

# Mulayam dismisses Rahul's status

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE/PTI  
LUCKNOW, JUNE 10

**U**TTAR Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav has sought to belittle Congress MP Rahul Gandhi for his remarks on the law and order situation in the state. "Rahul Gandhi ki *haisiyat nahin ki hum unka naam le*" (Rahul Gandhi's stature is not such that I take his name)," Yadav told reporters at a press conference here, when asked to comment on the Congress leader's remarks. On the strained relationship with the Congress,

Yadav said his party was supporting it despite undergoing humiliations.

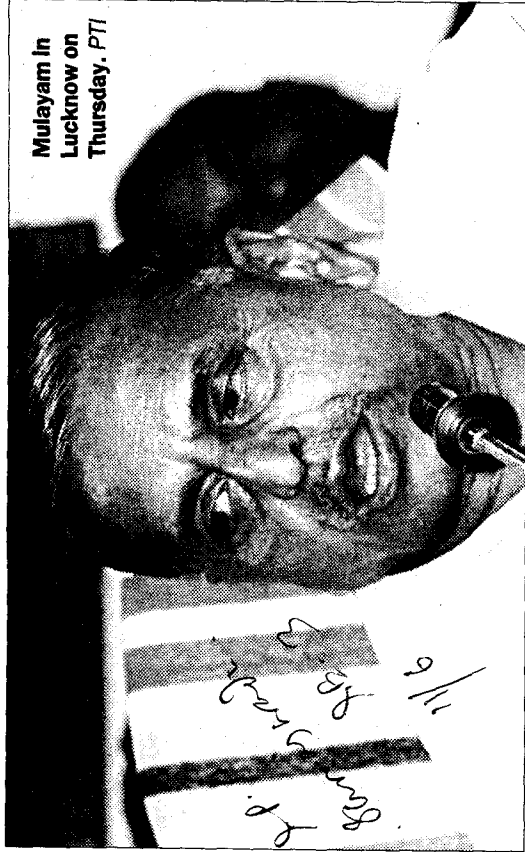
Attacking his detractors in New Delhi, he said: "Bahut bol

*rahen hain. Dilli aur Bambaee ko to dekhen. Rail men bhi murder ho rahe hain, yeh*

too much. Just look at Delhi and Mumbai. Murders have been taking place in running trains, but these they cannot see."

Mulayam claimed the law and order situation in UP was the best in the country, with Delhi and Mumbai topping the crime graph. He said certain elements with the Samajwadi Party dubbed as "*goonde aur badmash*" became "*sadhus, tapasvis aur paropkari* (saints, mendicants and benefactors) on joining the BJP and Congress.

"*Kya karen. Sadhu ab Dilli pahunch gaye hain, pehle Bhajappa ke saath the ab*



Mulayam in Lucknow on Thursday. PTI

*Congress ke saath hain* (The sadhus have now reached Delhi. Earlier, they were a part of the BJP, now they are with the Congress)," Yadav said.

Referring to BJP's defeat in the Lok Sabha polls, Yadav said: "Do you know who is it we defeated in the recent elec-

## 'We're supporting Congress despite humiliations'

tions? Who ensured the defeat of Murlidhar Joshi, Swami Chinmayanand and Vinay Katiyar? Of course, the Samajwadi Party," adding, "Everybody knows it isn't easy to dislodge my government."

## UPCC to launch protests across state

AMIT SHARMA  
LUCKNOW, JUNE 10

DIFFERENCES between the Samajwadi Party and Congress have now extended beyond a war of words, with the latter deciding to launch state-wide demonstrations on June 15 to highlight the Mulayam government's failure to check rising crime and ensure proper power supply.

The UP Congress headquarters sent directives to its district chiefs for the protest programme and a consolidated memorandum will be submitted to Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri with the request that the same should be forwarded to the Centre.

This is first time since it extended support to the Mulayam government in August last year that the Congress has decided to

go for a planned protest against it on an issue concerning the people. Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's two-day visit to Rae Bareilly beginning Friday, is set to boost the morale of partymen, and the decision has added to the discomfort of Mulayam who is facing criticism from all quarters over the law and order and power situations.

"The Mulayam government would not have been formed had we not been the first to extend support but this government is functioning with vendetta and against the expectations of the people. We will make an attempt to ensure that this government should be changed," said UPCC chief Jagdambika Pal. Pal met other office-bearers on the issue today and claimed that the party would ensure that "our first state-wide protest against the Mulayam government"

should not go unnoticed. In fact, the SP and the Congress had never had good relations ever since the party propped up the Mulayam government. But the row after Amethi MP Rahul Gandhi's indictment of the Mulayam government on the twin issues has played an incendiary role and forced party workers to take their differences to the public.

"Rahulji is a representative of more than three lakh people in Parliament but first Amar Singh and now CM Mulayam has tried to dismiss his statement by terming him as a kid. We will not tolerate such a personal attack on Rahulji," claimed Pal.

"*Woh (Rahul) abhi us haisiyat ka nahin ki hum uska naam le. Uchal kood macha raha hai, machane do* (He is not of the status that I should name him. He is creating a ruckus. Let him do so)," Mulayam said.

# The importance of being Mulayam

Saroj Nagi  
New Delhi, April 25

EVERYBODY WANTS something from Mulayam Yadav — especially they want to know what's on his mind. As the polls roll into his state tomorrow, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister and Samajwadi Party boss finds himself the man of the moment, facing overtures from every direction.

The Congress has appealed for a tactical understanding with him against the BJP in Madhya Pradesh. The NCP said Mulayam could hold the key in a hung Parliament. And the CPI-M announced the SP chief had assured it that he would not be swayed by the NDA's overtures.

The SP has 10 of the 32 UP seats that go to the polls on Monday. It is

expected to hold on to or increase its tally, thus setting Mulayam up as kingmaker — if not king — in a hung House. The Prime Minister and NDA convener George Fernandes appeared to recognise this possibility when they recently referred to Mulayam as a "friend" with whom they enjoyed ideological affinity.

Mulayam has so far avoided disappointing anybody, springing the air with vague hints that all could interpret to their advantage. Yesterday, his party denied the assertions by Vajpayee and Fernandes. Today, the CPI(M)'s H.S. Surjeet issued a statement saying the SP chief had assured him about his party's commitment to secularism.

Then Mulayam told Aaj Tak he would not support a BJP can-



**Mulayam Singh Yadav**

*Keeps everybody guessing*

didate for the prime ministership. As to whether he would back a non-BJP candidate (he didn't clarify if he/she could be from an NDA partner), he would decide after the polls.

Mulayam then sidestepped a

question about Sonia Gandhi's candidature, saying: "Our party has not taken a decision on this."

Yet, hours after the interview, Mulayam told a rally in Mirzapur that a third front of smaller parties could play the key role after the election.

Amid all this ambiguity, A.B. Vajpayee, when asked whether the BJP and SP could come together after the polls, said rather cryptically: "They (SP) would start howling. There are many possibilities. It is there now. It is difficult to detail them."

Hoping to get his support in the fight against the BJP, the Congress appealed to Mulayam, to withdraw the 26 candidates he has fielded in Madhya Pradesh, arguing they would divide the secular vote and benefit the BJP.

## SP manifesto woos minorities

Statesman News Service

LUCKNOW, April 9. — The Samajwadi Party today released its 16-page manifesto here which is specially wooing the minorities and promises 10 per cent reservation in government jobs for Muslims and the poor upper caste Hindus. It also promises to play an important role for a government of "third force" after the elections.

Party chief Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav and party general secretary Mr Amar Singh released the manifesto. The manifesto, however, had no mention of the "foreign origin" controversy and also that of Ram mandir. It declares that it wouldn't interfere with the Muslim personal law. It has alleged that the BJP in the past had been attacking the minorities and took over the government in Gujarat "playing a naked game of communalism".

The SP was against abolishing Article 370 of the Constitution and also Article 356 which provides for Emergency powers. "Those who were advocating removal of Article 356 should realise that anti-national forces still exist in the country," the party said. The manifesto points out that though other parties were against communal forces, the SP was the only one fighting a "decisive battle against them in the real sense".

THE STATESMAN 10 APR 2004

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20/3 Rational choice  
BSP Stands To Gain Little From Alliances

COMMON sense might suggest that the BSP's decision to go it alone for the Lok Sabha polls is an example of sheer cussedness and can benefit only the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. Closer examination will show, however, that it is a perfectly rational decision from the BSP's standpoint. The party has once before had an alliance with the Congress for the state assembly elections. What it learnt from that experience was that while the tie-up worked to the advantage of the Congress, the BSP itself gained very little. The reason: while the BSP has the ability to convince its supporters to vote for the Congress, the latter's support base is not easily transferable to the BSP. Under the circumstances, therefore, a tie-up with the Congress would have made sense for the BSP only if it had been able to wrest some concessions in other states like Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. Clearly, what was on offer in these states was judged inadequate by Mayawati.

With the Samajwadi Party also ruling out any possibility of a pre-poll pact with the Congress, UP is clearly set for a quadrangular contest. Once again, it is not necessarily true that the BJP will be the biggest gainer in a four-cornered contest. A Congress-BSP alliance, for instance, may have been a bigger threat to the SP given the potential such a formation would have had of eating into the SP's support base among the Muslims in particular. More than the BJP, therefore, the SP might be heaving a sigh of relief at the way things have turned out. In a quadrangular contest, the SP can also consider itself best placed vis-a-vis the situation in the last Lok Sabha elections. Unlike the last time, when it had no meaningful allies, the SP now has Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal as a useful partner in western UP. The BJP is making much of the fact that Kalyan Singh has re-joined the party, but he was very much in the party in 1999 as well. Of course, the situation on the ground may have changed considerably in these last five years, but on the whole it seems to have changed in favour of the SP and the BSP rather than the BJP.

# Contest for Sonia seat, silence on Atal

## Mayavati names <sup>HR</sup> 75 nominees <sup>RRP</sup>

KAY BENEDICTI

**New Delhi, March 17:** Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayavati today released the names of candidates for 75 of the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, paving the way for a four-cornered contest, but kept options open for post-poll alliances.

Belying expectations that she would leave two or three seats for Sonia Gandhi and her family even if there is no alliance with the Congress, Mayavati fielded candidates from Amethi and Rae Bareilly, the family's fief, while not announcing any candidate from Lucknow yet.

Candidates for Lucknow, the constituency of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and four others, including Akbarpur (from where Mayavati won in 1999), were left unannounced.

Mayavati — who released her party's manifesto, which demanded 65 per cent reservation for the *bahujan samaj* in the private sector, the judiciary, the Rajya Sabha and the legislative councils — said the BSP will contest 325 of the 544 seats across the country.

"If I.K. Gujral, who has no base, can be Prime Minister, if Chandra Shekhar, who has no mass base, can be PM, if (H.D.) Deve Gowda, who has some base only in Karnataka, can become PM, why not a Dalit *ki beti*?" she asked, while releasing names of 205 candidates.

Although the BSP does not have a single MP outside Uttar Pradesh, the party is contesting 21 seats in Madhya Pradesh, nine in Haryana, six in Punjab, 14 in Rajasthan, all five in Uttaranchal, 38 in Bengal

and 37 in Bihar.

In Bihar, Mayavati has not even spared Laloo Prasad Yadav. Abhayraj Kishore Yadav is her candidate in Chhapra from where the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief is expected to contest.

The BSP chief described as baseless reports that she suggested (in one of her meetings with Sonia) that the Opposition project her as Prime Minister and held the Congress responsible for such "false propaganda".

She also disagreed that a four-corner contest would benefit the BJP. "In UP, a four-corner contest will benefit the BSP," she said.

Mayavati dismissed allegations that she spurned the Congress' overtures under pressure from the BJP.

She said she had waited for the Congress to withdraw support to the Mulayam Singh Yadav government till March 12, but added that she did not make it a condition for an alliance with the Congress.

Asked if the BSP would support a common candidate against Vajpayee, she said no party had approached her in this regard.

About the possibility of an alliance with the Congress, Mayavati declared it was a closed chapter.

Even if the Congress withdrew support to the Uttar Pradesh government now, it was too late, she said, adding: "You can't sail in two boats at the same time and this was what the Congress leadership tried to do."

"The BSP would not align with any national or state-level party and would contest the elections on its own."



Mayavati shows the list of candidates in New Delhi on Wednesday. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

## Cong in review mode

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, March 17:** The Congress believes its hopes of an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party have not been extinguished even though Mayavati today named candidates for 75 of Uttar Pradesh's 80 Lok Sabha seats.

"We do not have any internal indication so far (from Mayavati) to rule out the possibility of an alliance with the BSP," Congress' Salman Khursheed said.

Even though Mayavati has ruled out a pre-poll alliance, Congress general secretary Ambika Soni went a step further than

Khursheed, saying the party would "continue its efforts to prevent secular fragmentation (in Uttar Pradesh) until the 11th hour."

Khursheed and Soni spoke soon after Mayavati's announcement; later in the evening, the Congress said the BSP chief's naming of candidates warranted a "review" of its poll strategy.

"We will review Mayavati's statement," party spokesman Abhishek Singhvi said.

The review will have to wait as Sonia Gandhi is yet to return from her Gujarat roadshow.

Not many senior leaders have any idea about the secret talks with the BSP since the Congress

chief has been directly negotiating with her BSP counterpart.

Sonia may reportedly have had an unpublicised round of talks with Mayavati as recently as Monday midnight. It appears the Congress chief could not get Mayavati to agree to a Congress-BSP pre-poll, seat-sharing pact.

Just four days ago, it seemed the Congress might make an impression on Mayavati after working committee member Arjun Singh said the party's support for the Mulayam Singh Yadav government should be reviewed.

But Arjun's statement either failed to impress the BSP chief or came too late.

## Blow to Cong in Punjab

OUR CORRESPONDENT

**Chandigarh, March 17:** Mayavati today followed up her heartland blow to the Congress with a similar one in Punjab, announcing candidates for five Lok Sabha seats without waiting for any tie-ups.

The Congress and the BSP have not been on very amiable terms of late, with chief minister Amarinder Singh having shut out the Bahujan Samaj Party chief from Jalandhar during the caste riots last year. He had also blocked thousands of Dalits from entering Chandigarh for one of her rallies.

With Dalit voters comprising nearly 35 per cent of the population, the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal have traditionally vied for their support. Now that the BSP has entered the fray, the stage is set for a three-cornered contest in Jalandhar, Phillaur, Ferozepur, Ropar and Sangrur.

"We have had enough of the Akalis and the Congress. Both have never done anything for us. They have only used us to come to power. Now is the time for us to show our strength," BSP leader Avtar Singh Karimpuri said.

"The BSP's decision to go it alone will help the Shiromani Akali Dal-BJP combine. The Dalit vote will now not go to the Congress," Akali secretary Daljit Singh Cheema said.

But state Congress president H.S. Hanspal, who has for the last two months been trying to work out some poll agreement with the BSP, voiced confidence that talks could be held for seats where candidates had not been fielded yet.

'SP HAS TACIT UNDERSTANDING WITH BJP'

# Mayawati rules out alliance with Congress

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, MARCH 13. The Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Mayawati, today once again ruled out the possibility of an electoral alliance with the Congress and declared that her party would go it alone in the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing party workers at a rally at the Ambedkar Maidan here, she castigated the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party for "working against the interests of the Bahujan Samaj". Only if a BSP Government came to power at the Centre "Bahujan" interests could be served and the party cadre should make all efforts for this, Ms. Mayawati said.

Taking exception to the Congress' support to the Samajwadi Party Government in Uttar Pradesh, she said the Congress was trying to "sail in two boats." On the one hand, it wanted an alliance with the BSP and, on the other, it was supporting the Samajwadi Party Government which kept reversing the decisions taken by her erstwhile Government. Ms. Mayawati alleged that during its long rule the Congress did nothing for the social and economic uplift of the weaker sections. Whenever there was a situation favourable for the BSP to come to power, the Congress did not support it. It was because of its "blameworthy policies" that the Congress

could not prevent the growth of communal forces. She said that the Samajwadi Party had a "tacit understanding" with the BJP. The Congress was supporting the U.P. Government led by the Samajwadi Party, which, she claimed, was likely to join the National Democratic Alliance after the elections.

The BJP-led Government at the Centre was trying to "tarnish her party's image with the help of the Central Bureau of Investigation." The CBI had failed to collect any evidence against her in the Taj Heritage Corridor case during the past four months and was yet to file a

## No tie-up with Congress: SP

LUCKNOW, MARCH 13. The Samajwadi Party today closed its doors to the Congress for any tie-up in the Lok Sabha polls.

Hours after the BSP president, Mayawati, ruled out alliance with the Congress, the Samajwadi Party general secretary, Amar Singh, said the senior Congress leader, Arjun Singh's statement yesterday hinting that the party might review its support to the Mulayam Singh Government in Uttar Pradesh has closed the door for a poll pact between the two parties. "Arjun Singh's statement has left no room for any tie-up," he said. — PTI

chargesheet. But she could not be threatened and was ready to spend her life in jail like the South African leader, Nelson Mandela. The Taj case would also end up like the Float Pump case and she would emerge blameless, she said. She had to seek the BJP's support in the past for forming the Government only because the Samajwadi Party and the Congress refused to back a BSP-led Government. Last time when she was the Chief Minister, the BJP tried to split her party and this led to her resignation.

Denying the charge that she had supported the BJP during the Gujarat riots, Ms. Mayawati said she had demanded an impartial probe into the riots. If the allegations against her were found to be correct, she would "quit politics forever."

She cautioned her party workers not to be misled by the Opposition propaganda that once the Taj Heritage case was withdrawn, she would join hands with the BJP. Even when she formed a Government with BJP support she had never compromised on her policies and programmes, she said.

Ridiculing the BJP's "feel good factor" slogan, she said the Bahujan Samaj felt good only during the past tenures of her governments in U.P. A similar situation could arise if a BSP Government came to power at the Centre.

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 BSP  
**Yet to decide on alliance: Mayawati**

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, FEB. 2.** As the stage for early Lok Sabha polls appears set, the Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Mayawati, today denied reports that her party had entered into an alliance with the Congress and said it was still pondering over the issue.

At a press conference here, she sought to downplay her recent meetings with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, asserting that she only had "general discussions."

On persistent queries, Ms. Mayawati said she agreed with Ms. Gandhi's views on the need to "halt the march of communal forces in their tracks." However, she added that it was not necessary for

the BSP to align with the Congress or any other party to strengthen secular forces. "I have not decided anything on having an alliance with the Congress. Whatever decision I take, it will be in the interest of the Bahujan Samaj and the party," she added.

There was ample time to think of poll alliances as the Lok Sabha had not yet been dissolved and elections announced. "I have called for detailed reports from several States where the BSP's presence is felt. After going through the analytical reports from our units, I will take a decision."

Ms. Mayawati said that in the recent Assembly elections in four States, the BSP had fought alone. "We are neither

nervous nor afraid of elections. We will enter into the electoral battle with full preparedness and take on all challenges." She criticised the NDA Government's decision to advance the Lok Sabha polls. "Probably, the BJP is enthused with the success in the Assembly polls in three States and wants to hide its shortcomings."

However, she had another reason to offer for early Lok Sabha elections. "The BJP has consulted astrologers who have reportedly predicted that the party was running a favourable period till April. Will our country be now run on superstitions and blind faith," she asked.

On reports questioning how the BSP could have an alliance with the Congress

as the latter was supporting the Samajwadi Party Government in Uttar Pradesh, she said: "Since there is no alliance with the Congress, the question of thinking about the SP or putting any condition on the Congress does not arise."

Referring to Mr. Yadav's victory from the Gannaur Assembly segment, she said her party had boycotted the election for which repolling had been ordered at an unprecedented number of 107 polling booths. "Where was the contest when our party boycotted the election?" she asked.

She also announced the appointment of the former Uttar Pradesh Advocate-General, Satish Mishra, as the BSP's new general secretary at the central level.

# Mayavati magic sours Sonia spell

## Doting daughter remembers Atal

KAY BENEDECT

New Delhi, Feb. 2: Mayavati today waved the magic wand that makes her the most unpredictable politician in India, transforming the turnaround mood in the Congress and the poll calculations of most key players.

Dubbing herself Atal Bhari Vajpayee's "second daughter" and seizing on the Prime Minister's play on the word "mazya", the Bahujan Samaj Party chief today hinted at the possibility of again doing business with the BJP which she was bent on defeating a few months ago.

The loaded words came at a news conference Mayavati had called to dismiss reports that she had forged an alliance with Sonia Gandhi at a dinner meeting two days ago.

"My meeting with Sonia Gandhi was routine. But newspapers have come up with speculative stories. This is not right," the BSP leader said.

Asked if there was any chance of her party softening its stand regarding the BJP, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said: "If the Prime Minister realises in front of the people of the country that (a) step-motherly attitude was adopted towards me, then I will consider."

Mayavati's sudden love for the Prime Minister comes in the wake of the government's advice to the Central Bureau of Investi-

gation to go slow in seeking her arrest in the Taj corridor case and Vajpayee's comments, though satirical, in Ranchi yesterday.

"Maya is with Sonia Gandhi but we are spreading the web of prosperity," Vajpayee had said, taking a swipe at the Congress chief for her accusation that his government was spreading a "mazya jaal" (illusion).

For the record, Mayavati said she would decide on alliances only after the announcement of poll dates and her party will fight "communal forces."

But she dropped enough hints to spillo the Congress mood and keep everyone guessing:

■ Vajpayee has an adopted daughter; I am grateful to him for suddenly remembering his second daughter.

■ This is a good thing. I thank him for it. This was because the reward was step-motherly treatment towards the second daughter for the last few months.

■ The BJP is a communal party. We tied up with the BJP thrice on issues but never on ideology.

■ I have come to know from reliable sources that another reason for advancing the polls was that the BJP had consulted astrologers who predicted that the party had a favourable period till April. (But) The country cannot progress on decisions based on superstitions.

■ It is not necessary (for her party) to enter into alliances for strengthening secular forces.

## LOSER AND GAINERS

☹ **CONGRESS**  
The biggest loser, if Mayavati sticks to her guns. Sonia Gandhi now stares at the daunting prospect of going it alone in Uttar Pradesh, which sends the largest number of MPs to the Lok Sabha. Other prospective allies like Ait Singh will also balk at a pact now

☺ **BJP**  
Congress' loss has to be BJP's gain. A Mayavati-Congress alliance would have made a difference in several seats and prevented a split in the minority vote, making the BJP's position tenuous

☺ **SAMAJWADI**  
Mayavati's immediate gain is expected to be a breather in the Taj Corridor scam case, which is now being probed by the CBI. Mayavati can keep her post-poll options open and bargain hard

☺ **MULAYAM**  
Mulayam Singh Yadav can breathe easy now. The minority vote — Mulayam Singh's biggest asset — could have shifted to a Mayavati-Congress alliance after innuendoes of a tacit deal between the BJP and the Samajwadi

The let-down in public could not have come at a worse time for the Congress, which was getting its act together with Sonia going out of her way to court prospective allies.

A breakthrough with Mayavati would have helped the Congress president better manage other alliances, which are now entering the bare-knuckle bar-

gaining phase after the initial euphoria. (See Page 6)

If the BSP does contest the elections on its own, it would suit the BJP as well as Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party.

The BJP realises that a Sonia-Mayavati alliance in Uttar Pradesh could see a revival of the Congress in the hearthland and cloud its chances of retaining



Mayavati at the news conference in New Delhi on Monday. (PTI)

power at the Centre, while the Samajwadi is wary of a shift of Muslim votes away from it.

Mayavati also dismissed reports that the BSP had put a condition that the Congress should withdraw support to the Mulayam Singh government in Uttar Pradesh.

Asked whether she was "ditching" her party's stand because

of the Taj corridor case, she said there was no pressure from either the Congress or the BJP.

"Whoever wants to do anything, can do. I have not done anything wrong. Ours is a national party and it will not act on anyone's dictates. I will not see personal interests but interests of the *bahujan samaj*," added the BSP leader.



# No tie-ups with BSP or SP: BJP

HT Correspondent & PTI  
Bangalore/Nagpur, January 18

BJP PRESIDENT Venkaiah Naidu said on Sunday that the party would contest the coming Lok Sabha polls in Uttar Pradesh on its own "as of now" and did not see any possibility of a tie-up with the Samajwadi Party or the Bahujan Samaj Party. But the BJP seemed to keep open the option for a tie-up with the AIADMK, a day after Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa hinted at her party's willingness for the same.

Talking to reporters after the BJP Karnataka unit's state council meeting in Bangalore, Naidu said, "I do not see any possibility of the BJP and SP coming together. We will contest on our own in Uttar Pradesh. That is the situation as of now."

Asked about moves to bring former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh back into the BJP fold, Naidu dismissed the query, saying, "We do not discuss individuals."

On an alliance with the Mayawati-led BSP, he said she was not with the BJP. On the speculation about an alliance between the BJP and AIADMK, Naidu said there had been no discussion so far on the issue. "I am neither proposing nor opposing (the alliance)," he said.

Asked if the doors were still open for the Sharad Pawar-led NCP to join the NDA, he said, "Whoever accepts Vajpayee's leadership is welcome."

He said the BJP was keeping an open mind on alliances, but they would be forged only with those parties which were willing to accept Vajpayee's leadership

## Sangma meets PM



AMID THE tussle with Sharad Pawar over aligning with the Congress, NCP leader P.A. Sangma met Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Sunday night and discussed the possibilities of a tie-up between his newly-floated North-east People's Forum and the ruling NDA for the Lok Sabha polls.

PTI, New Delhi

and his capacity to lead the nation. He said the BJP would firm up alliances once the notification for the polls is issued. "Till such time, everything is open," he said.

Naidu added that the Lok Sabha elections would be fought on national, and not on state issues and "it will be Vajpayee versus question mark".

In Nagpur, BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan also rejected the possibility of electoral alliances with the SP and the BSP. "There is no possibility of an alliance either with Mulayam or Mayawati," he said.

■ LS polls date only after revision of rolls, Page 4