the State president, the State executive and the members of the national council. By a separate resolution, the meeting also authorised Mr. Kumar to take any decision with respect to merger with any party.

The problem in the party had started soon after the legislative wing of the party had adopted a similar resolution in the last week of December, with a section of party MPs opposing it. This faction had sought the intervention of Mr. Fernandes to check Mr. Kumar's moves.

Mr. Kumar announced the names of the national council members at the meeting, according to which all MPs of the party have been nominated as ex-officio members. At least one of the 11 members nominated directly to the council was present at Mr. Jha's meeting.

Mr. Kumar, however, said that the State president and the executive would be nominated after consultation with all and, in particular, Mr. Fernandes. The other group re-elected Mr. Jha as the State unit chief. The Jha faction too was busy preparing the list of members for its national council.

THE HINDU

6 JAN 2001

Samata Party splits in Bihar

HT Correspondent
Patna, January 5

HT-1
6/1

THE SAMATA Party today split over the merger with the JD(U), as a last minute bid by Defence Minister George Fernandes to bring about a truce failed. The two factions held their own conventions in Patna.

At its meeting, the breakaway group with six MPs unanimously elected Raghunath Jha as the State chief of what they called the 'real' Samata Party. Nitish Kumar's camp too held a meeting and authorised him to nominate the state president from Jharkhand and Bihar.

The Samata split has now been formalised. It, however, remains to be seen if Fernandes will use his negotiating skills to reunite the factions. Both groups claimed that Fernandes was their leader and they

would do anything to honour his word.

When Fernandes' emissary, Minister of State for Railways Digvijay Singh, made a concerted bid to avert the split, both factions stuck to their stands. In fact, Singh was awake till early morning shuttling between Kumar's and Jha's homes, urging them to avoid a split. Singh kept Fernandes informed on the phone.

Even this morning the Railway Minister made a last ditch effort for truce, but the patch up formula did not work. Mr Singh, however, attended the State council meeting of the 'official' Samata, making it clear that Fernandes would be on Nitish Kumar's side in case of a split. In fact, Singh even criticised the rebels for holding a parallel meeting. At one point of time, it was learnt that Jha would call off the

meeting but that was not to be. In fact, Jha conceded that a suggestion to this effect was made by the Railway Minister, but I told him that I was prepared to do that only if Nitish Kumar also deferred his meeting. Since Nitish Kumar went ahead with his meeting, we also decided to hold ours."

While the State council meeting called by Kumar's supporters was convened at Vidyapati Bhawan, the one by the rebel MPs was convened at the IMA hall. Out of the 10 Lok Sabha MPs from Bihar, three MPs - Nitish Kumar, Digvijay Singh and Renu Kumari - were present at Vidyapati Bhawan meeting. The remaining six Lok Sabha MPs - Raghunath Jha, Brahma-nand Mandal, Mahendra Baitha, Manjay Lal, Arun Kumar and Prabh-nath Singh - were present in the meeting at IMA hall.

'Accident victim can claim relief'

THE SUPREME Court has held that proof of rash and negligent driving is not necessary to claim damages in accident cases.

Distinguishing "no fault liability" from the rule of "strict liability", it said that compensation on account of accident can be claimed under the common law even without the aid of a statute.

A division bench comprising Justice K. T. Thomas and Justice R. P. Sethi ruled that vehicle owners are liable to pay compensation to the victims' kin on the ground that the accident happened while the vehicle was in use.

The ruling followed an appeal by the widow of a road accident victim, Haji Mohammed Hanif. Haji had been run over by a jeep when the driver lost control.

HTC, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 JAN 2007

Nitish quits cabinet, crisis in Samata deepens

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The crisis in the Samata Party deepened on Thursday with senior party leader and Union agriculture minister Nitish Kumar announcing his resignation from the Union cabinet.



Nitish Kumar

Although the resignation letter was handed over to party leader George Fernandes on Wednesday night, it was only made public by Mr Kumar on Thursday morning after attempts to resolve the conflict in the party failed to make any headway.

The resignation followed fierce infighting in the party, especially its Bihar unit, over the issue

of a merger with the JD (U). Six party MPs, led by state unit chief Raghunath Jha, on Thursday threatened to split the party by holding a parallel convention in Patna on Friday if the party pushed through Mr Kumar's agenda of a merger with the JD (U).

Speaking to journalists in Patna, Mr Kumar said that he did not want to continue in the cabinet when he had lost the confidence of the MPs.

A late night meeting between Mr Kumar and Mr Jha failed to yield any results. As follow-up action, the proposed meeting of MPs was scuttled and they rushed to Patna ahead of Friday's meeting of the Bihar state council.

Describing these developments as "a slight problem within the party", Samata Party president Jaya Jaitley said there was no split within

the party and the differences would be sorted out by Friday. On Mr Kumar's resignation, she said the party would not like to accept it as Mr Kumar had done good work for the party and the nation.

Concerning the demands spelt out by the rebel MPs, Ms Jaitley said that there was no proposal for a merger with the JD (U). It was not on the agenda of the Patna meeting and would come up at the national executive only if someone raised it. On the demand for making Mr Jha the president of the Bihar state unit, Ms Jaitley said it would be decided through a democratic election.

Asked whether any disciplinary action would be taken against the six MPs, Ms Jaitley said, "We will try to accommodate them through friendly discussions."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 JAN 2001

Samata set to split

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 3. — The Samata Party will formally split on 5 January — when the dissidents elect Bihar unit chief Mr Raghunath Jha as their president at a convention in Patna.

Post split, the Samata led by Mr George Fernandes will have only four members in the Lok Sabha.

The seven rebel MPs decided to split the party after talks between Mr Jha and Mr Fernandes failed. Six of the leaders — Mr Prabhunath Singh, Mr Raghunath Jha, Mr Manjaval, Mr Brahamand Mandal, Mr Arun Kumar and Mr Mahendra Baitha — are leaving for Patna tomorrow to mobilise support.

The rebels said they had the support of another MP, Renu

Kumari, who could not attend the meeting.

Mr Singh said: "We decided to split the party when the leadership did not appear to be inclined to consider the feelings of a majority of party workers on the issues of Samata's merger with JD-U and the party's organisational polls in Bihar. A move is being made at Mr Nitish Kumar's instance to dislodge Mr Jha from the post."

"We had made our reservations on the merger clear to the party leadership and all of us wanted to meet Mr Fernandes. But he chose to meet Mr Jha alone. He called me around 5.30 p.m. and said he would meet me later. But by 8 pm, I had not received an invitation. Mr Fernandes was to leave for Bangalore at 7.30 p.m. So there is no hope of a meeting.

Moreover, this is a party problem. I don't think individual meetings will solve it."

Mr Arun Kumar felt the Samata top brass was playing a "game of hide and seek ... No party can be run properly if a coterie is allowed to dominate all its decisions. We are not going to continue with this party any longer. A formal announcement will be made in Patna."

The rebel MPs said theirs would be the real Samata Party. Hence there is no need for a new name.

Samata Party president Mrs Jaya Jaitley did not comment on the issue. She claimed that the leaders were united and would be meeting to discuss the issue.

A national council of the party will meet in Bangalore on 8 January.

THE STATESMAN

4 JAN 2001

Nitish's merger moves spark split threat

NACIN VERMA & SANJAY SINGH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA/NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The New Year hasn't begun well for Mr Nitish Kumar.

The Samata Party leader faces a revolt within his party with the Bihar unit chief threatening a split in the Samata over Mr Kumar's merger moves with the Janata Dal-United. A majority of the party's 12 MPs plan to take their protest against the merger to Samata president Mr George Fernandes soon.

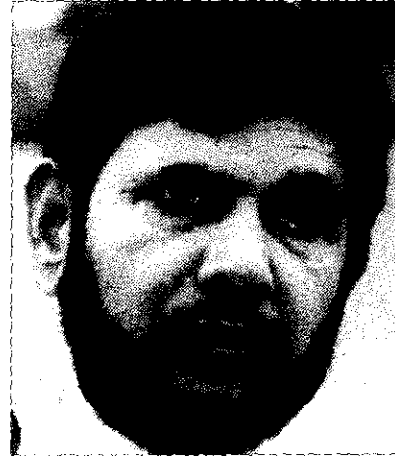
Six of the MPs — Mr Raghunath Jha, Mr Prabhunath Singh, Mr Mahendra Baitha, Mr Manjylal, Mr Brahmanand Mandal and Mr Arun Kumar — met this afternoon in Delhi to discuss their moves. They claimed they have support of two more MPs.

Mr Singh said the MPs wanted to convey their feelings to Mr Fernandes ahead of the national executive meeting in Patna on 5 January.

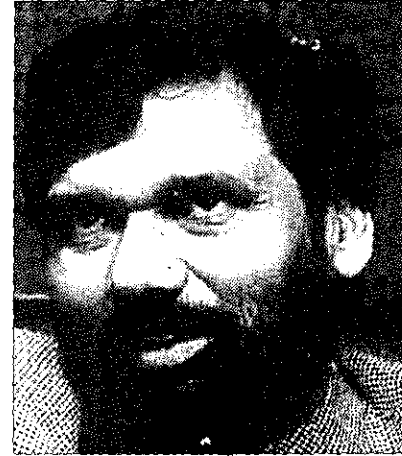
Mr Raghunath Jha, who is also the Bihar unit chief, has threatened to split the party if "the leadership goes ahead with its plan of merger. There is no way out other than quitting for those opposed to the merger."



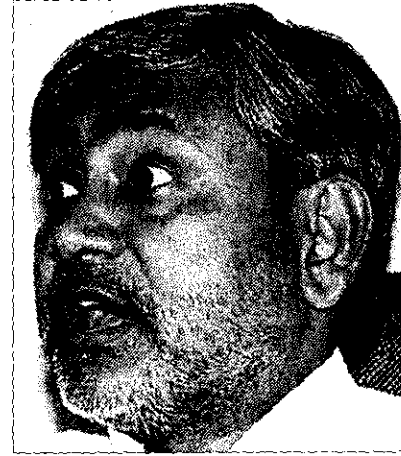
Mr George Fernandes



Mr Sharad Yadav



Mr Ram Vilas Paswan



Mr Nitish Kumar

The 'anti-merger' MPs had a meeting in Delhi last month too. They urged Mr Fernandes to stall the merger move.

However, Mr Kumar called a Samata Party Legislature Party meeting on 25 December which authorised him to take a decision on the merger. The MPs, led by Mr Jha, strongly opposed calling it a Legislature Party meeting. "The Legislature Party is

not entitled to take a decision on merger," MP Mr Arun Kumar said, adding: "The Samata Party is not a private limited company of someone. It belongs to all of us."

The MPs are reportedly opposing the merger because they don't want to be seen joining hands with Mr Sharad Yadav.

Sensing a revolt brewing, Mr Kumar is now lying low. "A final

decision on merger is yet to be taken; it will be taken through proper party processes," he said.

Mr Kumar's assurance does not seem to have satisfied Samata leaders who suspect that Patna resolution was sponsored by Mr Kumar. "We will have to chart our own line of action if the party pursues the idea. We will oppose the move to best of our capacity at the

national council meeting. In case Mr Kumar tries to thrust merger on us, we will be forced to split the party," one of them said.

The man who should be enjoying the developments more than anyone else is Mr Ram Vilas Paswan who recently broke away from JD-U.

There is a strong possibility that Mr Jha's group might join the communication minister's bandwagon, if Mr

Kumar sticks to his merger plans.

Both factions stress on consolidating anti-Laloo forces in Bihar. "Samata Party's main political base is in Bihar and our focus will continue to be on the state. JD-U and Samata had fought parliamentary elections with common symbols but got separated shortly before the Assembly polls. This harmed the NDA. Now we do not see a reason to merge with a party which did not trust us in the past. Moreover, the present Janata Dal does not have any social base and would only encash our popularity. And the party somehow gives the impression of being soft on Mr Laloo Yadav."

Mr Raghunath Jha has also challenged Mr Kumar's authority, by contesting for state Samata president for a second term. The election is scheduled for 5 January.

"I'm determined to stay in the fray come what may," he said.

Mr Kumar apparently wanted to ease out Mr Jha for his opposition to the merger move. Samata sources say Mr Shyam Sunder Singh Dheeraj, Mr Satish Kumar and Mr Jagannath Yadav are some of the names Mr Kumar was considering as Mr Jha's replacement.

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

Samata on brink of split over merger with JD(U)

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 3 JANUARY

INFIGHTING IN the Samata Party over the contentious question of a proposed merger with the Sharad Yadav-led Janata Dal (U) intensified on Wednesday as leaders opposed to the move, led by vocal party Lok Sabha MP Prabhunath Singh, threw their weight openly and decisively behind Bihar unit chief Raghunath Jha.

The anti-merger MPs group within the NDA constituent — which has 11 MPs in the Lok Sabha of whom 10 are from Bihar — met here at the residence of Jehanabad party MP Arun Kumar under the aegis of Mr Singh to decide on a plan of action in view of its dissent over the key issue.

Among the leaders present at the meeting were Brahmanand Mandal, Raghunath Jha, Mahendra Baitha and Manjay Lal. Party MP Renu Kumari's support was also claimed by the dissident group.

However, Mr Singh maintained after the meeting that the group was willing to restrain from any drastic action such as splitting the party in the Lok Sabha — much in the same fashion as the JD(U), which recently cleaved apart after Mr Ram



Fernandes: Problems galore

Vilas Paswan harnessed the support of four MPs from the Lok Sabha to form the Lok Janshakti Party — before holding consultations with senior party leader George Fernandes.

"We sincerely hope that he agrees to both our proposals of vetoing a merger with the JD(U) and reinstating Mr Raghunath Jha as the state unit chief," Mr Singh said.

In reply to a query on what the group's course of action would be should Mr Fernandes not endorse these two positions, Mr Singh refused to rule out the possibility of an impending merger.

Mr Fernandes is himself expected to hold priority consul-

tations with Mr Nitish Kumar later this evening with a view to sorting out the problem.

Trouble within the Samata on the contentious question of merger has been brewing rapidly over the last few days since Mr Kumar first made the suggestion following the departure of political foe Ram Vilas Paswan from the JD(U) stable.

The dissent intensified with the approach of the date for election of the party unit chief in Bihar.

The current incumbent, Mr Jha, who has over the last week been raising his voice loudly against agriculture minister Nitish Kumar's proposal for a merger with JD (U) — the two parties contested under the same poll symbol in the Lok Sabha elections — is looking to being reinstated as party unit president in Bihar in the polls scheduled for January 5.

This, notwithstanding the opposition of other local leaders, including Nitish Kumar supporters like national general secretary Rajiv Ranjan Singh.

Meanwhile, in the core problem area of Patna, Mr Singh chose to launch a frontal attack on Mr Jha for his "insult" to Mr Nitish Kumar and for seeking to be re-elected to the party state unit chief's post.

The Economic Times

4 JAN 2001