

Samata seeks to step out of BJP's shadow

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Samata Party, the BJP's closest ally, appears to be making tentative moves to dissociate itself from the NDA government's functioning.

It has once again raised questions about the issue of disinvestment, called for a mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the NDA agenda and also distanced itself from the BJP in Gujarat by announcing its decision to contest 50 seats in the coming assembly polls on its own.

With the BJP's popularity dipping gradually, it has become imperative for the its allies to re-establish their own distinct identity as opposed to the main ruling par-



A.B. Vajpayee G. Fernandes

ty, and this appears to be an effort in that direction.

Releasing the resolutions adopted at its recent national executive meeting held at Rajkot, Samata Party spokesperson Shambhu Shrivastava on Wednesday attacked the government on the "procedure and speed" of disinvestment, especially the sale of the Mumbai-based Centaur Hotel and IPCL. It also demanded that the government undertake a mid-term evaluation of its agenda, especially its economic policies.

Mr Shrivastava rushed to clarify that his party had no differences on the disinvestment policy or privatisation per se but felt the procedures had created misgivings among the people, which needed to be cleared. This is not the first time the Samata Party has raised the disin-

vestment issue. About two months ago, defence minister George Fernandes had raised serious objections to the sale of oil PSUs and effectively blocked their sale on grounds of national security.

Mr Shrivastava cited the Mumbai-based Centaur hotel which, he said was sold in February for Rs 83 crore to Batra Hospitality which resold it within six months to the Sahara group for Rs 115 crore, earning a profit of Rs 32 crore at a "time of market recession". Regarding the "strategic sale" of IPCL to the Reliance group, he alleged the government's "own guidelines were not adhered to by allowing the company to bid for IPCL even as its top officials have been charged with violation of the Official Secrets Act."

The Samata Party wants the PM to convene a meeting of senior ministers to discuss the disinvestment issue and re-evaluate the procedure on the basis of arguments forwarded by various quarters. At the same time, it also warned the government against allowing replacement of public sector monopolies by private sector monopolies and demanded that any information on evaluation, bidders, reasons for evaluation of a property and shareholders agreements be made public much before the deal was struck.

Mr Shrivastava also announced that the Samata Party would contest the Gujarat polls alone and field candidates in 50 of the 182 seats, adding that it would have no alliance with the BJP. He said there would be no common manifesto or programme, stating that there was a proposal for seat-adjustments with the BJP and Mr Fernandes had conveyed this to BJP president Venkaiah Naidu who had asked for a week's time to decide. However, there had been no word from them so far, he added.

UP Ruling Alliance Still Ahead In Numbers Game

Mulayam meets Sonia to topple Mayawati

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 27 OCTOBER

POLITICAL uncertainty in Uttar Pradesh deepened on Sunday with Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, seeking the support of Ms Sonia Gandhi to help him topple BSP-BJP coalition and install a government headed by the Samajwadi Party supremo.

The two leaders who share a "blow hot blow cold" kind of an equation, met at Ms Gandhi's residence at the behest of Mr Yadav. Though the parleys were still underway at the time of filing this report, political circles were sceptical that Ms Gandhi could, if at all, agree straightaway to the proposal of SP leadership. UP Congress chief was reluctant to join in the SP's bid to stitch together a majority when a group of independents have withdrawn support to the Mayawati government. SP's "woo Congress" efforts moved into high gear on a day when Ms Mayawati and the BJP sought to shift the battle of nerves to the SP's terrain. Ms Mayawati and BJP spokesperson claimed that more than a score of SP-Congress MLAs were on the point of crossing over should the SP chooses to intensify their poaching game.

The BJP, though troubled by the sharp division within its ranks over the support to Ms Mayawati just after deputy prime minister L K Advani accredited her government at the model of good governance, doesn't think that the prospect of a legal split in its ranks is real. However, the number of

MLAs ready to crossover is yet to reach the one-third mark which will make the defection legitimate.

Another comforting factor for the BJP is that the Speaker, who can play a crucial role, is from its own ranks. Even the Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri cannot be

tempt the fence-sitters to join the toppling game.

It will be a hard decision for the Congress to support Mr Yadav. Apart from the uneasiness that has characterised the ties between the two since Mr Yadav sabotaged Ms Gandhi's prime ministerial bid in 1999, the SP

leader arouses deep suspicions because of his formidable reputation as someone who shows little qualm in gobbling up MLAs of his allies. Ms Gandhi's reluctance, which was palpable at least this evening, also springs from the fear of Mr Yadav using his status as the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh to further shore up his already strong standing among Muslims. This is a con-

fusing prospect for a party which aspires to get a bigger slice of Muslim support in the next Lok Sabha elections. That the SP's plea for support comes accompanied with a threat of "secular" blackmail and sabotage of Congress' prospects in the approaching Gujarat polls cannot but strengthen the reservations of those who are against any tie-up with Mr Yadav.

Problems confronting Mr Yadav in mustering the necessary numbers can merely be a meagre consolation for the BJP, however. Though it can hope to avert an immediate collapse of its coalition with the BSP, the domestic squabbling can accelerate the diminution of its stock in the state where it seemed to enjoy pre-eminence till just a couple of years ago.

UNEASY FRIENDSHIP



expected to be sensitive to the concerns of Mr Yadav in the way one of his predecessors Romesh Bhandari was when the SP last tried its hand at wresting power between the two polls. Also, many MLAs loath Ms Mayawati despite the certificate bestowed on her by Mr Advani, but are wary of supporting SP because of local equations.

The SP, however, seems to be working on the assumption that it can break the stalemate if only the Congress backed Mr Yadav's candidature for the leadership of the next "secular" government in Uttar Pradesh. It recognises that even an "aye" from the Congress cannot take it beyond the halfway mark, but hopes that a commitment from Ms Gandhi can generate the type of momentum which in these situations can

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THE STATESMAN

Defence Minister Fears Prized Assets Are Being Sold For A Song

Fernandes sees sell-off demons, wants mid-term reforms review

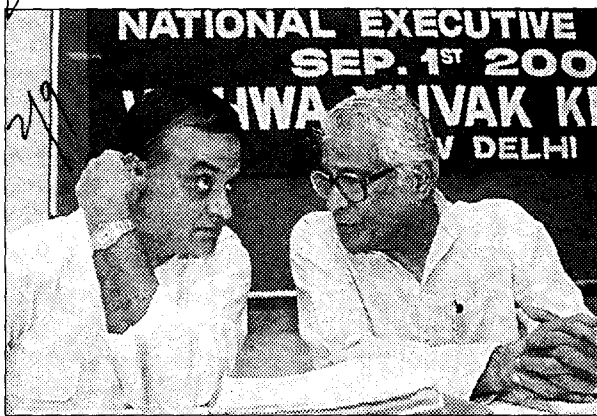
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 1 SEPTEMBER

IN a development that could sap the Vajpayee government of all enthusiasm to put the reforms process on the fast track, defence minister and NDA convenor George Fernandes on Sunday demanded a mid-term review of economic initiatives ranging from disinvestment to labour reforms. Mr Fernandes, who stuck to his theory that the disinvestment process could create private monopolies, said he has sought the Prime Minister's intervention to ensure "a course correction wherever necessary".

Angered over suggestions in the media that his stand against privatisation of the oil sector was at the behest a corporate lobby — whose members have associations with government bigwigs — the defence minister also sought to project his opposition as one that was prompted by the experiences of other countries.

"Britain, the mother of disinvestment, is now rethinking on its disinvestment process. Britain has now realised the limitations of sell-off in the power sector. The company which took over its railways became insolvent and the British government is thinking of re-nationalising the public utility," Mr Fernandes said.

It may be recalled that the Prime Minister had put power and labour reforms as priority areas in his speech at the BJP's national council and in his Independence Day address. Mr Vajpayee had said partisan interests should not be allowed to interfere with national objectives. He had also said the Centre would strive to evolve a consensus



STRATEGY TALK: Defence minister George Fernandes with minister of state for external affairs Digvijay Singh at the Samata Party national executive meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. — AFP

among all parties and state governments. But this appears a tough ask as Mr Fernandes on Sunday made plain his intention to force the issue and said he had asked the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of a "small group" of ministers to "reconcile" differences over the sell-off process. "We need to have a review followed by course correction wherever necessary, and identify areas where there is scope for reforms".

At the same time, he insisted that he was not against privatisation. "I am not saying disinvestment should be stopped, I simply want a review," he said when asked if disinvestment process should be stopped.

The NDA convenor, while addressing the press conference, appeared to share the Opposition's stand that government-run hotels were being sold for low amounts. "If someone takes it for a song, demolishes the building and makes millions

from the land, it is not fair," he said. Incidentally, rules bar those bagging the contracts from taking this route.

The minister also used the occasion to deny that he had sought a seat in the disinvestment panel. "I have not mentioned CCD, what to speak of my being invited to the meeting. Nor have I threatened to resign if the PM declines to yield on my demands. I have not made any demands," he added. Mr Fernandes also dismissed reports that he had written to Prime Minister that the disinvestment process impinged on national security and defence, and added that "whoever has said this, for whatever purpose, is a liar. That is also highly motivated."

Meanwhile, Mr Fernandes' loyalists on Sunday got Bihar MP Raghunanth Jha to issue a statement demanding inclusion of the defence minister in the CCD and baring tainted corporates from participating in the exercise.

Big brother bashing at Samata meet

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 1 SEPTEMBER

THE return of defence minister George Fernandes to the helm of affairs at Samata Party does not augur well for BJP, if the speeches delivered at the party's national executive meeting on Sunday are any indication.

Not only did Mr Fernandes, who's also NDA convenor, reaffirm his opposition to the government's disinvestment policy in his presidential speech, his loyalists took the battle right into the BJP camp, going to the extent of demanding that Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi step down for his failure to check communal riots in the state.

The national executive meeting saw the delegates re-imposing their faith in Mr Fernandes by unanimously electing him Samata Party president. He replaced Mr V.V. Krishna Rao, who had taken over from Ms Jaya Jaitley in March last year after she was forced to put in her papers in the wake of the Tehelka revelations.

Mr Fernandes' formal coronation as Samata Party chief emboldened his loyalists to resume their diatribe against big brother BJP. Taking their cue from his boss, Jehanabad MP Arun Kumar, they launched a scathing attack on Mr Modi. "We've a natural commitment towards secularism and it is not merely for the sake of votes," he said.

George to take over as Samata chief

Nalin Verma in Hajipur

Aug. 18. — Mr George Fernandes will replace Mr V Krishna Rao as the Samata party president, Mr Nitish Kumar said today. "The defence minister will take over as the party chief from 1 September", the railway minister said.

Mr Rao has expressed his desire to quit in favour of Mr Fernandes. Mr Kumar said the party's national executive would meet on 1 September to formally elect Mr Fernandes as its president.

Mr Fernandes, who was the Samata president when the party was formed, made way for Ms Jaya Jaitley following differences in the party three years ago. Ms. Jaitley too had to quit after the

Teheika expose on arms deal. Mr Nitish Kumar, however, said Mr Fernandes had to quit "entirely on technical grounds". "All the technical impediments in the way of his comeback is done away with now."

The protracted differences in the Bihar unit of the Samata probably has compelled the party's top brass to bring Mr Fernandes back at the helm. Recently, a section of Samata legislators led by the legislature party leader in the Assembly, Mr Singh, initiated a move to merge

with the Janata Dal (U) against the wishes of the railway minister. But the JD-U split with four of



RIGHT OF WAY? Mr Nitish Kumar after laying the foundation of the East-Central Railway headquarters at Hajipur. — PTI

its MLAs forming a separate group and extending support to the Rabri Devi government.

The Samata party continues to be plagued by factionalism. In this situation, Mr Nitish Kumar probably feels that having Mr Fernandes at the helm of affairs will help bring down differences in the party.

The railway minister also rejected Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for separate divisions for Dhanbad and Katihar within the Eastern Railway.

Mr Nitish Kumar said that his ministry was not considering "any such proposal."

"Dhanbad and Katihar divisions will be parts of East Central Railway with its headquarters at Hajipur, to be operational from 1 October," the railway minister said.

Mr Kumar said his ministry was going to launch a "cleanliness drive." "The trains, railway stations and toilets would be kept neat and clean for the passengers," the railway minister said.

The railway ministry may rationalise the fare structures of Rajdhani and Shatabdi Express. "The Railway Board is discussing the matter," adds PTI.

Editorial: On the back foot, page 4

Mayavati to rule UP and coalition panel

FROM YOGESHVAI PEYI

Lucknow, April 29: Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayavati today formally staked claim to form a coalition government in Uttar Pradesh with the BJP and its allies. She will be sworn in on May 3.

There will be no deputy chief minister in the new government. Mayavati will head the co-ordination committee of the coalition partners.

In return for the support from the BJP and its allies, the BSP will stay with the National Democratic Alliance government at the Centre from outside. It has also agreed to fight the next Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh in alliance with the BJP.

After Mayavati called on him this morning, Governor Vishnukant Shastri told reporters he was satisfied with the letters of support from 211 legislators submitted by the BSP leader. Shastri said he would soon recommend revocation of President's rule in Uttar Pradesh.

"But she will have to prove majority support in the House within three weeks of being sworn in," he added. Late tonight, the Cabinet met and decided to recommend revoking President's rule.

Mayavati, who would be assuming the reins of power in Uttar Pradesh for the third time, exuded confidence. "This time my government will rule for the full term," she said at a joint news conference at the BJP state headquarters.

Her first 136-day stint as chief minister with outside support from the BJP in 1995 had ended when the BJP pulled the rug

from under her feet. After her second six-month stint in 1997, it was she who had walked out of the coalition within a month of BJP chief minister Kalyan Singh assuming office as part of a rotating power-sharing deal.

Though Mayavati said the size of her ministry would be small, the way for her ascendance was cleared only after both the BJP and her party last night agreed to meet Rashtriya Lok Dal leader Ajit Singh's demand for a greater share in the new government.

Together, the BJP and the BSP have 185 legislators in the 403-member House. So the support of "others" is vital. However, the effective strength of the Assembly at present is 399.

Former chief minister and BJP legislature party leader Ranath Singh — who is believed to have opposed the BJP-BSP tie-up — did not accompany Mayavati when she called on the Governor with BJP leaders Kalraj Mishra and Om Prakash Singh and the RLD's Kokab Hamid. Rajnath met Shastri separately to hand over the letter of support.

Mayavati appeared conscious of the BSP haters within the BJP. At the joint news conference, when Singh expressed hope that the new government would work for all sections of society, Mayavati was quick to point out that her first concern would be the "welfare of the Dalits and the religious minorities".

She blasted the media for trying to drive a wedge between the BSP and the BJP. "The BJP had never demanded the post of the deputy chief minister or the chairmanship of the co-ordination committee," she said.

BSP ALL SET TO STAKE CLAIM

Kanshi Ram, Mayawati meet PM on U.P. govt. formation

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, APRIL 28. A day after the BJP's parliamentary board cleared the tie-up with the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, the BSP chief, Kanshi Ram, and vice-president, Mayawati, had a meeting with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, here today.

Apart from Mr. Vajpayee, the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, and the BJP president, K. Jana Krishnamurthi, were present at the meeting, which was in continuation of the discussions the BSP leaders had with the BJP State leaders on the formation of the next Government in Uttar Pradesh.

Reports here suggest that Ms. Mayawati would reach Lucknow tomorrow and meet the Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri and stake claim to form the Government. The swearing-in is expected to follow in due course after the Constitutional procedure — the Governor recommending lifting of the President's rule in the State — is gone through.

Mr. Krishnamurthi, told *The Hindu* that an agreement between the two parties had already been arrived at and the BSP-BJP State leaders would make a formal announcement in due course. He denied reports of any differences with Ajit



Mayawati

Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal, which has 14 MLAs and the support of a few independents in the State Assembly, over the Government formation.

Meanwhile, the Nationalist Congress Party today opposed the "unholy alliance" between the BJP and BSP in U.P. and decided to observe a 'Black Day'. In a statement, the party general secretary, Tariq Anwar, appealed to the "secular-minded" BSP MLAs to come out of the party in protest against the decision.

'Governor must complete legal formalities'

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, APRIL 28. The Uttar Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party president, Kalraj Mishra, on his return here from New Delhi,

told newsmen that Government formation in the State might still be delayed by three or four days.

The Governor, Vishnu Kant Shastri, would have to complete certain legal and technical formalities before swearing in the new Ministry and it would take some time.

Ms. Mayawati might, however, initiate the process by calling on the Governor tomorrow to stake her claim, he said. Mr. Mishra said he had started consultations with his colleagues in the BJP about Government formation.

Details about the coalition Government to be headed by Ms. Mayawati would be finalised in the next few days.

Motilal Vora, Congress leader in-charge of U.P. affairs, said the BJP-BSP Government to be installed in the State would not last long. This was an alliance "bereft of any principles". The two parties forming a coalition to rule the State had contradictory ideologies and their "marriage of convenience" was expected to break sooner than later, he said.

Mr. Vora denied the Samajwadi Party's allegation that the Congress had helped in the formation of the BJP-BSP coalition in U.P. The Congress had never created hurdles on the path of

the SP. If that party had enough MLAs to form the Government, the Congress would have readily come forward to help it, he added.

(A PTI report from New Delhi said that the Rashtriya Lok Dal, which has 14 MLAs in the Assembly, had extended support to the BSP-BJP alliance. Sources close to the party chief, Ajit Singh, said that the letter of support had been sent to Mr. Vajpayee. With the RLD's support, the alliance will have a strength of 186 MLAs in the 403-member Assembly.)

Tiwari is CLP leader

Meanwhile, the State Congress today unanimously elected Pramod Tiwari as the leader of its Legislature group. This would be Mr. Tiwari's fourth term as CLP leader.

The election had been delayed as uncertainty continued about the formation of the next Government in the State.

One group in the party was apprehensive of the intentions of Mr. Tiwari and felt that he could defy the party line on the question of the Congress support to the new Government. Now, with the decks being cleared for the formation of a BJP-BSP Government, all such apprehensions have been removed.

APR 29 2007

THE HINDU

BSP is likely to form govt in UP with BJP support

By Arvind Singh Bisht
Times News Network

LUCKNOW: It may be only a matter of time, but government formation now seems to be almost certain in Uttar Pradesh. If the mood in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) camp here is any indication, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) will form the government with the BJP's support.

But it will be with a difference. As sources within the BJP admit, "This time it could be Mayawati for a full term with deputy chief ministership and speakership for the BJP."

This option is given a serious thinking by the central BJP leadership, which may take a final decision in this regard after the party's three-day national executive, which is slated to be held in Goa from April 12. Still the party has time to act till May 8, as UP can be put under the President's rule till then without getting the bill ratified by the parliament.

However, this might trigger a

controversy within the BJP's rank and file, a sizable of which are up in arms against the alliance with the BSP. A most vocal on this count is BJP MLA, Bharat Singh. While threatening to begin a signature campaign, he claims to have the support of at least 30 MLAs. Incidentally, this is a number which is needed for a split within the BJP, which has a total strength of 88.

However, downplaying the threat, senior party leaders, on the condition of anonymity, said that such a statement would be of no consequence once the central leadership of the party took a decision. And this seems to be true. If the mood within the party is any indication, then it seems that more and more people are getting mentally prepared for becoming junior partner of the BSP in the government formation.

Either way, the BJP seems to be in a no-win situation in UP. As a senior leader admits, "Retreat is difficult and advance is impossible." It is evident from the fact that the BJP has not gained anything by

its alliance with the BSP in the past. In fact, the politics of alliance has done more harm than good to the BJP in the state. In stark contrast, the BSP has grown stronger and stronger by having alliances with the BJP in 1995 and 1997.

If the BJP compromises again, its base is bound to be eroded further. More so, it is because of the fundamental difference between the two. While the BJP is essentially a party of upper castes, the BSP is a party of dalits and while the former has radical Hindus on its agenda, the later is cultivating its base among Muslim minorities.

However, the BJP's predicament is that if it loses on government formation in UP, it could have some adverse impact on the Centre. Moreover, the possibility of a coalition government by the Samajwadi Party, which is rated favourably by the fence-sitters, cannot be ruled out in the state. So, the only option for the BJP, according to a senior leader, is to have an alliance with the BSP.

Sangh not to oppose BJP tie-up with BSP

By Rajesh Ramachandran
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Sangh Parivar leadership, which was earlier opposed to propping up Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati as the Uttar Pradesh chief minister, seems to have softened its stand on a probable BJP-BSP tie-up.

The forthcoming presidential election, restive legislators and apprehensions of a mid-term election appear to have forced the Sangh Parivar leadership to change its mind, and leave the decision about the formation of the UP government to the Prime Minister's Office, which has always been keen on a "friendly" government in the state.

Before setting out on a five-day tour abroad on Sunday, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said the issue would be discussed after his return. This is being seen in BJP circles as an indication of a possible resolution of the UP imbroglio soon.

A senior RSS leader said, "The Sangh will not oppose any move by the BJP to support a BSP government in UP. Of course, we have not discussed the issue and will not be part of the decision-making process. If the BJP central leadership thinks that a BSP-BJP alliance will suit the party, we will not interfere."

The Sangh Parivar is keen to have a

"friendly" President who can be of help in times of political instability and electoral debacles. BJP insiders said the party was keen that the UP assembly was constituted soon so that the UP legislators could cast their votes in the presidential poll due in July.

According to sources, a BSP-led government supported by the BJP seems to be the only alternative in UP now. If such an

arrangement came through, it would see BJP and BSP votes accruing to the BJP presidential candidate, the sources said.

However, Sangh leaders are aware of the organisational pitfalls of supporting Mayawati yet again. "The state leadership is opposed to the idea of the BJP supporting a BSP-led ministry. Wherever the central lead-

ership has imposed its decisions on the state unit, the party has suffered—like in Karnataka and Assam. But the presidential elections are too important to be ignored. Ultimately, the central leadership will prevail," said a BJP leader.

Meanwhile, Mayawati has sent out strong hints about a possible tie-up with the BJP. She told newsmen in Lucknow, "It will not be proper to make any premature statement on the formation of a BSP-BJP government." About the communal carnage in Gujarat, she said the Godhra incident should be probed first.

POWER POLITICS



A.B. Vajpayee

Mayawati