

SATURDAY, AUGUST 24, 2002 ✓

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THE PRESIDENT AND THE POLL ORDINANCE

THE PRESIDENT, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's decision to seek clarifications on the ordinance amending the Representation of the People Act has served to further highlight the retrograde nature of this piece of proposed legislation. While the exact nature of the clarifications sought by the President is not clear, it is a safe guess that they relate to the controversial nature of some provisions which directly controvert the Supreme Court's May 2 judgment and militate against the very spirit of the Constitution. The President's decision follows a chorus of protest from independent and eminent citizens, some of who had directly petitioned Mr. Kalam and drawn his attention to the unconstitutional nature of the proposed amendments. The problem with the ordinance is that it was drafted specifically to nullify an Election Commission order which was based on a Supreme Court directive and which made it mandatory for candidates seeking election to come clean with their criminal past (if any) and declare their financial assets. The ordinance neutralises this in two ways — by making no mention of financial assets whatsoever and by watering down the stipulation on criminal antecedents. Ironically, the only provision in the original draft which lent it the pretence of being a measure to check criminality in politics — a clause on disqualifying those chargesheeted in very serious crimes such as dacoity and rape — was withdrawn because it met with fierce opposition.

Mr. Kalam's demand for certain clarifications on the ordinance puts the Government in a peculiar spot in two ways. First, at a general level, his decision is a major embarrassment for the Government, which attempted to negate the force of the (Supreme Court-directed) Election Commission order and then attempted to brazen it out with unconvincing explanations and poorly constructed defences. The only 'saving grace' for the Government here is

that the ordinance had the backing of more or less all political parties and so the embarrassment, in a way, is possibly somewhat diffused. Second, at an immediate level, however, the problem pertains to the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly election for which the notification has already been issued. After all, one of the principal reasons for rushing through with an ordinance was to see that the Election Commission's order on the declaration of financial assets and criminal records was rendered superfluous for this poll. Although Mr. Kalam has no option but to sign the ordinance in case the Government insists that it go through exactly the way it is, the implications of not having the presidential nod in time for Jammu and Kashmir is something that the Government will have to consider.

But one reaps what one sows and the Government's quandary is very much of its own making. Ever since the Supreme Court's judgment on May 2, the Centre's entire attitude suggested that all it wanted was to avoid its implementation. The choices before it now are stark. One, to stick stubbornly to its position and risk the perception that it is ramming through a measure which even the President has some principled concerns about. Two, to back down and be prepared to refashion the proposed amendments to the Representation of the People Act in a manner which is in tune with the spirit of the Supreme Court's judgment, which was based on the premise that the voter in this country has a fundamental right to know much more than he is told now about the candidates he is voting for or against. The fears entertained by the political class about the Supreme Court's directive are grossly exaggerated and the proper choice for the Government would be to graciously adopt the latter route. Anything short of this would amount to supporting legislation which is aimed at denying the enforcement of a fundamental right and therefore unacceptable.

24 AUG 2002

'I KNOW HOW TO HANDLE POLITICS'

Abdul Kalam elected President

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, JULY 18. The 71-year-old scientist, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, will be the next President of India. He was declared elected today by R.C. Tripathi, Secretary-General of the Rajya Sabha, who was also returning officer for the Presidential election (for which the votes were cast on July 15 and counted today). Dr. Kalam will move into the Rashtrapati Bhavan after he is sworn in on July 25.



Abdul Kalam after the announcement of his victory in the Presidential election in New Delhi on Thursday. — AP

Dr. Kalam, who was supported by the ruling National Democratic Alliance, the Congress, the Telugu Desam Party and the Samajwadi Party, polled 4,152 votes whose value in terms of electoral college works out to 9,22,884, just a little less than 90 per cent of the valid votes. His only rival, Lakshmi Sahgal, who was supported by the two communist parties and the Janata Dal (Secular) notched up 459 votes with a vote value of 1,07,366, a little more than 10 per cent of the votes. The Members of Parliament (776) and the Members of Assembly in all the States (4,120) constitute the Presidential electoral college.

The vote tally in the unequal contest was along expected lines. Dr. Kalam won comfortably and decisively in almost all the States, whereas only

West Bengal and Tripura provided a margin of comfort to Capt. Sahgal.

The real surprise was the number of "invalid" votes from among the MPs. As many as 42 MPs cast their votes in an "invalid" manner. It clearly amounted to an indirect "vote of conscience" among the NDA and/or the Congress parliamentarians. Dr. Kalam, who was the last-minute choice for the NDA, obviously did not enthrone the saffron-brigade's hardcore sections.

Soon after Dr. Kalam was declared elected, Capt. Sahgal issued a statement congratulating him. She also thanked "those who have sponsored and supported my candidature in the Presidential election. It gave me the opportunity to address a wide section of the people, regarding the vital issues facing the country, especially the danger posed by the communal forces in the wake of the Gujarat events".

As soon as he was declared President-elect, Dr. Kalam was inundated with calls and visitors wanting to congratulate him. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was among the first to telephone him, while the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan (who was also his election agent), was the first to reach Dr. Kalam's residence to hand him over the election declaration.

The President, K.R. Narayanan, sent Dr. Kalam a message of congratulation, wishing him every success. Later in the evening, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, rang up Dr. Kalam conveying her greetings and congratulations.

After winning the election, Dr. Kalam himself suggested that "we need a vision, a second vision for the nation to get India transformed into a developed country in 20 years". He also took the opportunity to once again address his critics, who had doubted his suitability for the republic's top job on account of his unfamiliarity with politics. "I am working from 1982 onwards directly with the Government whether it be related with research, launch vehicles or nuclear programmes. Unless political decisions are taken, satellites will not be in orbit. Political decisions are vital for the success of any programme. I have worked with six Prime Ministers, I know how to handle politics."

'Cut your hair'

PTI reports:

If Abdul Kalam cuts his hair he will look much better — this was a suggestion made by a voter in the ballot paper for the Presidential election. The ballot paper, which became invalid, also said Capt. Sahgal should have contested the election 20 years ago. This was revealed by Mr. Mahajan.

Another invalid ballot paper had a note in Marathi saying that either Dr. Kalam should cut his hair or Mr. Vajpayee should grow his hair. "Both brahmacharis should look alike."

These were two of the 174 votes found invalid, and 42 of these were cast by MPs. Andhra Pradesh had the maximum number of 17 invalid votes, followed by Punjab at 14 and Madhya Pradesh with 11.

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THE HINDU

OPPOSITION READYING FOR A FIGHT

Shekhawat is NDA candidate for Vice-President

By K.V. Prasad

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NEW DELHI, JULY 17. The former Rajasthan Chief Minister and senior BJP leader, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, is the National Democratic Alliance candidate for the August 12 Vice-Presidential election. The Opposition parties appear determined to oppose him.

Mr. Shekhawat's candidature was formally announced by the NDA convenor, George Fernandes, here this evening at a press conference. He said the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was authorised by the NDA to select its candidate, had decided on Mr. Shekhawat. He would file his nomination papers at 12.30 p.m. tomorrow. Apart from the NDA constituents, Mr. Shekhawat's candidature is being backed by the Telugu Desam Party, the All-India Anna DMK and the Bahujan Samaj Party. After having secured the NDA authorisation last Sunday, Mr. Vajpayee sounded the TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, and the BSP leader and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, while the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, had a telephonic talk with the AIADMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa. Mr. Fernandes said the Prime Minister also spoke to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, seeking the party's support for Mr. Shekhawat. The Congress chief expressed regret and said the Opposition would contest the election.

The NDA's efforts to rope in the Samajwadi Party has not succeeded so far. The Nationalist Congress Party has decided to oppose any candidate with an RSS background and appealed to all Opposition parties to unite and fight against it. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, who was present at Mr. Fernandes's press meet, said the NDA was confident that its candidate would emerge victorious by over 100 votes. With the TDP, the BSP and the AIADMK extending support to Mr. Shekhawat, its nominee already had 85 extra votes. The members of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha constitute the electoral college for the Vice-President's post.

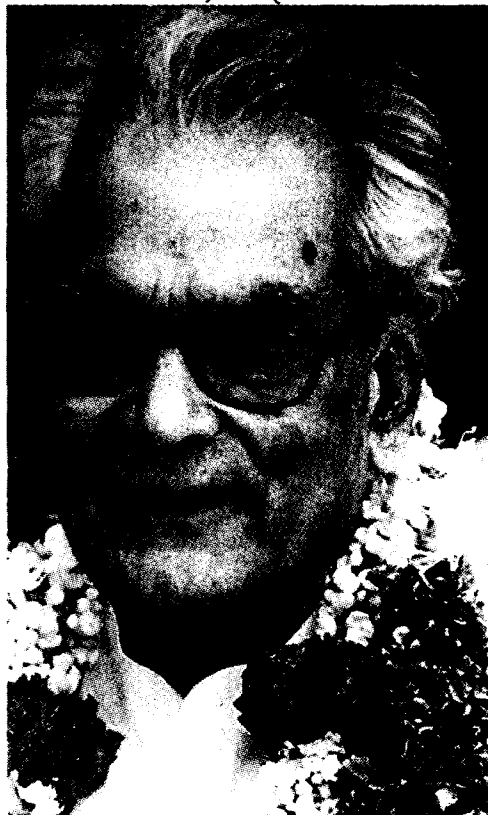
Meanwhile, the Left parties and the Congress leaders are in consultations on finding a joint candidate to take on Mr. Shekhawat. The Congress leaders went into a huddle with Ms. Gandhi on her return from Jammu this evening. It appears that the choice has narrowed down to a Dalit candidate and perhaps Sushil Kumar Shinde has emerged as the front-runner.

The Left parties are scheduled to meet tomorrow morning to finalise the candidate.

Jayalalithaa pledges support

By Suresh Nambath

CHENNAI, JULY 17. The growing bonhomie between the BJP and the AIADMK found another expression today with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister



and AIADMK general secretary, Jayalalithaa, supporting the NDA candidate for the Vice-Presidential election, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat.

With the senior BJP leader and Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, calling her up twice in the last two days, Ms. Jayalalithaa committed the votes of the AIADMK MPs to the candidature of Mr. Shekhawat.

The AIADMK had supported the NDA nominee, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, in the Presidential election too, but at that time Ms. Jayalalithaa had attributed her decision to the need for a consensus.

Moreover, she had rejected the earlier Presidential nominee of the NDA, P.C. Alexander.

However, the support for Mr. Shekhawat, a BJP leader, without even waiting for any attempt at consensus-building, shows the AIADMK's desire to be in the NDA company.

Even while declaring that she would maintain equidistance from both the Congress and the BJP, Ms. Jayalalithaa has been supporting the ruling National Democratic Alliance on crucial issues such as POTA.

Even when the Gujarat issue came up for voting, the AIADMK did not vote with the Opposition and, instead, chose to abstain.

Cong waits for Alexander to blink first

Sujata Anandan
Mumbai, July 15

AS FORMER Maharashtra Governor P. C. Alexander filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha byelection today — with support from the NCP — there was only pity for him in the Congress ranks. Pity, and a good deal of willingness to vote for him. But the votes come with a price tag.

By and large Congressmen in the State do not bear Alexander any grudge. And now that, as they see it, he has reduced himself in stature, they are more than willing to forget the by-gones. But for that Alexander must call their

president Sonia Gandhi first. Until then, the party will play tricks with the NCP and Alexander — as they have done by proping up former Rajya Sabha MP Suresh Keswani as an Independent candidate against Alexander.

But this, in all likelihood, is only a cat-and-mouse game. Sharad Pawar's conciliatory statements towards the Congress and the latter's own lacklustre challenge to Alexander is ample indication that neither is interested in shaking up the coalition in the State yet. Pawar might want to make Alexander the Deputy Chairperson in the Rajya Sabha (in place of Najma Heptullah) but as

one Congressman said, "One less MP in the Rajya Sabha does not render us outnumbered. Even Pata could not be passed by the Rajya Sabha. We are not worried."

Minister of State for Home Kripa Shankar Singh said the Congress would never have poached on a seat that "belongs" to NCP. It was vacated after the death of Mukesh Patel, earlier a Sena MP in the RS. Sharad Pawar was up to his political games when he decided to field Alexander as an Independent — a ploy to deny party colleague Tariq Anwar an RS seat.

Anwar was given the impression that the Congress would oppose his candidature but, says

Singh, "It is a fact that we have a pact — we don't oppose their candidates, they support ours, whether we like it or not." However, he says, "Now that the NCP has shown no interest in fielding an official candidate, the seat is free to be contested. We will vote according to the directive from our party high command."

The point, however, is that the Congress knows that Alexander is already home and dry for as an Independent candidate he also has the support of the Shiv Sena, if not the BJP (which in all probability will also vote for him). So he does not really need Congress support for a victory. But Kes-

wants candidature is a signal to him: Does he want to get into the RS with support all round or does he want to subject himself to a battle that could get murky?

Says a Congressman, "It is Natwar Singh who is clouding her judgment over Alexander." He added Singh's access to both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, was blocked by Alexander who worked for both PMOs.

Congressmen are waiting to see who blinks first. After all, Sharad Pawar has made things easier by categorically saying he is not averse to a tie-up with the Congress at the Centre on lines of that in Maharashtra.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

It's a fight: Lakshmi Sahgal

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 21. The Left parties' Presidential candidate, Lakshmi Sahgal, today filed her nomination papers for the July 15 election and became the first woman to contest for the top post. Freedom fighter and lieutenant of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Capt. Sahgal, 87, filed her papers with the Returning Officer, Secretary General of the Rajya Sabha, S.C. Tripathi, this morning as the candidate against Abdul Kalam, the NDA nominee being backed by a majority of the Opposition parties.

"I take the contest as a fight," Capt. Sahgal told correspondents in the Parliament House complex soon after completing the formalities. Her main election plank would be the importance of the high office as a protector of the Constitution.

Accompanied by the former Prime Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, Left Parliamentary parties leaders, and her daughter and former CPI(M) MP, Subhashini Ali, she declared that she took it as an honour being nominated by the Left parties.



The Left parties' Presidential candidate, Lakshmi Sahgal, on her way to file her nomination at Parliament House in New Delhi on Friday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

Two sets of nomination papers were filed, with one set being proposed by the CPI(M) Parliamentary party leader, Somnath Chatterjee, and other Left leaders. The second set was filed with the list of proposers being headed by the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb

Bhattacharjee, and his Cabinet colleagues, MLAs and MPs from the State. MLAs from Kerala headed by the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, V.S. Achuthanandan (CPI-M), Binoy Vishwam (CPI), C.K. Nanu (JD-S) and others were also among the proposers-seconders.

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THE HINDU

NDA, CONG. TOGETHER, YET APART

Vajpayee, Sonia among Kalam's proposers

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI JUNE 18. In a display of the much-needed convergence of political forces, the entire political leadership, save that of the Left parties, filed the nomination papers of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam for the post of President. His opponent, the Left parties-supported Lakshmi Sahgal, is slated to file her papers on June 21.

Two sets of nomination papers were filed on Dr. Kalam's behalf, each set signed by 60 proposers and seconders. The first set was signed by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, Chandrababu Naidu, Naveen Patnaik and Mayawati, along with Mr. Vajpayee's senior ministerial colleagues and other NDA leaders. Significant-

ly, the Congress filed a separate set of nomination papers, signed by the party president, Sonia Gandhi, Shivraj Patil, Manmohan Singh, Najma Heptuallh, Arjun Singh, Ahmad Patel and Ambica Soni.

The nomination papers were filed at the office of R.C. Tripathi, Secretary-General of the Rajya Sabha and returning officer of the election. Dr. Kalam was brought in procession from the Prime Minister's Office in the Parliament House to the returning officer's room. He was escorted by Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Advani, the three Chief Ministers and, significantly, Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party.

The occasion also witnessed perhaps for the first time since their bitter parting of ways, archrivals Mulayam Singh Yadav and Ms. Mayawati on the same

side of the divide. But the two avoided each other.

Congress leaders sought to maintain their distance from the NDA by not only filing a separate set of nomination papers but also arriving separately. Ms. Gandhi, along with her party colleagues, was the first to arrive. Incidentally, the Congress also deposited the Rs. 15,000 security deposit for Dr. Kalam from its own account.

Explaining the decision to file a separate set of papers, the Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, said his party had taken a positive decision in favour of Dr. Kalam. "We decided it independently as a party and also decided to file his papers separately."

The NDA was buoyant at the turnout with the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, emphasising the point that

almost the entire political spectrum barring the Left had rallied to Dr. Kalam's support. A detailed campaign programme for Dr. Kalam would be drawn up in a day or two.

Talking to newsmen separately, the Union Rural Development Minister, Venkaiah Naidu, said the Left parties were an exception to the nation's mood when they said that supporting Dr. Kalam, a missile man, as the Presidential candidate would send a "wrong signal". Expressing "surprise" at a similar reaction from the Left candidate, Capt. Sahgal, Mr. Naidu said, "This shows that they are apologetic about the country's nuclear programme when the entire country is proud of it".

Mr. Naidu said the Left parties were an exemption to the nation's mood in 1942 during the Quit India Movement; in 1962 during the Chinese aggression; in 1975 when emergency was imposed; and now they had become an exemption in the Presidential election.

There had been umpteen number of times when the Left had joined the BJP and the Jana Sangh over certain issues. "And now they say they cannot support a BJP candidate."

He denied that Dr. Kalam's candidature was announced unilaterally by the BJP and said that the Prime Minister held two rounds of consultations with political parties. "In the process of consultations, several names crop up. But the first name and the final name that was announced was that of Dr. Kalam." Mr. Naidu said Dr. Kalam had many things to his credit. "He is a great patriot, a great scientist and a great human being, and the nation is rejoicing at his candidature."

Kalam has his way: Page 11



The Presidential candidate, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, filling his nomination papers in the presence of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, and other political leaders in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

'Decision on Vice-President at right time'

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, JUNE 18. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, today asserted that a decision on the choice of candidate for the post of Vice-President would be taken at an "appropriate time".

Mr. Naidu, who was here to propose the candidature of the Presidential nominee, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, said the issue would be discussed later, "let us wait".

Talking to reporters at Andhra Bhavan here, he refused to react to the reports that with the BJP-led NDA having agreed to field Dr. Kalam as a consensus candidate for the President's post, the BJP was keen that the Vice-President's post be left to it.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Naidu had a meeting with Dr. Kalam before he went to the

Parliament House complex to file the nomination papers. Dr. Kalam told Mr. Naidu that technology should be effectively used to bring about a change in the lives of the people and both discussed the potential for proper application of technology. Mr. Naidu said the nomination of Dr. Kalam was an 'inspiration' for the people and the move would have a 'tremendous impact'.

Asked to comment on the Left parties' Presidential candidate, Lakshmi Sahgal's observation that the nomination of a nuclear scientist to the top post would send "wrong signal", Mr. Naidu said that while that could be the view of the Left parties, the assessment was not correct since the country's had a clear foreign policy.

During his day in the Capital, Mr. Naidu had a brief interaction with the Prime Min-

ister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, when he urged that the Centre use the Rs. 29 crores accrued from the cess for market intervention in tobacco and raise the import duty on silk yarn which had been lowered during the last few years. In a separate meeting with the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, the Chief Minister sought the release of the first tranche of Rs. 50 crores for the extension of the Visakhapatnam airport and the relocation of a defence institution near the proposed Hyderabad international airport.

Mr. Naidu took up the issue of reimbursement of funds for setting up fast track courts with the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley. He also met his Orissa counterpart, Naveen Patnaik, and urged that he intervene to sort out two pending irrigation projects between the two States.

Kalam kicks off Raisina Hill journey from PM house

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 17

SCIENTIST APJ Abdul Kalam looked and sounded every bit a tested politician today as he hopped from one power centre in the capital to another, picking up adulation and pledges of support. Around the same time, presidential challenger Lakshmi Sehgal kicked off her campaign, saying electing the Missile Man to the top office would send wrong signals to the world.

Kalam — the NDA's candidate for the President's post — flew in here this morning. Defence Minister George Fernandes and luminaries from the scientific community received him. Before driving off to the Prime Minister's residence, he said: "I've come here on a mission. I'll file my nomination papers tomorrow."

At a power-packed luncheon



Abdul Kalam with AB Vajpayee at the PM's residence on Monday.

meeting with A B Vajpayee, Kalam — better known as the father of India's missile programme — had the high and mighty of the country for company. The guest list read like a who's who in the corridors of power — L K Advani, George Fernandes, Murlis Manohar Joshi, the Congress's Dr Manmohan Singh. Sonia Gandhi too was among those invited but she didn't turn up.

After a plateful of goodies, photo-ops and plastic smiles at the PM's do, Kalam called on his other key backer, the Congress president.

And in all this, the man bound for Raisina Hill didn't forget to spend time with the man he's set to succeed — President K R Narayanan. A Rashtrapati Bhawan communiqué said the two had a 45-minute meeting. It was a "courtesy call".

Samajwadi Party chief Murali Manohar Joshi said he was also a part of call. Later, a beaming Yadvav told reporters: "He (Kalam) told me he was learning Hindi and hoped to get a grip on the language within six months."

It was a dream run for the presidential hopeful, barring a minor hiccup. N Chandrababu Naidu — who claims credit for floating Kalam's name for the

President's post — was a miffed man today. He had been told that he would be the only Chief Minister present when the NDA nominee files his nomination tomorrow. But tonight he got to know that Mavawati and Jayalalithaa had also been invited. The Cyberabad CEO won't make the journey to the capital tomorrow.

But Kalam was clearly on a high. "People want me to be their President," he told reporters. "You should understand that I am a candidate now with many supporting parties. The NDA is supporting. The Congress is supporting. Murali Manohar Joshi's party is supporting. So what you see is that people want me."

Even though his challenger, INA veteran Captain Sehgal, fired her first volley, saying "it would be wrong to have a nuclear scientist as the country's clear scientist as the country's

President" she couldn't avoid saying some nice things about her rival. "I admire him greatly for his scientific mind and his contribution to science."

The 88-year-old Netaji loyalist seemed aware that her fight would be a difficult one, yet she sounded spirited: "A fight is a fight."

Flanked by stalwarts Harkishan Singh Surjeet and AB Bardhan, she said she would file her papers on June 21. Sehgal wasn't particularly bitter about the Congress and the Samajwadi Party deserting her: "In every battle there are deserters. There are people who take the first opportunity to run."

She had some words for the Vajpayee Government. "Communism is a scourge and the challenge within is far greater than the one from outside." She charged the NDA Government with "non-performance".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

TRIUMPH OF "REALISM" OVER "ROMANTICISM"

Congress for Kalam, Left still for contest

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, JUNE 13. The Congress today declared that it would support A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the ruling National Democratic Alliance's proposed presidential candidate. While the Congress decision virtually ensures Dr. Kalam's victory, the prospects of a contest — even if a token one — have not dissipated altogether as the Left Front remains unchanged in its commitment to put up a fight against the NDA nominee.

Within an hour of the Congress going public with its decision, Dr. Kalam rang up the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, to thank her. From among the non-NDA political forces, the Samajwadi Party had already announced itself in favour of Dr. Kalam.

The Congress decision, arrived after "extensive consultations", is being described as the triumph of "realism" over "romanticism". That the political realists, headed by the Kerala Chief Minister, A.K. Antony, began making themselves heard; and the "Antony line" prevailed once Ms. Gandhi indicated her preference for it. Her own role in the three days of prolonged decision-making was described by one senior CWC member as one of "sensitivity and maturity".

The Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, cited the "totality of circumstances and the candidature of Kalam" as the crucial elements in the final decision; nonetheless, he expressed "respect" for the viewpoint of the Left. The decision, Mr. Reddy said, was unanimous.

Asked whether the decision

would sour the party's relations with the Left, Mr. Reddy answered in the negative and said: "Our relations with the Left have always been ideologically-oriented; and our differences are tactical." He pointed out that Manmohan Singh and Natwar Singh, both senior CWC members, called on the CPI(M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, to apprise him of the decision.

However, the party informed Atal Behari Vajpayee and the NDA through the media. "They informed us perfunctorily; we'll inform them through this press con-

ference." The decision to support Dr. Kalam's candidature was apparently firmed up this morning at an "unofficial CWC" which was attended by Ms. Gandhi, her two political secretaries, Ambika Soni and Ahmed Patel, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Natwar Singh.

The party said that Dr. Kalam had been entrusted with the country's missile development programme by the Congress and the United Front Governments. "Don't forget that George Fernandes removed him. Then he was given a 'sinecure' job of scientific adviser to the Prime

Minister. So, he is not the BJP's or the NDA's first choice."

As soon as the Congress indicated that it was going to go its separate way, the Left parties went into a huddle and decided to take a final view tomorrow at a formal meeting of the Left Front.

The basic position to oppose Dr. Kalam's candidature remains and tomorrow's meeting would decide the form and fashion in which this could be carried out. The possibility of fielding a candidate from among the Left parties is high with at least two of the four constituents — The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and All-India Forward Bloc (AIFB) — favouring the move. The CPI(M) politburo member, Prakash Karat, said the party would consult the politburo members ahead of tomorrow's meeting. "Our stand to oppose the candidature of NDA nominee remains".

The RSP and the AIFB said they were "not surprised" by the Congress decision. "We are not against the candidate (Dr. Kalam) but the policies and politics of the NDA," the RSP secretary, Abani Roy, said while the AIFB secretary, G. Devarajan, said the party was "well aware of the class character of the BJP and the Congress."

The CPI-ML general secretary, Dipankar Bhattacharya, said Dr. Kalam's selection was in line with the "Sangh Parivar's line of aggressive militarisation and the Advani's doctrine of defence as the key to development". The party welcomed the opposition to Dr. Kalam's candidature and also the dissolution of the People's Front.

Overwhelmed, says Kalam

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JUNE 13. The Presidential candidate, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, has thanked the "leaders, political parties and the nation for the confidence and faith" they have reposed in him. "The post of President of India indeed reflects the integrated aspiration of the nation," he said in a statement today.

Initially, Dr. Kalam was scheduled to meet the press this morning, but the meeting was called off. Instead, the former Principal Scientific Advisor to the Union Government released a statement, which he later read out to the media at Anna University.

Dr. Kalam was "really overwhelmed" at the many phone calls, e-mails and media reports which were "pouring in continuously from Monday onwards," after the announcement of his candidature. Since then everyone had been asking for a message from him. He recalled a "famous Indian thought" that "whatever happened has happened for the good, whatever is happening is happening for the good and whatever will happen, will happen for the good".

Sharing a personal anecdote, Dr. Kalam said that while he was recently addressing a student group at Porbandor, he was asked by a Class X girl what his message was for the young people. He told her that everyone should grow with the thought that "the nation is bigger than the individual".

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THE HINDU

14 JUN 2002

PRESIDENTIAL POLL: CONG. YET TO DECIDE

People's Front dissolved, Left to enter fray

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, JUNE 12. A presidential contest appears inevitable after the Left Front announced its decision to put up a candidate against Abdul Kalam, the ruling National Democratic Alliance's choice. The Congress, on the other hand, has yet to make up its mind on whether to support Dr. Kalam or to join hands with the Left in opposing him.

The split in the Opposition camp that manifested itself on Tuesday (when the Samajwadi Party broke ranks) today led to the dissolution of the People's Front, a combination of the Left parties, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the Samajwadi Party.

"The Front is no more," announced the CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, and his CPI counterpart, A. B. Bardhan, at a press conference here. "The Samajwadi Party is out of the Front. Mulayam Singh Yadav is no more the convener of the Front," Mr. Surjeet said. However, both the leaders claimed that the combination would be "reorganised" after Mr. Yadav went against the other constituents and decided to support Dr. Kalam. More parties would be drafted to forge a "third alternative."

For the Left, it is a matter of principle that the NDA candidate be opposed. A joint statement by the Left leaders read: "Who will be the President is a serious political question. Since the NDA is going ahead with its candidate, the Left Parties are of the view that it must be opposed. All those who are concerned with secular, democratic values expect the Opposition parties, including the major opposition party, Congress, to join this political contest."

The Congress camp, however, was reported to be divided. The Congress Working Committee met in an "informal" session and decided that the process of inner consultation should be widened to include the Chief Ministers.

Though the CWC had earlier authorised the party president, Sonia Gandhi, to take all decisions vis-a-vis the presidential elections, Ms. Gandhi, according to the spokesman, Jaipal Red-

dy, felt "the need to have wider consultations and more inputs before taking a decision."

Stating that the "single biggest party in the country and the single biggest component in the electoral college for the office of President" would not be hurried into making up its mind on the "highest constitutional office" of the country, Mr. Reddy asserted that the Congress would not be led by any other party. He was quick to clarify that the Congress would continue to have discussions with like-minded parties.

Tight-lipped about what transpired at this morning's CWC — which lasted 50 minutes — Mr. Reddy sought to explain the delay in arriving at a decision to the absence of many members. "Since the CWC was convened at a short notice, only those members in town could attend it." Also, Ms. Gandhi thought it best to consult the Congress Chief Ministers as had been done before the party settled on suggesting the President, K. R. Narayanan, for a second term.

Maintaining that the party would finalise its strategy within a day or two, he said: "Time is not being lost. There are still 12 days as the last date for filing nominations is June 24. It does not mean we'll take all 12 days, but there is no hurry."

On reports of the Kerala Chief Minister, A. K. Antony, informing Ms. Gandhi that he was favourably inclined towards Dr. Kalam, Mr. Reddy pleaded ignorance, just as he did when asked if the former Chief Justice of India, A. M. Ahmadi, was being considered a probable for the contest. Similarly, he stonewalled questions on the "fall-back option" that he had spoken about a couple of days ago in the eventuality of Mr. Narayanan refusing to contest.

Refusing to comment on whether Dr. Kalam was fit to be President, all that Mr. Reddy was willing to say was: "He's an eminent scientist; has made a notable contribution; and is a man of repute." Also, Mr. Reddy was of the view that no political group should claim a presidential candidate as its own.

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THE HINDU

13 JUN 2002

NARAYANAN NOT A CANDIDATE ✓

Opposition divided on support to Abdul Kalam

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, JUNE 11. A day after the National Democratic Alliance announced that the eminent scientist, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, was its new presidential candidate, the President, K.R. Narayanan, ruled himself out of a possible contest. The President's announcement came after the Opposition could not take a united stand on whether to support Dr. Kalam.

For most of the day, a divided Opposition worked on a post-Kalam strategy amid indications that Mr. Narayanan was no longer available — if he ever was — to the Opposition as a candidate. The day ended with a Left-Congress delegation, consisting of Manmohan Singh, K. Natwar Singh and Sitaram Yechury, going to the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the hope of ascertaining whether Mr. Narayanan was willing to contest against Dr. Kalam. After the delegation left, the Rashtrapati Bhavan issued a statement, which said: "There have been recent media reports suggesting that President K. R. Narayanan may be the candidate for the presidential elections 2002.

This is to clarify that K. R. Narayanan is not a candidate." If yesterday the Opposition had reasons to feel happy that it could force the NDA to jettison the Maharashtra Governor, P. C. Alexander, today it found itself unable to think its way through the situation created by the breaking of ranks by the Samajwadi Party (SP). For most of the day, the Congress, too, presented a picture of being befuddled: having committed itself to working jointly with the Peo-



The CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, and the Samajwadi Party leaders, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Amar Singh and others after the People's Front meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: Sandeep Saxena

ple's Front, a deeply divided party leadership could not finalise its stand without the Front first coming to any decision.

By the end of the day, the People's Front became a house divided, with the SP announcing itself in favour of Dr. Kalam. The Front met twice, once in the morning and in the evening; each time it was clear that the SP leadership was unwilling to go against Dr. Kalam. In the morning, the Front leadership dispersed without taking any decision and maintained that

the interregnum would be used by the parties to consult their colleagues.

Even after the consultation, there was no change in the SP position. Its president, Mulayam Singh Yadav, asserted that it was his party which had first proposed Dr. Kalam as the ideal candidate and that there was no need for the SP to change its mind just because the NDA had adopted "his" candidate. Mr. Yadav also said Dr. Kalam was a "wise man and a Bharat Ratna."

Feeling chastened by the SP's breaking of the Opposition ranks, the Left parties admitted to differences within the Front. For now, the Left (along with the rest of the Front, the Janata Dal-Secular) will meet tomorrow to consider the changed situation.

CWC to meet tomorrow

The decision-making in the Congress, too, went into a tailspin, after it dawned on its leaders that Mr. Narayanan would not be willing to contest against Dr. Kalam, even if the Opposition remained united. The party president, Sonia Gandhi, twice called informal meetings of the Congress Working Committee; the CWC met once in the morning but the evening meeting was "postponed." And, in between, she had a visit from the senior CPI (M) leader, Harkishan Singh Surjeet. After the first CWC meeting, the party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, told newspapers that "Mr. Narayanan is still the party's candidate. Our request is still pending." After the late night statement from the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the AICC announced that the CWC would meet tomorrow to take stock of the situation.

Meanwhile, support continued to build up for Dr. Kalam. The AIADMK formally announced itself to be for him. Indications were that the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Nationalist Congress Party would rather support him. The BJP formally welcomed Dr. Kalam's acceptance and the party spokesperson, Maya Singh, questioned the Opposition's diffidence in endorsing his candidature.

THE HINDU

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Scholar leads by default

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The dark horse wins the race. In an age of hung Houses and deeply divisive politics, Kalam's apolitical background was his major asset. He emerged as a front runner in the race for the presidency more rapidly than any observer had foreseen.

Smaller players turned out to pack the most punch. Telugu Desam leader, N. Chandrababu Naidu successfully blocked P.C. Alexander with his insistence on a consensus candidate. With his crucial bloc of MLAs and MPs in his pocket, he played his cards astutely. While unable to get his own first choice the post, he checkmated the drive to install the Governor of Maharashtra in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

In the Opposition, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the first to publicly support the former missile scientist, eventually had his way. Both the Congress and the Left parties had their work cut out trying to force a trial of strength and rally behind K.R. Narayanan. As in 1998, the SP could march to a tune different from that of other third front parties.

Alexander proved unacceptable to the two regional satraps due to his associations, past and present. An eminent civil servant, he was closely identified

with both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. His new-found popularity with the Hindutva parties did not endear him to leaders of other political formations.

Kalam's chances went up by default. Krishan Kant, a former Governor of Andhra Pradesh, was Naidu's first choice but did not win favour from others. There was little chance of a second term for Narayanan, once the NDA spoke out against him.

The BJP, too, has reasons to be pleased with the eventual choice. This is a chance to try refurbish its secular credentials tarnished by the handling of Gujarat.

Given his central role in the Pokhran tests of May 1998, it is in tune with the hawkish mood in the Sangh parivar. His knowledge of Sanskrit and mastery of the Rudra Veena will help get their stamp of approval. There is also the hope that this will help finally bury the image of a Hindi belt party without a presence in southern India. Kalam is a native of Rameshwaram in the deep south of Tamil Nadu.

This is not the first time Kalam has been in public lime-

light due to wider political design. Few now recall it was the United Front government that gave him the Bharat Ratna in January 1997 on the eve of the general elections.

Barring a twist in the tale, he looks set to become India's next President. But he will face closer public scrutiny than ever before in his long and distinguished career. The outgoing President

THE BIG PICTURE Mahesh Rangarajan

often intervened in debates at crucial moments, often to the discomfiture of the ruling coalition.

The actual political impact may be limited but the post is of more than symbolic importance. Given his past as a nuclear physicist, it will send out a signal that India's search for peace will not entail compromises on defence.

It is in terms of the internal dynamics of the polity that the choice is equally significant. Not since the philosopher S. Radhakrishnan became President in 1962 has the post ever gone to anyone without an active engagement in politics.

As the country's second President, he gave new stature to the office. He buoyed up sagging public morale during the India-

China war of 1962. His statesman-like role was also evident in two difficult transitions after the death in office of successive Prime Ministers, Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Yet, not until four decades later has a man of letters, arts or science been a front runner for the office. The post seemed to have become a sinecure for senior if eminent politicians.

A practitioner of politics as head of state has formidable advantages. Difficult constitutional choices have to be made while in office. More critically still, there are moments when the differences with the government of the day need to be made public but without transgressing the propriety.

A non-partisan figure can, however, go a step further. In a country that is deeply divided by differences of ideology and personality, he can be a symbol of the search for unity. The absence of party politics is a plus not only for the individual but also for the polity.

Kalam has all the goodwill he needs. If the past is a guide, he may yet surprise doubters and cynics. There can still be twists in the tale. But should he have his day, the country's eyes will be on him.

The Kalam missile

NDA has made a complete mockery
of consensus

IT is almost certain that noted scientist A.P.J. Abdul Kalam will be the next president of India. He may even be elected unopposed. But this does not in the least mean that political consensus has been evolved over his candidature. Quite to the contrary in fact. The NDA has made a complete mockery of the consensus process in zeroing in on their candidate, even while the Opposition parties cannot escape the charge of indulging in the most petty manoeuvres. There was lack of transparency, sincerity and trust from the start. The Congress did not serve the cause of consensus when it announced to the world after Sonia Gandhi had a meeting with K.R. Narayanan, that he had an "open mind" about serving a second term. Then the prime minister threw discretion to the wind when, after his meeting with the president, his office let out that he had informed Narayanan that the consensus in the NDA was against him continuing for a second term.

The NDA then floated the name of Maharashtra Governor P.C. Alexander, despite stout opposition from the Telugu Desam Party chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who had

rooted for Vice-President Krishna Kant. To scuttle Alexander's chances, the Congress spread the word that Narayanan, who had the backing of the entire Opposition, was even willing to contest for the post. A thoroughly upset BJP then had no option but to drop Alexander and accept Naidu's alternative suggestion of fielding Kalam, India's missile man. When Vajpayee met the Leader of the Opposition and mentioned Kalam's name, he was presenting the Opposition with a fait accompli.

In all this petty politicking, nobody bothered about the embarrassment caused to three eminent persons holding key constitutional posts in the country — the president, the vice-president and a governor. Ideally, the leaders of the ruling combine and the Opposition should have discussed the various proposals amongst themselves and chosen a person regarded by all as the most suited to hold the highest office in the land. After all, this is a post that requires a thorough understanding of the Constitution, a knowledge of the political system and the conduct of international affairs. Alas, this opportunity has been missed, and the country is the poorer for it.

THE BEST CHOICE, SAYS NAIDU

Kalam is NDA candidate

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JUNE 10. The National Democratic Alliance this evening changed its mind on its preferred presidential candidate. The Maharashtra Governor, P.C. Alexander, is no longer "a front-runner" and, instead, the noted scientist, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, has emerged as the man around whom a consensus between the NDA and the Opposition seemed very much on the cards.

Dr. Kalam's candidature was announced at a joint press conference addressed by the NDA convener, George Fernandes, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu, and the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati. Mr. Naidu described Dr. Kalam "as the best choice."

In a day of dramatic develop-



ments, the NDA leadership found itself constrained to jettison Mr. Alexander, who was the combine's choice on Saturday. The NDA leaders woke up this morning to a realisation that they could no longer afford to risk the displeasure of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu's who had left no one in doubt about his preference for the Vice-President, Krishan Kant.

More than Mr. Naidu's displeasure, the NDA bosses understood that if the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, with his crucial votes, was not on board on the Alexander choice, then two other key potential "outside" partners — the AIADMK and the BSP — could also become a doubtful proposition. Late last night, the NDA bosses, after agonising consultations, reached a judgment that the combine must find ways of cutting its losses. And since Mr. Naidu was not to be given the satisfaction of imposing his candidate just as the Opposition was not to be allowed to calibrate a second term for the President, K.R. Narayanan, the "dark horse" — Dr. Kalam — made his appearance.

Consequently, Dr. Alexander's most vocal advocate, Mr. Mahajan, was advised to appease Mr. Naidu. The two met in Hyderabad and Mr. Mahajan signed the sur-



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

render document on behalf of the NDA. With complete brazenness, Mr. Mahajan told newsmen in Hyderabad that the NDA had not taken any decision on any name. Later, he was instructed to convey to the Maharashtra Governor that he would no longer be the ruling combine's presidential candidate.

Back in the capital, the Prime Minister set in motion a process of consultation with the allies and the Opposition. Among those who met or talked to Mr. Vajpayee included the Congress President, Sonia Gandhi (who was accompanied by the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Manmohan Singh), the Samajwadi leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister; the BSP leader, Mayawati, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, the Left leaders, Harkishen Singh Surjeet and A.P. Bardhan, and the NCP leader, P.A. Sangma.

Indications were that the Opposition parties had no problem with Dr. Kalam. There is all-round satisfaction in the Opposition camp that the candidature of the Maharashtra Governor had been spiked. "We deem it as an outstanding positive achievement to get Alexander out," asserted the Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy. On its part, the People's Front asserted, in a statement: "The display of Opposition unity on the issue of presidential election after the BJP's efforts to unilaterally impose a candidate has compelled the BJP to beat a retreat."

On the fate of Mr. Narayanan, Mr. Reddy said: "We won't say yes to anybody without consulting him since we have used his name to keep Alexander out."

On what transpired at the meeting in 7 RCR, Mr. Reddy said Sonia Gandhi and Manmohan Singh called on the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. They were told that "our candi-

date now is Abdul Kalam". When Dr. Singh asked whether he was "your final candidate; how are we to be sure that you won't change your mind again," Mr. Advani intervened and said, "he is our final candidate." Further, Mr. Advani said: "We are going to have a meeting today and this is our final candidate."

On the issue of Vice-President, the Congress was told that the two were different issues and would be dealt with separately. Ms. Gandhi informed the Prime Minister and the Home Minister that "we need to consult our party and other parties before we take a view" upon which the Prime Minister told her that he would be contacting Mulayam Singh Yadav and Harikishan Surjeet.

However, late night indications were that the Left was not at all excited about the idea of Dr. Kalam making it to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Its final views, nonetheless, would depend on the stand Mr. Mulayam Singh takes. His votes have the same centrality to the Opposition calculations as do Mr. Naidu's for the NDA.

Jayalithaa to back NDA nominee

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JUNE 10. Involving herself in the efforts to create a consensus on the Presidential candidate, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, today assured the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, of support to the candidate of the National Democratic Alliance.

Mr. Vajpayee spoke to Ms. Jayalithaa in the morning and the two leaders reached an agreement on the candidate.

The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, had talked to her seeking support for the same candidate. Now, she along with Mr. Naidu would join efforts to build a consensus.

NDA dithers, Opposition wants Narayanan to contest

By Neena Vyas

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NEW DELHI, JUNE 9. The National Democratic Alliance meeting to formally discuss and announce the ruling coalition's presidential nominee was cancelled once again today after the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and Telugu Desam Party chief, Chandrababu Naidu, failed to keep his date with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee. And the Opposition parties met the President, K. R. Narayanan, in a bid to renew their request that he agree to contest for a second term.

There are indications that the NDA may make a formal announcement after June 13. Ostensibly, the time is to be used for a fresh round of discussions, specifically to "persuade" Mr. Naidu to support the candidature of the Maharashtra Governor, P. C. Alexander, for the post of the President. Coincidentally, by June 13, the outcome of the vote of confidence sought by the Deshmukh Government in Maharashtra would also be known.

Even as there was confusion in the NDA ranks — for the second consecutive day, a formal meeting failed to materialise — the Opposition leaders, Manmohan Singh and Natwar Singh (Congress), Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Sitaram Yechury (CPI-M), A. B. Bardhan (CPI) and Amar Singh (Samajwadi Party), met Mr. Narayanan this evening to formally request him to be their candidate for the ensuing presidential polls.

Emerging from the meeting, they said that Mr. Narayanan had indicated that he would think about their request. Mr. Amar Singh said that the Opposition would be "firm as a rock" on the issue and would stand united, contrary to reports that there was a division within their ranks.

Later, the Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, also said that it was a "disgrace" that the NDA had been unable to announce its presidential candidate. If the ruling alliance were to wait till June 13, "it would expose their game completely." The bottomline for the Opposition is that if Mr. Alexander is the NDA nominee, it would like Mr. Narayanan to contest.

On Saturday, after urgent telephone calls to Mr. Naidu by the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, it was claimed that he would be here today and would meet the Prime Minis-



Opposition leaders (from left) Sitaram Yechury, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, A.B. Bardhan, Manmohan Singh, Natwar Singh and Amar Singh briefing presspersons at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan on Sunday .

— Photo: V. Sudershan

ter before the NDA meeting. When reports first came that Mr. Naidu might not come, apparently there was another round of frantic calls to him from several Cabinet Ministers. Throughout the day, there were strategy meetings at the residences of Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani and by evening, NDA sources claimed that Mr. Naidu would arrive here tomorrow.

After the TDP leader's meeting with Mr. Vajpayee three days ago, the signal was that the NDA nominee for the President's office would be the Vice-President, Krishna Kant. The TDP was anxious to evolve a consensus, especially against the backdrop of tensions on the India-Pakistan border. It was willing to support Mr. Kant and there was a very good chance that the Congress and the other Opposition parties would go along with a consensus on Mr. Kant. But at a meeting with the Prime Minister on Saturday, some Cabinet Ministers wanted the BJP to have "its own man" in the Rashtrapati Bhavan and Mr. Alexander's name was specifically being pushed by the Maharashtra lobby in the BJP as well as the Shiv Sena. It is being claimed that Mr. Vajpayee would like the presidential nominee to be jointly announced by the NDA and its supporting parties such as the TDP. This would mean that unless further discussions take place with Mr. Naidu, the NDA

cannot move forward. The Opposition party leaders have pointed out that in the current state of instability in Maharashtra — the Deshmukh Government is desperately trying to avoid a fall — Mr. Alexander will naturally play an important role.

They are aghast that the carrot of nomination for the President's post is being openly dangled by the NDA before Mr. Alexander just when he may be called upon to play a crucial role in Maharashtra, where the BJP-Shiv Sena combine has openly displayed its desire to stake claim to form an alternative government.

Naidu for consensus

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JUNE 9. The Telugu Desam Party is in favour of a consensus on the choice of candidate for the Presidential election. The Chief Minister and party president, N.Chandrababu Naidu, spoke to the Prime Minister, A.B.Vajpayee, on Sunday evening where he is understood to have made it clear that "under the present circumstances" all efforts should be made to evolve a consensus on the issue.

Mr.Vajpayee should take all parties with him and come out with a choice acceptable to most.

BJP HARDLINERS CARRY THE DAY

NDA 'plumps' for Alexander

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JUNE 8. The ruling establishment is understood to have decided to field the Governor of Maharashtra, P.C. Alexander, as its candidate in the next month's Presidential election. Barring any last-minute dramatic change, an announcement to this effect would be made tomorrow after a formal endorsement of Mr. Alexander's name by the ruling National Democratic Alliance. The alliance meeting was, in fact, scheduled for this evening but it now stands postponed to tomorrow as a number of NDA partners are out of town.

Efforts are also on to persuade the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu to be in the capital when Mr. Alexander's name is announced. Mr. Naidu had only two days ago "authorised" the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to decide on the Presidential candidate, though he had indicated his preference for the Vice-President, Krishan Kant.

Late in the night, Prime Ministerial aides were claiming that Mr. Naidu had agreed to travel to the Capital on Sunday. He will have a meeting with Mr. Vajpayee before the NDA meeting, tentatively scheduled for 4 p.m.

Indications till now were that Krishan Kant was the front-runner as the most acceptable "consensus" candidate. An election now seems inevitable, as the Opposition parties, by and large, remain unexcited about the Maharashtra Governor as the next occupant of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Both the Congress and the People's Front have expressed their sense of unhappiness that the ruling combine has gone back on its promise of exploring the possibility of a consensus, and have threatened a "contest" if the NDA makes a unilateral decision.

The decision to go in for Alexander was taken at a meeting of



the NDA bosses at the Prime Minister's residence this morning. Besides Mr. Vajpayee, those present were the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, the NDA convener, George Fernandes, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, and the BJP president, Jana Krishnamoorthy. The decision is seen as a setback to Mr. Vajpayee, who was reported to be keen on avoiding a contest.

Before the confabulation at the Prime Minister's residence, an emissary of Mr. Vajpayee is believed to have conveyed to a representative of the Congress leadership that Mr. Kant was acceptable to the ruling combine. Three hours later, the Prime Minister's emissary called back, with an apology, that the final decision had gone against Mr. Kant. It is the first time in four years that Mr. Vajpayee's "consensus strategy" has been spurned by his own senior colleagues.

In fact, it is believed that the decision in favour of Mr. Alexander was insisted upon by the BJP hard-liners. The argument is that if the NDA has the numbers to win the Presidential poll, why should it shy away from a contest. It is further argued that just to meet the hyped expectations of a "consensus", why should the NDA settle for a "neutral" candidate.

The younger leaders such as Mr. Mahajan, Arun Jaitley, and

Ananth Kumar, among others, are reported to have impressed upon the party leadership that the BJP should have its man — if it was in position to do so — in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

As soon as the Prime Minister's emissary conveyed to the Congress representative the latest decision, the party leadership summoned for consultations members of the Congress Working Committee available in the capital. The mood reportedly was one of anger that the ruling party had gone back on its commitment to seek a consensus. Among those who put in an appearance at short notice were Manmohan Singh, Ambika Soni, Ahmed Patel, Natwar Singh and Jaipal Reddy.

The Congress faults the Alexander choice on several counts: first, it violates the convention that the Vice-President gets elevated; second, no Governor has made it straight to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, without doing a stint as Vice-President; and, three, it is seen, unofficially, as the BJP's attempt to spike Sonia Gandhi's chances of becoming the Prime Minister (on the plea that if there is a Christian in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, another Christian could not become the Prime Minister). The ploy is seen as an unacceptable and mischievous attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of the Congress.

Since there was no formal announcement from the NDA quarters, the Opposition reaction was rather muted. But both the Congress and the People's Front — separately through their spokespersons, Jaipal Reddy, Sitaram Yechury, and Amar Singh — announced that "secular parties" would unite and fight this battle together. Mr. Yechury and Mr. Singh added: "We have our differences with the Congress but if the Government believes it can take advantage of these differences, it is living in a fool's paradise. We will all join hands and go to any length to defeat this challenge."

Left parties to field INA veteran

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 14. The Left parties and the Janata Dal (Secular) today decided to field the veteran freedom fighter, Lakshmi Sahgal, to contest the Presidential poll against A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, candidate of the ruling National Democratic Alliance and a majority of the Opposition.

While conceding that the "fight is unequal", the Left parties — the CPI(M), the CPI, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the All-India Forward Bloc — asserted it was a "political battle", not aimed at an individual and it demonstrated the unity of the Left.

Announcing the candidature of the 87-year-old Capt. Sahgal, at a joint press conference here, the CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, the RSP Secretary, Abani Roy, and his Forward Bloc counterpart, G. Devarajan, said her name was also agreed to by both the former Prime Ministers, V.P. Singh and H.D. Deve Gowda, whose party JD (S)



Lakshmi Sahgal

was part of the now dissolved People's Front. The Front fell apart after the key constituent, the Samajwadi Party, broke ranks to back Dr. Kalam.

The Left leaders described Capt. Sahgal as a symbol of the Indian freedom movement who dedicated her life for the betterment of the people. The Left parties wondered how the Congress and other Opposition parties could not support her.

"How can they (Congress) now justify their opposition to the BJP policies and support their nominee", the CPI (M) politburo member, Sitaram Yechury, said later.

The Left leaders said Capt. Sahgal, who was associated with Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and played a lead role in the formation of the Rani Jhansi regiment, was active both militarily and on the medical front. She was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1998 and now works at her maternity home.

Meanwhile, the Samajwadi Party, which has been under attack by the Left parties ever since it decided to back Dr. Kalam, today joined issue with them. The party General Secretary, Amar Singh, charged that the Left parties had "no principle and consistency".

He said the People's Front was formed to maintain equidistance from the Congress and the BJP, but the Left took a pro-Congress line to oppose the NDA candidate for the post, though the Congress eventually declared its support to Dr. Kalam.

Congress for consensus on Vice-President

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, JUNE 14. Though the Congress is willing to cooperate with the National Democratic Alliance if the ruling coalition seeks a consensus on the Vice-Presidential candidate, it indicated today that it would contest the post should an attempt be made to foist a BJP candidate.

With the result of the Presidential elections now a foregone conclusion, the focus within the Congress has turned to the office of the Vice-President that falls vacant in August. And, as was the case with the Presidential candidate, the Congress will consult all "like-minded" Opposition parties before making up its mind.

The party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, told mediapersons in an informal chat: "If the NDA tries for a consensus, we will be ready to cooperate, keeping in mind the high office of the Vice-President. But in case the NDA tries to impose its own candidate unilaterally, we will be left with no option but to contest."

However, he gave no indication of the probabilities being considered by the Congress for the post of Vice-President.

Mr. Reddy did not comment on the Left parties fielding the revolutionary freedom fighter, Lakshmi Sahgal, against the eminent scientist, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, for President. That the party was reluctant to comment on Capt. Sahgal's candidature became evident when it cancelled its sched-

uled briefing soon after the Left announced its candidate.

Though the Congress' focus has now turned to the Vice-Presidential elections, introspection over its decision to support Dr. Kalam continued today.

Again, the underlying point was that the party leadership could ill-afford to ignore the views of the party's Chief Ministers who were overwhelmingly in favour of Dr. Kalam.

While the mood within the party was favourable to Dr. Kalam, soon after the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, informed the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, of the NDA choice, a decision was apparently deferred in view of the Maharashtra political scenario.

With the CPI(M) pledging support to the ruling Democratic Front in the State and the Left parties wielding considerable influence over the Peasants and Workers' Party, the Congress did not want to jeopardise the carefully-orchestrated exercise to save the Deshmukh Government.

In fact, the "unofficial" meeting of the Congress Working Committee — wherein the final decision to support Dr. Kalam and communicate its decision to the CPI(M) was taken — took place around the same time as the DF Government was facing its vote of confidence. And, by the time the CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, was informed, the crisis in Maharashtra had blown over.

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MONDAY, JUNE 3, 2002

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THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

8/6

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS ARE a good illustration of the truism that not everything licensed by law is salutary. It is far better they are tranquil non-events than occasions marked by sharp political rivalry, attended by the customary bitterness and bad blood. In this context, the recent developments — which have diminished the hope that the election to the next President would be determined by a gracious consensus — are discouraging. As things stand, the process of finding a suitable consensus candidate has hit a seemingly intractable snag. On the one hand, there is the NDA Government's strong opposition to giving the incumbent, K.R. Narayanan, another presidential stint — a position which is really derived from what it perceives as his 'undue activism' but also draws support from the fairness principle which affirms a one-man/one-term convention. (The country's first President, Rajendra Prasad, enjoyed two terms and so, at the very least, there is one precedent for a two-term President.) On the other hand, the Congress-led Opposition, even while declaring it is in favour of a consensus, has announced it will back the candidature of Mr. Narayanan, who has reportedly indicated he has an "open mind" about remaining in Rashtrapathi Bhavan. Meanwhile, leaks of the discussions at closed-door meetings, appeals made on the basis of caste and religion, political jockeying in favour of one person or another have lent a disagreeable air to the whole proceedings. Perhaps worse, they threaten to reduce the election into an unbecoming and quarrelsome contest.

There are excellent reasons why a presidential election should be insulated from the scuffle and scrimmage of politics. The office of the President, by its very place in the constitutional scheme of things, should be kept above such things. Since he is the figurehead of the nation, he must not be perceived as a candidate of one

political formation or another. Given the non-partisan nature of the presidential office, it is only appropriate that those who occupy it are selected through a smooth consensual process and not by a potentially fractious electoral face-off. From a more immediate point of view, a potentially unpleasant presidential contest is the last thing the nation needs at this juncture. Even if those at the Centre enjoy a small electoral edge, the fact that both the NDA and the Opposition are almost equally represented in the electoral college will render any contest extremely close and, ipso facto, extremely nasty and bitter. Another pertinent issue is whether the nation's attention should be consumed by a political wrangle in these precarious times, when its armed forces are positioned eyeball-to-eyeball with their counterparts across the border and when the threat of war looms larger than ever.

As things stand, any hope of evolving a consensus depends on the consultative process which, according to available information, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, proposes to set into motion after he returns from the Asia summit in Kazakhstan. The process must take note of all viewpoints, but given the Congress' substantial strength in the electoral college, Mr. Vajpayee's foremost task would arguably lie in sincerely trying to arrive at some sort of agreement with Sonia Gandhi. Moreover, any consultative process should be conducted with an open mind, a flexible attitude and be spared of the kind of petty quibbling which has threatened to mar the very process of electing a new President. Arriving at a consensus is not merely a challenge for Mr. Vajpayee or the NDA Government. It is a test of the people this country has elected to legislatures at both the national and State levels — in fact, a test of the nation's very political maturity.

9 3 11 2002
THE HINDU

'NDA decision on Presidential election most unfortunate'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 31. The Lok Janshakti has strongly criticised the decision of the National Democratic Alliance led by the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to deny a second term for President, K.R.Narayanan, describing it as "most unfortunate."

The entire opposition, it was pointed out, has fully backed the Government in the fight against terrorism and has virtually told the Government that it would support whatever action it may take.

At this crucial juncture, the ruling coalition could have made a reciprocal gesture by backing the Opposition demand for a second term for Mr. Narayanan, the Lok Janshakti said in a statement today.

The party headed by Ram Vilas Paswan, also emphasised that not only has Mr. Narayanan done credit to his job as President, since he also comes from the most underprivileged section of society a second term for him would be fitting as it becomes a symbol of hope and dignity for the millions who remain underprivileged and continue to suffer as a result of low social status.

The Bharatiya Janata Party and the NDA should have risen above shallow and narrow partisan party politics to help build consensus on the critical issue of Presidential elections and create an environment of mutual trust cutting across rival political camps.

War of words over Presidential race

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 31. The non-NDA political parties are unhappy that the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, is "trying to manoeuvre" the incumbent President, K.R. Narayanan, out of the Presidential race, while the BJP is maintaining that it would still want to work out a consensus though it was not averse to a contest.

There was an all-round feeling that the manner in which Mr. Vajpayee's conversation with Mr. Narayanan on Thursday was leaked out did not enhance the dignity of either of the two constitutional offices. Given the fact that Mr. Narayanan has not, so far, sought the NDA's support, it was nothing short of a "Prime Ministerial snub" for the President. 8.18P

However, the BJP leadership was quick to deny the suggestion of any "impropriety." The party president, Jana Krishnamurthy, asserted today that all that the Prime Minister was trying to do was to convey the NDA's affirmation of a convention (that no President should get a second term). Mr. Vajpayee is likely to go through the motion of consulting the Opposition, though the BJP also made it clear that the onus was on the opposition parties to avoid a contest by not insisting on a second term for Mr. Narayanan.

According to Mr. Krishnamurthy, it was the Congress that had upped the ante by approaching Mr. Narayanan and then announcing that the President had "an open mind". The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi's, journey early this week to the Rashtrapati Bhavan invoked "partisan and bitter memories of another journey" (on April 21,

1999) when she made her famous "we have 272" statement.

The Congress rejects the charge, though in private many leaders believe that it was rather "tasteless" of the ruling establishment to have gone about advertising the President-Prime Minister communication. Moreover, AICC sources insist that at no stage in his consultations with the Opposition leaders did the Prime Minister invoke the "convention". A section of the AICC establishment wants to wait for Mr. Narayanan to make up his mind whether he wants to enter the fray; there are serious doubts among Congress leaders that faced with the prospect of a contest, Mr. Narayanan may prefer to opt out.

The CPI (M) also repeated the Congress charge of bad faith on the BJP's part. In a statement, the party's politburo noted: "It is noteworthy that the Prime Minister did not suggest any name for the Presidentship when he met leaders of the Opposition parties. The BJP game plan seems to be first exclude Mr. Narayanan and then push through their nominee. There can be no consensus possible with such a gambit." The All-India Forward Bloc expressed the view "it was not averse to supporting Mr. Narayanan if a national consensus is arrived at his re-election"; but, it also added that "the post of President of India should not be based on narrow political interests or caste or religion. We need a President who is above politics and he must be chosen through national consensus particularly when the country is facing multifaceted crisis from internal and external evil forces. We need a President who acts as a watchdog and protects the interest of the common masses."

THE HINDU

0 1 2002

Kalam is dark horse for President

By Mahendra Ved
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: With the presidential sweepstakes round the corner, talk in political circles has shifted to the dark horse. While sources in the ruling National Democratic Alliance claim that Maharashtra governor P.C. Alexander's candidature is a foregone conclusion, others say that the race is still wide open. The latest name doing the rounds is that of 'Missile Man' A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. But once the dust raised by the more contentious candidates settles, L.M. Singhvi or Karan Singh may pip the other contenders to the post, considering their wide acceptance.

BJP sources revealed that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee threw up Mr Kalam's name during a recent meeting with Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav. By seeking out Mr Yadav, the man who had recommended Mr Kalam for the Bharat Ratna in 1997, the BJP obviously tried to play the minority card and isolate the Congress. Mr Yadav, however, told this newspaper that he was



awaiting the return of CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet, who is on tour, before taking a final decision. Not having a universally acceptable candidate, the Congress and the Left parties have been veering towards incumbent K.R. Narayanan. However, the President has made it clear that although he is not averse to being a consensus choice, he will not contest for a second term. The situation being what it is, candidates like Mr Singhvi and Mr Singh may find favour with both the Congress and the BJP.

The selection process has been delayed considerably due to the Prime Minister's preoccupation with Gujarat. The NDA had last week authorised Mr Vajpayee to hold parleys on the selection of the next President and Vice-President. A list of names for both posts is now being readied for consultations with other parties.

Meanwhile, the aspirants' list has been growing by the day. While the NDA's column has the names of Mr Singhvi, Mr Kalam and Jammu and Kashmir CM Farooq Abdullah, among others, the Congress list has Mr Singh. A new name doing the rounds in recent days is that of Karnataka governor V.S. Rama Devi. But across the political spectrum, the consensus seems to favour a consensus. A fractured polity and a volatile situation could make a contest a risky proposition. "A contest will be everybody's nightmare. It will create a bitterness that should be avoidable," said Mr Singhvi.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 MAY 2002

Consensus eludes hunt for President

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, May 13

THE PROSPECT of a consensus candidate for the President's post is fading fast. While the Congress and the Left seem to favour a second term for KR Narayanan, the BJP is dead against the idea.

The saffron party is keen instead to nominate Maharashtra Governor PC Alexander. But for the time being, it only wants to send out a clear signal that it wouldn't like Narayanan in the President's chair again.

Narayanan's activist approach, exemplified most recently before the Lok Sabha censure motion on Gujarat, has embarrassed the NDA Government on more than one occasion. The BJP is hoping Narayanan will opt out of the race once he gets to know the NDA's stand.

The Congress is playing a waiting game, hoping Narayanan will be open to another term. It believes some BJP allies will find it difficult to oppose a Dalit's candidature.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has reportedly opened formal consultations with his NDA partners and allies to hammer out a consensus and is expected tomorrow to speak to DMK chief M Karunanidhi.

Aware that these parties cannot be compelled to fall in line, in the first round of talks, the PM is likely to restrict himself to ruling out Narayanan's nomination. "The effort to build a consensus on another name, Alexander's among them, will be made at subsequent talks, including those with the Opposition," a PMO source said. He said with the numbers in the electoral college as tight as they are, Vajpayee wouldn't want to

approach the Opposition with a name of the NDA's choice.

He would be willing instead to discuss the names suggested by parties other than his own, including the TDP and the AIADMK.

However, Alexander's name, according to sources, figured last week in Vajpayee's talks with Chandrababu Naidu. BJP sources said Naidu neither committed himself to Alexander's candidature nor named a candidate. The BJP was looking at it as a sign that the TDP might accept an NDA-approved candidate, they said.

At last Saturday's NDA meeting to discuss the issue, MDMK's Vaiko was prompted by the BJP to indirectly pitch for Alexander. Vaiko argued that the NDA candidate should be from a minority community which hadn't yet had occupied Rashtrapati Bhawan.

NDA sources are citing various reasons to back their preference for Alexander and disinclination to give Narayanan a second term. Congress president Sonia Gandhi has been "mised" by some party colleagues into believing that Alexander's candidature is aimed at preventing her from becoming PM, they say. The assumption is that both President and Prime Minister cannot be from "the same community".

But BJP leaders reject this argument. "This isn't true. In public perception, Sonia is a Gandhi family member," a Cabinet minister said. "Why should the Congress object to a candidate who isn't a BJP member and has been with them?" he asked. In his view, a contest would be inevitable if Narayanan obliges the Opposition in spite of his failing health.

NDA authorises Vajpayee to choose nominee

Raisina card in PM hands

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 11. — The NDA today authorised the Prime Minister to initiate the process of finalising the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the coalition for the elections scheduled for July.

Though "consensus" is the official mantra in the ruling coalition, NDA and Opposition camps may choose to battle it out in the end, particularly in a scenario where the numbers are evenly poised.

The frontrunners seem to be Mr KR Narayanan, with the Left rooting for a second term for him, Maharashtra Governor Mr PC Alexander, being backed by a section of the BJP and Shiv Sena which is opposed to Mr Nar-

ayanan's second stint on Raisina Hill, and Vice-President Mr Krishan Kant, currently the dark horse in the race despite support from Mr Chandrababu Naidu and Mr Chandrasekhara.

The Congress, on the other hand, has lined up a series of aspirants. These include 10 Janpath-loyalist Dr Karan Singh, who may have the odds

95 am 11/11/95
from other Opposition parties against him. Congressmen say given the narrow gap between the Opposition and the NDA in the parliamentary tally, the party would prefer to watch-and-wait and keep options open for a Narayanan re-election.

The party also believes Mr Alexander, close to 10 Janpath, will not agree

to enter the fray from the rival camp. If the BJP insists on contest, the Congress, if not being sure of its strength, could bargain for the Vice-President's post, for which Mr Pranab Mukherjee is a contender. Mr Mukherjee, however, today ruled out this possibility.

Both sides admit that Mr Chandrababu Naidu's stand would be crucial. The TDP chief is keen to have Mr Krishan Kant as President.

One of the advantages for Mr Kant, who is not close to 10 Janpath, is that the incumbent Vice-President is traditionally elevated to the President's Chair.

And so far the President himself has not spoken his mind, but indications are that he may not be averse to a second term provided he is the consensus candidate.

■ Another report on page 5

DMK favours Dalit President

CHENNAI, May 11. — Mr M Karunanidhi said tonight the party prefers a person from among the minorities, Dalits or Backward Classes as the next President, but refused to say if the party has any specific person in mind.

In New Delhi, Mr Chandrababu Naidu declined to spell out the TDP's stand on Raisina Hill, saying he would do so "at the appropriate time". — PTI

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

NDA for consensus, not confrontation

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 11

IN A bid to avoid any kind of confrontation over the crucial presidential sweepstakes, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was today authorised by the NDA to work towards finding a consensus candidate. He is expected to hold consultations both with the NDA partners, including key parties providing outside support like the TDP and the BSP, and the Opposition.

This NDA decision comes ahead of the presidential election process being set in motion towards the end of May. President KR Narayanan completes his five-year tenure on July 26.

The electoral process, as per constitutional requirement, has to be put into motion two months ahead of the expiry of a sitting President's term.

At a meeting of the NDA convened by the Prime Minister at his Race Course Residence this afternoon, no specific names are understood to have come up for discussion. This was confirmed by NDA Convenor George Fernandes. He said the NDA had unanimously adopted a resolution authorising the Prime Minister to take a decision on the ensuing presidential election. He was categorical in asserting that "no single name was discussed at the hour-long meeting".

Reliable sources said the Prime Minister might pitch for a candidate who would be acceptable to the NDA and the Opposition, the Congress in particular. They indicated that as of now, a second term for KR Narayanan was not under consideration. The President himself has not indicated that he would like to stay on in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Such names as PC Alexander, the Maharashtra Governor, and LM Singhvi, a constitutional expert and former High Commissioner to the UK, are now doing their rounds in NDA circles. Among the two candidates, the latter seems to have a clear edge.

However, the NDA's plans could hit a roadblock should Narayanan opt for a second term. The Left parties have already expressed their preference for him and have said he should be given another stint of five years. "Once the Congress extends support to him, the NDA may find it difficult to deny him a second term," sources said.

This is because the NDA and the Opposition have nearly equal strength in the electoral college that will elect the President. All eyes are now on such parties as the Telegu Desam, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the AIADMK and Independents, who together could be the deciding factor if a contest becomes unavoidable.

India's
Next
President
HT-1

MS

Narayanan, too, is willin'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 28

IN A clear indication that the race for the President's chair could hot up soon, incumbent K R Narayanan hinted today that he might not be averse to contesting and had an "open mind" on running for a second term in Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Narayanan reportedly dropped broad hints to this effect when Congress chief and Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi met him this evening and said her party would like to see him continue as Head of the State after the expiry of his term on July 24.

Narayanan reportedly thanked Sonia, authorised by the CWC to choose the party's nominee for the President's post, during the 20-minute one-on-one she had with the President this evening.

The Congress chief was tight-lipped on what transpired at the meeting, but party sources said Narayanan's "open mind" was a clear enough signal that he might join the fray even if there is no consensus on his name.



Sonia Gandhi
Tight-lipped



K R Narayanan
Open mind

An NDA meeting earlier this month had virtually forestalled a consensus on Narayanan's name by proposing a minority candidate for the post. The PM, who is expected to go for a wider consultative exercise on the issue, raised the matter while briefing Sonia on the latest situation in Jammu and Kashmir and along the border.

But, if Narayanan chooses to contest, his Dalit background and his "excellent track-record" as President could end up driving a wedge in the NDA ranks. Already, the

Left parties, the SC-ST Parliamentary Forum and Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti have called for a second term for Narayanan. Former Prime Ministers V P Singh and I K Gujral too have met him separately over the past few days since the President returned to the Capital.

The Congress had earlier hailed Narayanan as "one of our exceptionally good Presidents" and signalled support for him for a second term provided the President himself was willing. The Left has already expressed its support for him.

Cross-voting hits BJP, Cong in RS polls

WSB J. Bhandari
Statesman News Service 5/1

NEW DELHI, March 27. — Cross-voting saw Mr Vijay Mallya, Mr Shibu Soren and Mr Dilip Ray through in the Rajya Sabha elections while Mr Shatrughan Sinha and Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav won on the strength of their parties.

The Congress suffered a setback in West Bengal, Orissa and Jharkhand, thanks to poor mobilisation of votes by its managers. Mr Sarfaraz Ahmed and Mrs Maurice Kujur lost from Jharkhand and Orissa. It was a major embarrassment for the BJP in Karnataka, Rajasthan and Jharkhand where some of its MLAs voted for other parties. Mr Vijay Mallya, liquor baron from Karnataka, won at the cost of the BJP nominee.

In Rajasthan, Mr Abrar Ahmed

fielded as a third candidate by the Congress — got elected, thanks to the BJP nominee, Mr Anil Bhakkar, who had withdrawn. Mr Ahmed was reportedly helped by a Mumbai-based industrialist to win the poll against heavy odds. He has been in the "good book" of the industrialist ever since he became a minister in the Narasimha Rao government. Congress sources said Mr Ahmed was nominated on the "request" of the industrial house. Mr K Natwar Singh and Mr Prabha Thakur were the other two Congress nominees to have been elected from Rajasthan.

In Jharkhand, it was a loss of face for Mr Yashwant Sinha whose hand-picked nominee Mr Ajay Maroo, though elected, got only 26 votes

Turn to page 6

(Continued from page 1)

against the JMM's Mr Shibu Soren who bagged 36 votes, highest in the state. The JMM on its own has only 12 votes, while the BJP and its allies have 50 votes.

In Bihar, Mr Laloo Yadav ensured the defeat of his detractor Mr Ranjan Yadav by "managing votes" for Mr Bashistha Narayan Singh who was fielded by Mr Nitish Kumar. Two RJD members who were

Rajya Sabha:

WSB J. Bhandari
elected from the state were Mr Prem Gupta and Mr Ramdeo Bhandari.

In Jharkhand, Mr Yadav took the Congress for a ride by first refusing to accommodate the party in Bihar for one seat and then insisting that Mr Sarfaraz Ahmed be fielded from Jharkhand despite objections from the AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar, Mr

Mahabir Prasad. SFB
Mr Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal and Orissa, failed to deliver the results.

In Orissa, the success of Mr Dilip Ray who was removed from the Vajpayee government is a blow to Mr Navin Patnaik. Mr Ray won as an Independent by poaching on the Congress and BJP votes.

Congress leader Mr Motilal Vora was earlier elected unopposed from Chhattisgarh.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAR 2002

BJP, BJD hit by cross-voting in RS polls

NEW DELHI, MARCH 27. The liquor baron, Vijay Mallya, and the former Union Minister, Dilip Ray, today notched up shock victories as cross-voting dealt a blow to BJP and its ally BJD in the Rajya Sabha biennial elections that saw the maiden entry of the RJD President, Laloo Prasad Yadav, to the Upper House and return of senior Congress leader, Natwar Singh.

Prominent among those elected today are the former Union Ministers Janardan Poojary and Abrar Ahmed, the Congress leader, Murli Deora, the Union Minister, V.P. Goyal, and the Videocon Chairman, R.N. Doot.

Film star and BJP nominee in Bihar, Shatrughan Sinha, managed to stay on in the House by garnering 37 votes, one more than the effective strength of the party in the 243-member Bihar Assembly, while the JMM leader, Shibu Soren, whose party badly lacked the number to win, romped home comfortably with the help 14 surplus votes in the Jharkhand Assembly.

Rocked by dissidence of a dozen MLAs, the BJP candidate in Karnataka, D.K. Taradevi, former Union Minister, lost to Mr. Mallya, independent candidate who managed to win with at least six BJP votes. He was backed by the Janata Parivar. The BJP's plight was tellingly brought forth with at least six of the party's 40 MLAs cross voting.

In Orissa, the ruling BJD suffered a setback when Mr. Ray, denied party nomination and expelled from it, emerged victorious as at least 14 members of his former party appeared to have voted for him.

What must have been more galling for BJD is that while 72 of its members had cast votes, the party could muster only 58 first preference votes in favour of its four candidates.

In Bihar, while Laloo Prasad Yadav got the highest number of 49 votes, his bete noire and expelled RJD leader, Ranjan Prasad Yadav, who contested as an independent, lost after appearing to be a pre-poll favourite. — PTI

28 MAR 2002

4 MLAs defy Mamata whip

511
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 27. — Miss Mamata Banerjee's candidate won the Rajya Sabha polls bagging the highest number of votes. But the Trinamul chief had to suffer the indignity of having had four "traitors" who defied her whip and voted for the Congress candidate at today's election by secret ballot.

Politically, the incident is being interpreted as a big blow to the Trinamul and a "personal defeat" for Miss Banerjee. Many in the Trinamul said in private that this is the "beginning of the end" for the party.

How things are going to shape up in Trinamul circles is to be closely watched following today's "undesirable" development, Trinamul leaders believe.

Four Left Front candidates also won the polls along with Trinamul candidate Mr Dinesh Trivedi. The victory of Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, Mr Tarini Roy, Mr Kab-

iruddin Ahmed of the CPI-M and Mr Debabrata Biswas of the Forward Bloc was expected. The contest was primarily for the fifth seat, between Mr Trivedi and the Congress' Mr Arjun Sengupta.

Miss Banerjee had issued a whip to her MLAs to cast all 60 votes in Mr Trivedi's favour, though the magic figure for him was only 49. The Legislature Party had also made it clear to MLAs that all 60 votes should go in Mr Trivedi's favour. However, four Trinamul MLAs, allegedly on account of "huge bargaining", voted for the Congress nominee, causing gloom in the Trinamul camp.

Though Mr Trivedi called the results a victory for "Miss Banerjee", disheartened party legislators are set to go on a witch-hunt. Mr Jyotipriya Mallick, Trinamul MLA who played a major role in Mr Trivedi's campaign, said: "All of us should hang our heads in shame as four of our MLAs turned out to be purchasable commodities." Trinamul MLA Mrs Naya-

na Bandopadhyay said it was hard to believe an MLA could go against the party.

The Rajya Sabha poll saw the casting of 292 ballots. Of this, three were invalid. Though the Left leadership attributed this to inadvertent errors in the marking of the ballots, the fact is that all three invalid votes had been cast in the Left's favour, raising doubts whether the GNLF, SUCI or someone from the Left did it deliberately to belittle Alimuddin Street.

Mr Trivedi bagged 56 votes, highest among the six candidates. As for the Left Front, Mr Prasanta Chatterjee, Mr Tarini Roy and Mr Kabiruddin Ahmed (all CPI-M) got 51, 50 and 50 respectively. Mr Debabrata Biswas (Forward Bloc) got 49 votes. Two votes for Mr Biswas and one for Mr Roy were declared invalid.

Mr Sengupta lost despite support from the four Trinamul MLAs who raised his tally from 29 to the unexpected 33.

Photograph in Kolkata Plus page 1

THE STATESMAN

Cong alluring our MLAs: Mamata

9. Buelu
Patnaik
PS

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, March 24. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today said the Congress was trying to allure Trinamul MLAs to get their votes for the Rajya Sabha polls in the state.

Asked whether these allurements included "financial offers", she said all sorts of enticements were being offered to the MLAs.

This is unfortunate and unethical facet of national politics today that a party which does not have the requisite number of MLAs fields a candidate hoping for cross-voting, she said.

The Trinamul chief said she was confident that none of her party MLAs would be "enticed" to vote for the Congress candidate Mr Arjun Sengupta.

Miss Banerjee was scheduled to meet party MLAs for a last-minute pep talk at Maharashtra Niwas hall this evening. MLAs from Kakdwip and Canning would not be able to attend today's meeting. Their absence should not be misinterpreted, she said.

BJD-BJP suspicion over Dilip Ray

BHUBANESWAR, March 24. — Mr Dilip Ray's candidature for the Rajya Sabha elections has created an atmosphere of suspicion in the BJD-BJP combine and other major parties. The BJP is suspicious of the BJD leadership's tilt towards the Congress. The BJD is apprehensive of the BJP siding with Mr Ray. The Congress is peeved at reports of AICC leaders being in league with the BJD.

In fact, Mr Ray's entry into the fray as an Independent has posed a challenge to Mr Navin Patnaik. Mr Ray, recently expelled from the party, has become a rallying point for disgruntled elements and anti-Navin forces. The BJD has nominated Ms Sushree Devi and Ms Pramila Boidar. The BJP has fielded Mr Suren Lath and the Congress Mr Maurice Kujur. The House arithmetic is such that the BJD can win two seats and the BJP one. Both parties have a surplus of 24 votes while the Congress is short of five to see its candidate through. — SNS

Mr Pranab Mukherjee, state Congress chief, had written to her seeking Trinamul's support but he should not have released the letter to the media before receiving her reply, she said.

Mr Mukherjee admitted he had written to Miss Banerjee seeking support for Congress candidates in the Rajya Sabha polls but there has been no "positive response", adds SNS from

Siliguri. Mr Mukherjee was speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the Youth Congress' first North Bengal convention.

The Trinamul chief said Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya's election to the Rajya Sabha in 2000 aided by Congress MLAs cannot be equated to the present situation. Mr Bhattacharya was an Independent candidate while Mr Sengupta is the official Congress candidate.

THE STATESMAN

29 MAR 2002

Three ex-PMs in race for President

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
in New Delhi

April 14. — The Prime Minister's Office has three unusual "job applications" for the President's post.

They are from three former Prime Ministers.

Sources said Mr PV Narasimha Rao, Mr VP Singh and Mr Chandra Shekhar have "subtly and not-so-subtly informed the government that they would be more than willing to be considered".

All have cited their stature and tenure in politics as the required criteria.

Sources said while it's too early to say if any of the former Prime Ministers stands a chance, some others being mentioned for Rashtrapati Bhavan — Dr PC Alexander and Dr Karan Singh — are viewed by senior government leaders as "not having a high

571 1574
enough stature". Dr Alexander and Dr Singh rather "have better vice-presidential" prospects.

The Congress has a high-profile "application", too. It's from

Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet lobbied for the TDP's support during the CPI-M's conference in Hyderabad. But in no way would the BJP and most of its

dential candidate through (there are many contenders at the moment for that post), the Congress' support is vital if any consensus is to emerge for a presidential candidate.

Sources said barring Dr Rajendra Prasad, who was twice elected to the nation's top post, (especially because he had never served a term as Vice-President), there is no precedent for giving a sitting President a second term, which virtually rules out the current incumbent, Mr KR Narayanan. The Vice-President, Mr Krishan Kant, is not a leading contender either for the NDA or the Congress.

Apart from Dr Alexander and Dr Singh, the other contenders for the Vice-President's post are Dr Farooq Abdullah, Dr Najma Heptullah (whose chances are not too good given her equation with the Leader of the Opposition) and Dr Manmohan Singh.

'More than willing' candidates



PV Narasimha Rao



VP Singh



Chandra Shekhar

Mr Jyoti Basu on whose behalf the CPI-M has sought the Congress' support.

A reportedly non-committal Mrs Sonia Gandhi has urged for a consensus on his name, and, if that comes through, she would have no problem endorsing his candidature.

NDA allies consider his candidacy, making the suggestion a virtual non-starter.

And the government has made it clear that it wants a consensus candidate, not a contest.

Though the NDA has a majority in Parliament and would have no problem seeing its vice-presi-

LF allies fume at RS seat allocation

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 8

THE FISSURES within the Left Front were there for all to see today as its chairman Biman Bose announced candidates for the Rajya Sabha elections. Angry at not receiving a single Rajya Sabha seat, the CPI said it would weaken the Front unity.

Of the five Rajya Sabha seats falling vacant from the State's quota, the Left Front has announced candidates for four. The elections are to be held on March 27.

Expectedly, the CPM kept three seats for itself. The fourth went to the Forward Bloc. Front partner CPI's district secretary Manju Majumdar bitterly criticised the CPM leadership for breaking its promise. Bose, on the other hand, reminded CPI of its Kerala promise.

While the Forward Bloc re-nominated its general secretary Debabrata Biswas, CPM will field three new candidates — Kolkata's former Mayor

Prasanta Chatterjee, Cooch Behar district leader Tarini Roy and Nadia district secretary former MLA Khabiruddin Ahmed.

"Candidates were selected after discussions with the Front constituents," said Bose. He refused to comment on the CPI's criticism. "The decision on Rajya Sabha seat allocation were taken by CPM's all-India general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet and his CPI counterpart A B Bardhan," he said. Bose assured that differences would be ironed out through discussions.

CPI district secretary Manju Majumdar has criticised the move and again alluded to the letter by former Left Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta dated March 8, 2000, where in the late leader had assured CPI of a RS seat in 2002.

According to CPI, both Surjeet and Dasgupta had promised a seat to the party in 2000, when CPI ministers Nandagopal Bhattacharya and Sreekumar

Mukherjee pulled out of the ministry protesting denial of extension to CPI nominee Gurudas Dasgupta.

Bose harped on the changed situation after the Left Democratic Front lost Kerala.

"CPM and CPI were to share a single RS seat in Kerala. As per the deal, CPI's VD Raghavan was to vacate his RS seat after serving three years of his term. The seat was to go to CPM," said Bose.

The arrangement is not feasible anymore, with United Democratic Front coming to power. "If Raghavan resigns, the seat will go to UDF. Since Raghavan gets to continue, we cannot sacrifice another seat to CPI," Bose said.

Majumdar said there was no question of leaving the Front. "We will stay with the Front. This episode, however, has left a bad taste in our mouths. This would weaken left unity," said he. Bhattacharya had yesterday said CPI was with the Front due to political compulsions.

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