

# Cash-for-vote slur on George Fernandes

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, Dec. 25. — Former defence minister and JD-U president Mr George Fernandes is now in the centre of a controversy for his alleged violation of the model code of conduct.

Muzaffarpur district administration today lodged an FIR against Mr Fernandes and some of his supporters, following a complaint that they paid money to 40-year-old Sumita Devi. Muzaffarpur is Mr Fernandes' constituency.

Devi, fed up with poverty, reportedly attempted suicide on

Thursday. She jumped into a river from a bridge in the town with her two young children. But, they were rescued by some fishermen and admitted to a hospital.

The full Election Commission will meet in New Delhi tomorrow to discuss the filing of the case against Mr Fernandes and its official Mr KJ Rao's report on violation of the model code of conduct in Bihar.

Superintendent of Police Mr Amit Lodha said a case has been filed under Sec. 171(b) of IPC (attempts to induce voters) against the former Union minister and his party workers. Mr Lodha

## DM BACK ON DUTY

PATNA, Dec. 25. — Patna DM Mr Gautam Goswami today resumed duty after receiving the EC directive asking him not to proceed on leave till the completion of the Bihar Assembly poll process. "I will abide by the EC directive and work till the poll process is completed," Mr Goswami said. — SNS

said the money — a sum of Rs 500 — was seized from Devi.

Denying the allegation, Mr

Fernandes said that on learning about the incident, he and his party colleagues went to see Devi and her family. "Neither did I have any money nor did I give it. I will file a suit against those trying to defame me. It is totally false, fictitious."

Devi said her husband Tuntun Paswan was the sole earning member of the family and had been bed-ridden owing to illness.

Muzaffarpur DM Mr SK Mishra did not clarify whether the money was given by Mr Fernandes himself, but added that the JD-U leader was present when the cash was offered to the Dalit family.

# Laloo gives his model 'truth'

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OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, Dec. 24:** Faced with the threat of his party being de-recognised, Laloo Prasad Yadav today met the chief election commissioner to explain why he distributed money to villagers near Patna after the polls in Bihar were announced.

An adviser to the election commissioner, K.J. Rao, who was sent to Bihar following charges that the RJD had misused government facilities for political purposes, also submitted his report today.

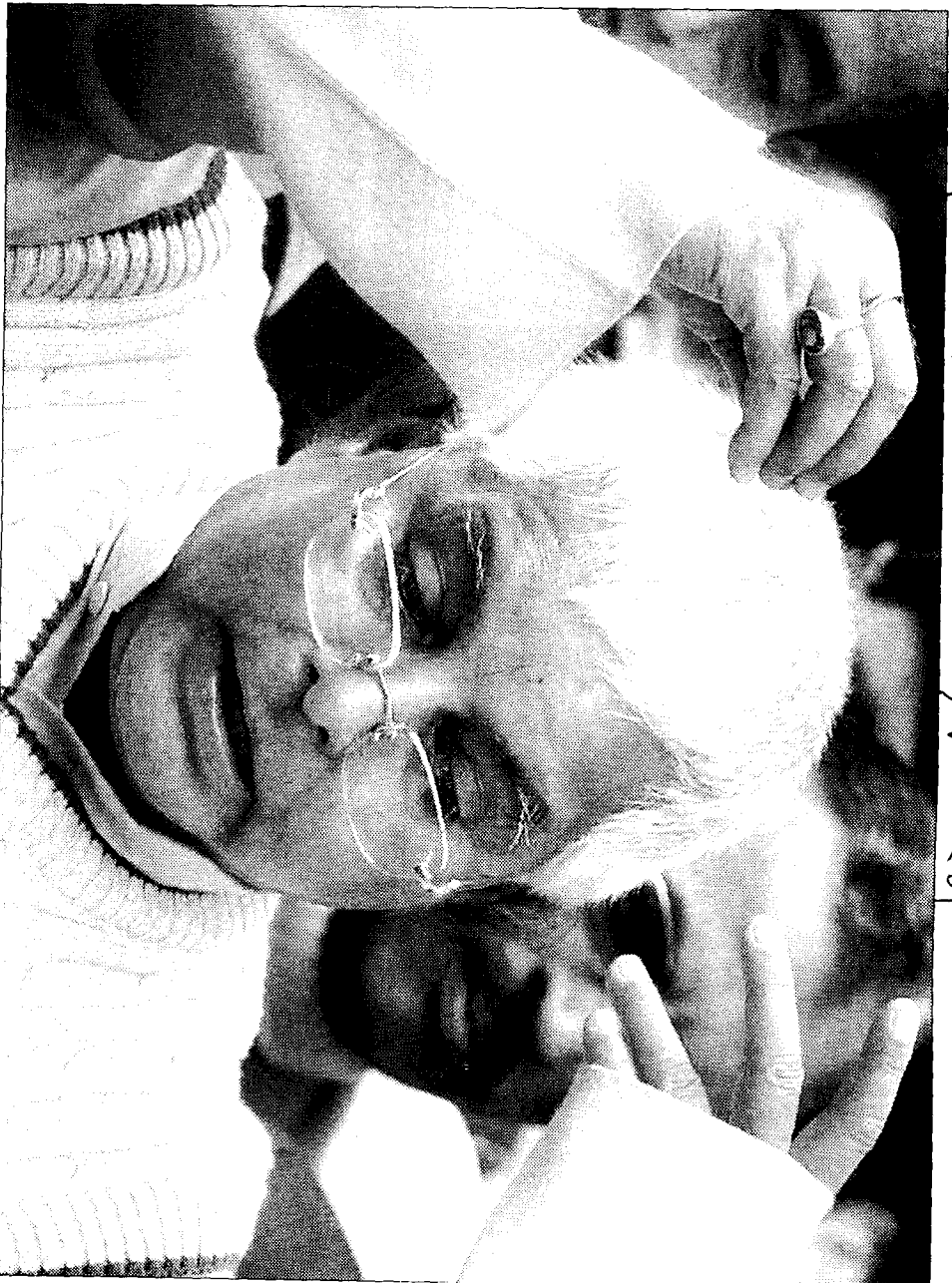
Election Commission sources said a decision will be taken "over the next week or so".

The Election Commission, in its showcause notice issued on Monday, had set a deadline of 3 pm today for the RJD chief and Union railway minister to present his case.

Laloo Prasad did not say what he told the chief election commissioner but he has earlier stressed that he never denied having given money to people who had come to attend a public meeting in Bihna.

"I have given my explanation in writing and I have told them the truth," Laloo Prasad said after meeting chief election commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy.

"The commission is of the opinion you, as president of the RJD, have violated the model code by distributing money to the electorate of Bihar as reported in the media," the Election Commission notice to the RJD chief had said.



**DID I DO SOMETHING WRONG?** Laloo Prasad talks to reporters after meeting the chief election commissioner. (PTI)

The notice, asking why he should not be charged with flouting the model code of conduct, alleged that Laloo Prasad had violated electoral laws under Section 171(b) of the Indian Penal Code.

The RJD chief had reacted just after the notice was issued in his inimitable way: "Thank God, I have been shown dis-

tributing money and not taking money," he had said on Monday. Television footage from last Saturday mentioned in the notice showed Laloo Prasad distributing currency notes of Rs 100.

Laloo Prasad today said that he had sought to assure the commission that his party was not challenging rules.

"We have always respected the commission. We have never bribed anyone."

The minister also said he had re-stated a plea to the panel for a one-day poll in Bihar but the election commissioners had pointed out that it would have been possible had there been enough security forces.

He said he did not foresee any problem in presenting the railway budget because the elections will end on February 23.

Rao said he had put up a "factual report" on the charge that the RJD was using the administration for a rally that was subsequently called off by Laloo Prasad.

## ‘মহারালা’ নিয়ে মহাসঙ্কট

# নির্দেশ সাতটি আইনের প্যাঁচে এফ আই আর দায়ের করার পড়ে সনিয়ার দ্বারস্থ লালু

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, পটনা, ২২ ডিসেম্বর: ‘মহারালা’ নিয়ে মহাসঙ্কটে পড়তে চলেছেন লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব। ‘মহারালা’র প্রস্তুতির সময়ে আরজেডি নেতারা যে নির্বাচন বিধির ভোয়াজ্ঞা করেননি, নির্বাচন কমিশন বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক কে জে রাও আগামী কাল সে বিষয়ে সবিস্তার রিপোর্ট দাখিল করতে চলেছেন। পরিস্থিতি অস্বস্ত সেই রকমই ইঙ্গিত দিচ্ছে। সারা দিন পটনা এবং হাজিপুর শহর ঘুরে আরজেডি নেতাদের বিরুদ্ধে রাও এফআইআর দায়ের করার নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন। রাত পর্যন্ত সাতটি এফ আই আর দায়ের হয়েছে।

এই রিপোর্টের পরে আরজেডি-র অনুমোদন বাতিল করা হবে কি না, তা এখনই খোলসা করে বলতে চাননি বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক কে জে রাও। গত লোকসভার ভোটের সময় এই রাওই ‘ছাপার ছাপা’ ভোট নিয়ে তদন্ত করতে এসে পুরো কেন্দ্রেই পুনর্নির্বাচন করার সুপারিশ করেছিলেন।

এ হেন কে জে রাও আসার কথা শুনেই গতকাল সারারাত ধরে পটনার সমস্ত হোর্ডিং, পোস্টার, ব্যানার খুলেছেন আরজেডি কর্মীরা। পথের ধারের যে সব জায়গার হোর্ডিং দখল করে নেওয়া হয়েছিল, তা-ও মুছে ফেলার প্রাণপণ চেষ্টা চালান তাঁরা। রাও আজ সকাল ৯ টা নাগাদ পটনার জেলাশাসক গৌতম গোস্বামীকে নিয়ে যখন রাস্তায় বের হন তখন ভোজবাজির মতোই পাল্টে গিয়েছে পটনা শহর। কিন্তু এরমধ্যেই নিজস্ব ভঙ্গিতে তদন্ত চালিয়ে অনিয়ম খুঁজে বের করেছেন রাও। পটনা রেল স্টেশন, বাস স্ট্যান্ড, কোতায়ালি থানা এবং হাজিপুর রেল স্টেশনে যে ভাবে ঘুরে ঘুরে মহার্যালার প্রচারের জন্য টাঙানো হোর্ডিং দেখে সংশ্লিষ্ট অফিসারদের প্রশ্ন করতে থাকেন তা আরজেডি নেতাদের চমকে দেওয়ার পক্ষে যথেষ্ট। হাজিপুরে রেল স্টেশনের হোর্ডিং এবং পোস্টার ভিডিও ক্যামেরাতেও তুলে নেন তিনি। ট্রেনের গায়ে যে সব পোস্টার এবং ব্যানার লাগানো হয়েছে, তা-ও ক্যামেরাবন্দি করেছেন তিনি। তাঁর তদন্তের ধরণে ছিল এই রকম—

● পটনার কোতায়ালি থানার ভিতরে মহার্যালার প্রচারের হোর্ডিং দেখে তিনি পটনার ডেপুটি পুলিশ সুপার সত্যনারায়ণ সিংহকে চেপে ধরেন। তাঁর প্রশ্ন ছিল, ‘থানার মধ্যে এই হোর্ডিং লাগানোর পরে পুলিশ কোনও এফআই আর দায়ের করেছে কি?’ আমতা আমতা করে ওই ডেপুটি পুলিশ সুপার জবাব দেন, “আমি স্যার নতুন এসেছি। তাই এ ব্যাপারে বিশেষ কিছু জানি না।”

● পটনা বাসস্ট্যান্ডে গিয়ে হোর্ডিং এবং ব্যানার দেখে এখানকার ম্যানেজারকে খুঁজতে থাকেন কে জে রাও। ম্যানেজার না থাকায় তিনি সেখানকার অফিসারদের বলেন, “একটু পরে আমি ফের আসব। তাঁকে থাকতে বলবেন।” কিছুক্ষণ পরে তিনি ফের হাজির হন বাসস্ট্যান্ডে। তাঁর প্রশ্ন ছিল, সরকারি বাসস্ট্যান্ডে হোর্ডিং লাগানোর জন্য আরজেডি নেতারা কোনও টাকাপয়সা দেওয়ার চুক্তি করেছেন কি না। ফাঁপরে পড়ে ওই ম্যানেজার বলেন, “আমি ছুটিতে ছিলাম স্যার। তাই এ ব্যাপারে কিছু জানি না।”

● পটনা স্টেশনে গিয়ে প্লাটফর্ম টিকিট কেটে সিঁধে  
এর পর পাঁচের পাতায়

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ২২ ডিসেম্বর: সনিয়া গান্ধীর উপর লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের নির্ভরশীলতা অনেকটাই বেড়ে গিয়েছে। ভোটের মুখে দলিত মহিলাদের নোট বিলির ঘটনায় তোপের মুখে পড়েছেন লালু। এ অবস্থায় কংগ্রেসের শীর্ষ নেতৃত্বও তাঁকে চাপের মধ্যে রাখতে চাইছেন।

বিহারে কংগ্রেস এবং লালু একে অন্যের পরিপূরক। কেউ কাউকে ছাড়তে পারেন না। এই রাজনৈতিক বাধ্যবাধকতার মধ্যেও বিধানসভা নির্বাচনে কংগ্রেস কিন্তু লালুর কাছে আরও বেশি আসন চাইছে। এমনিতে রাজ্য কংগ্রেসকে রেয়াতই করেন না লালু। বিহারের কংগ্রেস নেতারাও বাম নেতাদের মতোই লালুর সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করার দাবি জানাচ্ছেন দীর্ঘ দিন।

কিন্তু দিল্লিতে হরকিষেন সিংহ সুরজিতের মতোই সনিয়া গান্ধীও বেশি আসন পাওয়ার জন্য রাজনৈতিক দর কষাকষি করলেও লালুর আর জে ডি’র সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করতে রাজি নন। ভোট ভাগাভাগি মানেই বিজেপির পৌষমাস। অতএব জোট ভাঙা চলবে না।

নির্বাচন কমিশনের ভূমিকায় লালু এখন চাপে। সংসদে বিরোধীরা মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে তাঁর ইস্তফা দাবি করছে। লালুর ইস্তফার দাবিতে প্রধানমন্ত্রীর উপর চাপ সৃষ্টির কারণ হল, তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে জারি এফ আই আর। কিন্তু সংসদে লালুকে বাঁচাতেই আসরে নামেন কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব। লোকসভার কংগ্রেস নেতা প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় যুক্তি দিয়েছেন, অভিযোগ এখনও প্রমাণিত হয়নি। লালু এখনই ইস্তফা দেবেন কেন?

সংসদের অধিবেশন শেষ হয়ে যাবে আগামী কাল। আর তাই সংসদ এড়িয়ে লালু রয়েছেন পটনায়। ‘মহারালা’ আপাতত স্থগিত রাখতে হলেও দলিত ভোট পাওয়ার জন্য লালু এখন প্রচার করছেন তিনি ‘গরিব’ দলিতদের সাধ্যমত সাহায্য করছিলেন বলেই ‘বড়লোক’দের তা পছন্দ হল না। লালুর এই দেহাতি প্রচারে যদি ভাল ফল পাওয়া যায় তবে তাতে কংগ্রেসের কোনও লোকসান নেই।

লালু এ বার বিহারে কংগ্রেসকে ২০টির বেশি আসন দিতে কিছুতেই রাজি নন। কংগ্রেস দাবি করেছে শতাধিক আসন। লালু যদি আরও কিছু দিন চাপে থাকেন তবে তিনি আসন বাঁটোয়ারার প্রক্ষে আরও নরম হতে বাধ্য হবেন।

এ আই সিসি-র সাধারণ সম্পাদিকা অম্বিকা সোনি বলেন, “বিহারে কংগ্রেস আর জে ডি’র সঙ্গে সম্পর্ক ছিন্ন করার কথা ভাবছে না। কিন্তু কংগ্রেসের নিজস্ব সাংগঠনিক শক্তি বাড়ানোর চেষ্টা তো স্বাভাবিক ঘটনা।”

রাজনীতিতে সেয়ানে সেয়ানে কোলাকুলিটাই দস্তুর। আপাতত সেটাই হচ্ছে।

এ বার সরকার গঠনের সময় কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব চেয়েছিলেন লালু, শিবু সোরেন বা তসলিমউদ্দিনের মতো দাগি নেতারা যাতে মন্ত্রিসভায় না থাকেন। প্রধানমন্ত্রী তো বিদেশে গিয়ে লালুর মন্ত্রিত্ব সম্পর্কে নাম না করে কটাক্ষও করেন। এই প্রসঙ্গে জোট রাজনীতির বাধ্যবাধকতার কথাও বলেন তিনি। প্রধানমন্ত্রীর ওই মন্তব্যে লালু অখুশি হন।

কংগ্রেসও আপাতত লালুকে চাপের মধ্যে রেখেই দলীয় কার্যসিদ্ধি করতে আগ্রহী।

23 DEC 2004

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

F.T.O.

৩৩০

# ৭টি এফ আই আর

প্রথম পাতার পর

ভিতরে ঢুকে পড়েন কে জে রাও। সেখানে স্টেশনের মধ্যে পোস্টার ব্যানার ঘুরে ঘুরে দেখেন তিনি। পরে হাজিপুর স্টেশনেও গিয়ে স্টেশন মাস্টারকে ডেকে পাঠান রাও। স্টেশন মাস্টার তাঁর প্রশ্নের সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে থাকেন নীরবে।

● সরেজমিন তদন্তের পরে বাণিজ্যিক কর বিভাগের অফিসারদের ডেকে পাঠান রাও। হোর্ডিংয়ের জন্য আরজেডি নেতারা কোনও কর দিয়েছেন কিনা, তা জানতে চান তিনি। হোর্ডিং ভাড়া করা হলে এই কর দেওয়া বাধ্যতামূলক। বাণিজ্যিক কর বিভাগের অফিসার রাওকে জানান, এই রকম কোনও কর তাঁদের কাছে জমা পড়েনি। এই রিপোর্ট তাঁদের ফ্যাক্স করে দিল্লিতে পাঠিয়ে দিতে বলেন কে জে রাও।

● ফেব্রার সময়ে পটনা এয়ারপোর্টের ভিআইপি লাউঞ্জে বসে পটনার জেলাশাসকের কাছে জানতে চান, “কতগুলি তোরণের জন্য প্রশাসনের অনুমতি নেওয়া হয়েছিল?” জেলাশাসক জানান, পটনা সদর মহকুমায় ১৭৯টি তোরণ তৈরির জন্য অনুমতি দেওয়া হয়েছে। পটনা শহরে যে এর চেয়ে কয়েকগুণ বেশি তোরণ বানানো হয়েছিল, তা অবশ্য আগেই রাও ঘুরে দেখেছেন। বিহার সরকারের ‘ডিফেন্সমেন্ট অফ প্রপারটি’ আইনের

ফ্যাক্সও জেলাশাসকে নির্বাচন কমিশনের কাছে পাঠাতে বলে তিনি। অনুমতি ছাড়া কারও সম্পত্তি জোর করে ব্যবহার করলে এই আইনে শাস্তির ব্যবস্থা রয়েছে।

পরে বিমানে ওঠার আগে কে জে রাও বলেন, “আমি আমার রিপোর্ট কালই কমিশনের কাছে জমা দিয়ে দেব।” বিহটাতে দলিতদের মধ্যে লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের টাকা বিলির অভিযোগ নিয়ে তিনি যে তদন্ত করছেন না, তা জানিয়ে রাও বলেছেন, “আমি শুধু মহার্যালার বিষয়টি নিয়ে তদন্ত করেছি।” কেন্দ্রীয় রেলমন্ত্রী লালুপ্রসাদ যে সারাদিন তাঁর সঙ্গে দেখা করেননি তা-ও জানিয়ে দেন তিনি।

কে জে রাওয়ের সঙ্গে দেখা না করলেও তাঁর গতিবিধি সম্পর্কে সারাদিন খোঁজ খবর রেখেছেন লালুপ্রসাদ। এই দিন সকালে তিনি বক্তব্য রাখেন আরজেডি-র জাতীয় কর্মসমিতির বৈঠকে। সেখানে মহারালা নিয়ে বিরোধীদের আক্রমণ করতে ছাড়েননি তিনি।

তাঁর বক্তব্য, বিরোধী দলের মাফিয়ারা মহার্যালার দিন গোলমাল পাকিয়ে তাঁর দায় আরজেডি-র উপরে চাপানোর পরিকল্পনা করেছিল। এই কারণে তিনি এই র্যালা বাতিল করেছেন। লালুপ্রসাদ জানিয়েছেন, বিরোধীদের চাপে পড়ে তিনি মন্ত্রীত্ব থেকে ইস্তফা দিচ্ছেন না।

23 DEC 2004

9. P. 2  
Lalu Prasad cancels rally FED-13  
2/12

By Our Special Correspondent

**PATNA, DEC. 21.** The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, today called off his planned rally for December 23, in an apparent bid to avoid a confrontation with the Election Commission which has threatened to derecognise his party for "violation" of the model code of conduct.

Mr. Prasad told the Chief Election Commissioner, T.S. Krishnamurthy, that he had no intention of embarrassing the Commission by going ahead with the rally. He claimed that the Opposition parties, which were perturbed by the support that his party had built up for the rally, had launched a "mis-information campaign."

He said that he would respond to the E.C. show-cause before the deadline on December 24. The notice was issued on Tuesday in the light of allegations that Mr. Prasad had distributed money to villagers. The E.C. had lodged a First Information Report with the police in this regard.

The RJD chief held a meeting with the party functionaries before announcing his decision at a press conference, much before the arrival of the two-member E.C. team assigned to keep a tab on the RJD rally. The Commission had debarred the Railways from providing 18 special trains, which the RJD had arranged for. It also warned



**RJD chief and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, announcing the cancellation of the proposed rally of the party, which was scheduled for December 23, at a press conference in Patna on Tuesday. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar**

against any misuse of government machinery.

Mr. Lalu Prasad maintained that the E.C. had not sought to put any pressure on him on this score and that he had cancelled the rally to defeat the "nefari-

ous designs of the BJP and the NDA." He would now hold a Vijay Utsav (victory) rally after the elections on February 28.

**To visit villages**

Instead of the rally, party

workers would fan out into the villages on December 23 to convey the party's solidarity with farmers and landless labour. Mr. Prasad said he would visit the villages and "expose" the NDA's efforts to win the elections through "fraud and deceit."

He said he had no complaints against the E.C. in dismantling hoardings and, as a matter of fact, maintained that he would cooperate with it as he had respect for all the constitutional institutions. He hoped that the E.C. would deploy adequate paramilitary forces for a free and fair election.

Mr. Prasad's decision to call off the rally has apparently angered his supporters who took out various forms of processions here and trooped into his residence to protest. They were, however, peaceful.

Mr. Prasad's decision brought to a standstill the massive preparations under way for a public meeting and the rallyists, in particular, for whom recreational facilities had been set in place — huge tents, public kitchens and night-long entertainment.

The district administration has been working round-the-clock pulling down the huge roadside hoardings on thoroughfares leading to the Gandhi Maidan. Officials say that it would take at least a couple of days to clear the roads of all the RJD's hoardings, posters, banners and welcome arches here.

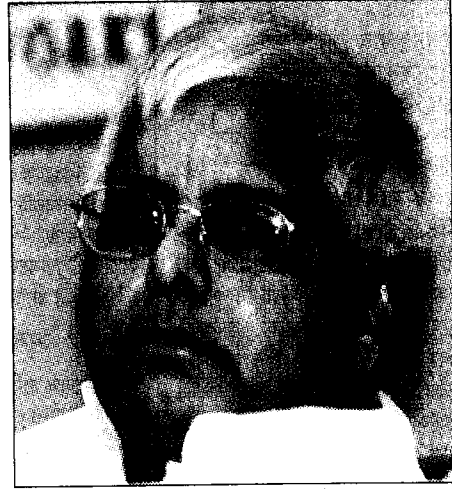
‘মিষ্টি খেতে’ দলিতদের টাকা বিলি

J.P.P.-RSP

২০ ডিসেম্বর (২০০৪)

## লালুর নামে কমিশনের মামলা

আজকালের প্রতিবেদন | দিল্লি, ২০ ডিসেম্বর— নির্বাচন কমিশনের নির্দেশে পাটনা জেলার বিহটা থানায় লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের বিরুদ্ধে দায়ের করা হল এফ আই আর। অভিযোগ, নির্বাচনী আচরণবিধি ভেঙে লালু জনগণের মধ্যে টাকা বিলি করেছেন। ভারতীয় দণ্ডবিধির ১৭১ (খ) ধারায় অভিযোগ আনা হয়েছে রেলমন্ত্রীর বিরুদ্ধে। অভিযোগ উৎকোচ দেওয়ার। এ ছাড়া সরকারি ভবনগুলির ওপর থেকে রাজনৈতিক প্রচারের পোস্টার, ব্যানার খুলে ফেলারও নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে। এর আগে নির্বাচন কমিশন বিহারের মুখ্য নির্বাচন অফিসারকে ফ্যাক্সবার্তা পাঠিয়ে রেলমন্ত্রী লালুপ্রসাদের বিরুদ্ধে এফ আই আর করার নির্দেশ দেয়। কমিশন এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেয় আজ মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনারের সভাপতিত্বে অনুষ্ঠিত পূর্ণাঙ্গ বৈঠকে। অন্যদিকে, বি জে পি আজ প্রধানমন্ত্রী ড. মনমোহন সিংয়ের কাছে দাবি জানিয়েছে, অবিলম্বে লালুকে মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে বাদ দেওয়া হোক। কারণ, তিনি শুধু ভোটের আচরণবিধি লঙ্ঘন করে টাকা বিলি করেই ক্ষান্ত হননি। তিনি এর সাফাই গেয়ে বলেছেন, ‘আমি তো ঘুষ নিচ্ছি না।’ বি জে পি-র সংসদীয় দলের মুখপাত্র বিজয় মালহোত্রা বলেন, যেন ঘুষ দেওয়াটা কোনও অপরাধই নয়। যদিও মালহোত্রা প্রধানমন্ত্রীকেও একইসঙ্গে একহাত নেন। বলেন, উনিও সমদোষে দোষী। নাহলে এ বিষয়টি আগেই ওঁর নজরে পড়া উচিত ছিল। কিছু না করে প্রধানমন্ত্রী উল্টে যুক্তি দেখিয়েছেন, লালু তাঁর দলের মন্ত্রী নন। একথা বলে কি প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দায়িত্ব এড়ানো যায়? মন্ত্রিসভার যৌথ দায়িত্বের মধ্যে সবাই পড়েন। বিজয় মালহোত্রা ও সুষমা স্বরাজ আজ নির্বাচন কমিশনারের সঙ্গে দেখা করে লালুর বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ জানান। এর পাশ্চাত্য লালুর দাবি, তিনি মোটেই নির্বাচনী আচরণবিধি লঙ্ঘন করেননি। গরিব মানুষদের, দলিতদের আমি মিষ্টি খাওয়ার জন্য টাকা দিয়েছি। আমি রেলমন্ত্রী হওয়ার পর ওঁরা মিষ্টি খেতে চেয়েছিলেন। তা ছাড়া, হাসতে হাসতেই লালু বলেন,



ভগবানকে ধন্যবাদ, আমি টাকা বিলি করছি বলে টিভিতে দেখা গেছে। টাকা নিচ্ছি দেখায়নি। তাঁর কথায়, নির্বাচন বলেই নয়, এমনিতেই দলিত মায়েদের কাছ থেকে আশীর্বাদ নিতে আমি তাঁদের প্রণামী দিই। নির্বাচন কমিশনের মুখপাত্র এ এন বা জানান, আজ বৈঠকে সিদ্ধান্ত অনুযায়ী রাষ্ট্রীয় জনতা দল সভাপতি লালু যাদবকে কারণ দর্শানোর নোটিসও জারি করা হয়েছে। বলা হয়েছে ২৪ ডিসেম্বরের মধ্যে জানাতে হবে, টাকা বিলির জন্য কেন তাঁর দলের স্বীকৃতি প্রত্যাহার করা হবে না, বা প্রতীক চিহ্ন আইন মোতাবেক ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হবে না? এ ছাড়া রেল বোর্ডকে এক নির্দেশিকায় কমিশন বলেছে, ২৩ ডিসেম্বরের র্যালির জন্য কোনও বিশেষ ট্রেনের বা অন্য কোনও ধরনের বিশেষ ব্যবস্থা করা চলবে না। লালুর শিবির অবশ্য মনে করছে, শাপে বরই হবে এই ঘটনায়। গরিব মানুষ বুঝবে, বি জে পি গরিবদের স্বার্থে ঘা দিল।

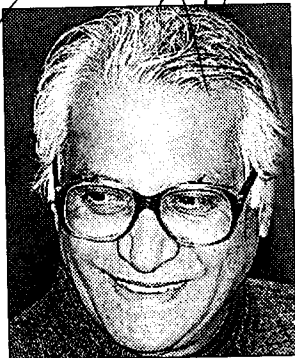
## BJP Ticked Off On Ayodhya, Uniform Civil Code, Article 370

# JD(U) swears by secular identity

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 1 AUGUST

WITH the BJP showing signs of reverting to its ideological moorings, the Janata Dal (United) was constrained to tell its ally to lay off the controversial issues of Ayodhya, uniform civil code and the abrogation of Article 370 if it wanted the NDA to remain intact.

The threat handed out by the JD(U), the oldest ally of the BJP after the Shiv Sena, is, however, seen by most political observers as a ploy to reassure its supporters that it hadn't abandoned its "secular" ideals and that its decision to back the BJP was contingent upon its stand on the three controversial issues, which formed the core of the BJP's ideology of cultural nationalism.



GEORGE: BETTING ON BIHAR

For the JD(U), the forthcoming Assembly polls in Bihar is likely to be the test of its standing in the state. To do well, it has to wean the non-Yadav OBCs, especially the most backward castes and a section of Muslims, away from the RJD — a difficult task in

view of the latter's hold over these communities. The party will contest the polls in alliance with the BJP, but would like to preserve its "secular" identity — this is the message emanating from the JD(U) camp.

"We joined the NDA only after the three controversial issues had been removed from its agenda. If any effort is now made to revive them, we shall have to take another road. We shall never compromise with religious bigotry," a resolution adopted at the conclusion of the JD(U)'s two-day-long national executive meeting said here on Sunday.

There are, in fact, many leaders in the JD(U) who feel that the party had compromised on its "secular" image by backing the BJP to the hilt. It may have been one of the factors responsible for forcing a large number of people,

especially the Muslims, for jettisoning the party in favour of other outfits. With the Assembly polls in Bihar scheduled to be held by February next, the need to reassure its traditional supporters has acquired an urgency. The JD(U)'s dismal performance in the state, in the Lok Sabha polls held earlier this year, was attributed by many to its silence on issues such as the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat.

Briefing reporters on the deliberations at the national executive, JD(U) president George Fernandes said "a majority" of the delegates expressed views on the issue and "quite a few" were in favour of coming out of the alliance. He, at the same time, made it plain that the BJP and the JD(U) would contest the Assembly elections together as the alliance was still on.

# Rahul Gandhi a media creation: Mulayam

M.A. Hafiz  
Lucknow, June 10

UNFAZED BY constant sniping from top Congress leaders, Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav on Thursday sought to quash rumours that he intended to dissolve the Vidhan Sabha and opt for fresh Assembly polls.

When asked about Rahul Gandhi's remarks that the law and order situation in Uttar Pradesh would improve only when the SP-led coalition was ousted to usher in a Congress-led government, Yadav replied that a leader of his stature would not reply to Rahul's observations. "Kis haisiyat se ham jawab den?" he asked while ducking the question.

He said SP general secretary Amar Singh had already described Rahul's remarks as that of a child. "Rahul is the creation of the media which has given him the halo of a big leader," he said. "He is indulging in *uchhal kood*."

On the Congress' allegation about a steep decline in law and order in Rae Bareilly, the Lok Sabha constituency of its president Sonia Gandhi, Yadav shot back saying that it was far better than in Delhi and Mumbai.

He said controversial MLA Akhilesh Singh was treated like a saint as long as he was in the Congress but when fell out he was being hounded as a criminal. He said Akhilesh Singh's case required the SP's support — even though he



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav addresses a Press conference in Lucknow on Thursday.

was not an SP MLA. Yadav was talking to reporters after a Cabinet meeting which approved a draft agreement with the Ambanis for setting up a Rs 10,000-crore 3,500 MW gas-based power plant in Ghaziabad.

He also talked about his government's decisions to provide free education to all girls up to degree classes, scholarships to all students (including the upper castes), and facilities to industrialists to invest capital in the power sector.

Mulayam said these were meant to eradicate illiteracy among women and provide 24-hour power supply to consumers.

"Within three years, there would be plenty of power as the Ambanis' power plant will generate 3,500 MW of electricity. Forty per cent of the generation (1,500 MW) would be sold to UP at about Rs 2 per unit and the Ambanis would be free to sell the remaining 60 per cent to any industrial house," said the Chief Minister.



# বেতিয়া আৰ সিওয়ান জিতে নিল

## আৰজেডি

স্টাফ रिपोर्टर, पटना, २७ मे:  
बिहारेर सिওয়ान एबं बेतिया  
लोकसभा केन्द्र दु'टितेओ लालुप्रसादेर  
आरजेडि जयलाड करल। सिওয়ान  
केन्द्रटि ए बारेओ निजेर दखले  
राखलेन आरजेडि-र जेलबन्दि नेता  
महम्मद साहबुद्दिन।

बेतिया केन्द्रटि छिल बिजेपि-र  
दखले। गत बारेर सांसद मदनप्रसाद  
जयसওয়ालके हारिये ए बारेर निर्वाचने  
एह केन्द्रटिते जयी हयेछेन आरजेडि  
प्राथी रघुनाथ बा। निर्वाचन कमिश्नेर  
निर्देशे एह दु'टि केन्द्रेर प्राय साडे  
छ'शो डोटग्रहण केन्ने गत सोमबार  
फेर डोट नेओया हय।

आज एह दु'टि केन्द्रेर फलप्रकाशेर  
परे बिहारेर मोट ४०टि आसनेर मध्ये  
आरजेडि-कंग्रेस-लोक जनशक्ति  
पार्टि जेओटेर आसन संख्या एखन पर्यन्त  
दाँडाल २८। निर्वाचन कमिश्नेर निर्देशे  
आगामी ३१ मे छापरा केन्ने पुनर्निर्वाचन  
हवे।

निर्वाचनेर व्यापक छाप्रा डोट एबं  
बुध दखलेर অভিयोगेर तदन्त करे  
निर्वाचन कमिश्न बिहारेर तिनटि  
आसनेर फल प्रकाश स्थगित रेखेछिल।  
एर मध्ये सिওয়ान एबं बेतिया केन्द्रेर  
साडे छ'शो बुधे फेर डोटग्रहण करा  
हयेछिल।

आरजेडि-र विवर्कित नेता महम्मद  
साहबुद्दिन ए बार जेल थेके निर्वाचने  
दाँडियेछिलेन। ताँर बिरुद्धे खून,  
अपहरण-सह विभिन्न अपराधेर प्राय  
तिरिशाटि मतो मामला रयेछे। तनि  
जितेछेन १ लक्ष ४ हजार डोटे।

अन्य दिके, आरजेडि एबं बिजेपि-  
र लडाइयेर पाशापाशि बेतिया केन्द्र  
थेके निर्दल प्राथी हिसाबे डोटे  
दाँडियेछिलेन जातीय पुरस्कारप्राप्त चित्र  
परिचालक प्रकाश बा। प्रकाश छाडाओ  
माफिया नेता राजन तेओयारिओ बेतिया  
जेल थेके निर्वाचने लडेछेन।

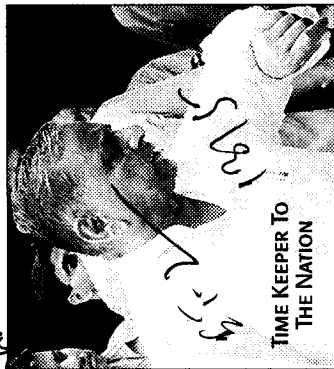
बेतिया केन्द्रटि बिजेपि-र काछ  
थेके निजेदेर दखले आनते  
आरजेडि ए बारे जनता दल (संयुक्त)-  
र प्राञ्जन नेता थेके रघुनाथ बा-के एह  
केन्द्र थेके टिकिट दियेछिल। तनि  
जितेछेन प्राय ३५ हजार डोटे  
आरजेडि एह दु'टि केन्द्र थेके जेताः  
परे एह दलेर मोट सांसदेर संख्या  
दाँडालो २३। एर मध्ये बाडखण्डेः  
दु'जन छाडा बाकि २१ जनई बिहारेर  
बिहारे आरजेडि ए बारे २७टि आसने  
प्राथी दियेछिल।

# Mulayam still not ready to take sides

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 12 MAY

**E**VEN though the Samajwadi Party is being assiduously wooed by CPM general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet to rally behind the Congress in the government-formation business, the best possible post-poll scenario for the former, surprising it may seem, is the NDA falling short of the half-way mark by about a dozen seats, leaving the alliance with no choice but to seek BSP chief Mayawati's help in forming the government. Such a situation, according to senior SP leaders, would allow them to continue with their policy of maintaining equi-distance from both the BJP and the Congress.

This would also allow them to tar the BSP with the communal brush and to train their guns on the BJP-BSP combine. The prospects of reclaiming the secular space, breached by the Congress during the month-long campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, is intertwined with this strategy. Mr Surjeet met the UP chief minister on Wednesday as he stepped up his efforts to cobble together a secular alternative. But Mr Yadav remained evasive, saying he'd wait for the results to be out before opening his cards.



**TIME KEEPER TO THE NATION**

While any verdict, according to these SP leaders, which enables Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav to become the king or to play the role of the kingmaker, would be welcome, a situation which would force them to take sides with either of the two main formations is not exactly being relished. It would certainly accentuate the dilemma that has been staring at them for quite some time now.

While Mr Yadav, still smarting under the attempts by the BJP leaders to create a barrier between him and the Muslims, has categorically ruled out the possibility of supporting the NDA, the prospect of being called to support a Congress-led regime is also something that he'd be dreading. This would mean accrediting

the Congress with the secular tag and giving the Muslims the option of choosing between the two parties when it came to soliciting their support.

The Surjeet-Yadav meeting saw them maintaining a stoic silence on the leadership issue. The SP chief, who was evasive on the question of supporting a Sonia-led government, is keeping his cards close to his chest refusing to count his chickens before they are hatched. The Uttar Pradesh chief minister, for the record, ruled out that he was in the race for prime ministership.

Putting off all answers on the leadership of a non-NDA formation till after results, Mr Yadav said "in politics, strength is everything. Decisions will be taken on the basis of respective strengths."

Congress spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy, who had a meeting with the CPM general secretary after Mr Yadav left, also refused to divulge details of discussions on the leadership issue and whether his party was ready to compromise on Ms Gandhi's candidature for prime ministership. The Congress and SP leaders, however, said they were making efforts to unite all secular forces, big or small.

Playing kingmaker, Mr Surjeet expressed confidence that the non-NDA leaders wanted to be united to form a

stable government as an alternative to the NDA. He also said the Forward Bloc's reservations about supporting a Congress-led government was not something that cannot be tackled. He said the leadership issue would be resolved easily after the results.

Mr Surjeet, who had a meeting with Ms Gandhi on Tuesday, said while "in principle it is the single largest party that has a bigger claim to lead the coalition, there have been instances in the past when the Prime Ministers have not hailed from the largest group in the Lok Sabha."

For the secular alliance, however, the bigger hurdle to a Congress-led government could come from the SP. Asked if he would agree to supporting a Sonia Gandhi-led Congress coalition, Mr Yadav said: "We are neither opposed to, nor supporting ... everything will be decided after the results." He also said his

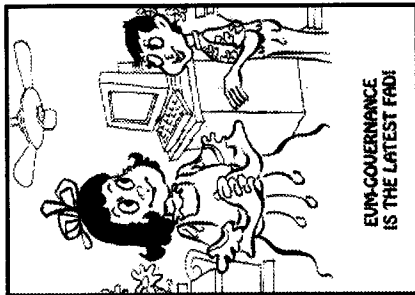
party did not campaign on the leadership issue but on development.

The SP supremo ruled out supporting the NDA saying "that is like an abuse for me" and said the BSP was tying up with the BJP as the latter had promised not to pursue the cases against its chief Mayawati. Mr Reddy also eluded direct answers to questions on the leadership issue before the results are out and said his party's priority is to unseat NDA and Congress as the largest party will have a leading role to play in this process.

Asked if his party was ready to take SP's support, he said: "It's a historical necessity to get together all secular forces." Exuding confidence that all pre-poll partners will be with the Congress, he described the Left as "pre-poll allies" except in the states of Kerala, West Bengal and Tripura. The other pre-poll partners of the Congress include the NCP, DMK, RJD and TRS.

## SINGLE WINDOW

BONNY THOMAS



# Fernandes and Nitish set for seat shift

**RADHIKARAMASESHAN**

New Delhi, March 16: The BJP and the Janata Dal (United) have finally swung a seat-sharing deal in Bihar with the former opting for 17 Lok Sabha seats and the latter for the remaining 23.

Under the deal finalised at a late-night meeting yesterday, Dal (U) chief George Fernandes may shift from Nalanda to Muzaffarpur and his party colleague Nitish Kumar from Barh to Nalanda.

Jai Narain Nishad, a new BJP entrant, may, however, be left high and dry in the process. The BJP had promised Nishad to let him retain Muzaffarpur, which he has won since 1991.

Although the constituency

was once on the national map because "international socialist" Fernandes represented it, Nishad has had a virtual stranglehold over it in the post-Manand phase because of the pre-dominance of Nishads, an extremely backward caste of Bihar.

Party sources admitted they had no other constituency in mind for Nishad, who left Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party for the BJP.

Barh is out of contention because even if Nitish vacates it, the seat will be in the Dal (U) quota, not the BJP's.

NDA sources said it was not Fernandes so much as Nitish who wanted to leave Barh, which he had won since 1996 after he split with Laloo Prasad

Yadav and formed the Samata Party.

Nitish had scraped through in 1999 with a 1,300 margin. This time he was even "less sure", sources said, and thus sought refuge in Nalanda, a bastion of the Kurmi caste to which he belongs.

Like Nishad, another new BJP entrant, Satpal Mallik, has become a casualty of the party's bargain with the Dal (U). Mallik had switched over from the Congress hoping to swing a ticket from Meerut.

But the BJP first handed Meerut to long-time member Amar Pal Singh and then asked him to withdraw in favour of K.C. Tyagi, a confidant of Dal (U) leader Sharad Yadav.

Thus, the sources said, was a

"return gift" for Sheohar that the Dal (U) agreed to give up to accommodate Anwar-ul-Haque, a former Rashtriya Janata Dal MP who was showcased as a Muslim acquisition.

The BJP has also given the Dal (U) Lakshadweep, Koliabor in Assam and Banswada in Rajasthan.

The Dal (U), apart from Meerut, bagged three other seats in Uttar Pradesh: Aonla, Ghosi and Salempur.

The party may field former Samajwadi Party MP Kunwar Sarvaraj Singh from Aonla and Rajdhari Singh from Salempur.

As for Ghosi, the Dal (U) is undecided whether Kalpnath Rai's widow should be fielded from the late Congress leader's pocket borough in eastern

Uttar Pradesh.

Stung by reports, BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu denied that some party members were sulking after being dropped.

Dilip Gandhi and Chatrapal Singh, Union ministers who resigned after being denied tickets, will campaign for the party, Naidu said today.

They put in their papers because they thought it "improper" to hold office when they would not be contesting the polls, he added.

The BJP president maintained that Uttar Pradesh leader Kairaj Mishra, who too was denied a ticket despite indications to the contrary, did not wish to contest and was required to oversee the campaign in the state.

*J.P. Jomali Dal*

*9.6*

*197*

# Sonia talks to DMK leaders

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, January 17

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi is likely to go to Chennai in the next few days to seal a pact with DMK chief M. Karunanidhi for the Lok Sabha elections in Tamil Nadu. A decision to this effect is expected within "two or three" days.

"I'm looking forward to calling on Karunanidhi at the earliest opportunity," Sonia said after her hour-long meeting with the DMK leader's emissaries, M.K. Stalin (Karunanidhi's son), Dayanidhi Maran (son of Murasoli Maran) and former Union Minister T.R. Baalu at her 10, Janpath residence on Saturday. This was Sonia's first interaction with the DMK leaders.

Manmohan Singh, who had earlier met Karunanidhi, was present during the discussion that focused on strengthening their proposed alliance in Tamil Nadu.

All five leaders came out together to present a picture of unity of an alliance that was in an advanced stage. As Sonia put it: "It's only going to be a forward movement".

The Congress-DMK talks had gathered momentum after Sonia called up Karunanidhi on December 30. The two sides will meet again af-

ter "two or three" days. During the interregnum, there will be in-house consultations on the contours of the alliance and the seats to be shared. The two parties have put the misunderstandings of the past behind them by coming together after 23 years. Their agenda, however, is different. The DMK wants to defeat the AIADMK and the Congress the BJP. The pact will be sealed with Sonia's meeting with Karunanidhi.

Stalin said the talks were focussed on further strengthening the alliance and the political situation in the state. But, though Stalin said the seat-sharing formula hadn't figured in Saturday's discussions, Manmohan Singh admitted some "ideas" had been discussed. Issues like a common minimum programme or joint campaigns are expected to be thrashed out later.

But the DMK is known to drive a hard bargain. The Congress had fielded 12 candidates in 1999 and won two seats. Its splinter group, the Tamil Maanila Congress, now merged with the parent body, had contested all the seats but failed to secure even one. The DMK had won 12 seats, while the MDMK and PMK had got nine between them.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 JAN 2004

Cong chief sets up meet after 5 years

# Sonia turns leaf, Pawar offers tea

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Jan. 14: History is being repeated, but with some twists.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who was a special invitee to the tea party that heralded the fall of the Vajpayee government five years ago, has been called for tea by the man who had revolted against her foreign origin.

Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar has invited Sonia to his 6 Gurudwara Rakabganj residence here tomorrow to discuss an alliance with the Congress — the party he had left in 1999 with two other leaders, P.A. Sangma and Tariq Anwar.

The invite followed Sonia's call to Pawar last night, on the eve of the NCP's national executive meeting. Pawar, whose party is a ruling partner of the Congress in Maharashtra, grabbed the chance.

"Sonia had a talk with Pawar and spoke to him with regard to the emerging political situation in the wake of the BJP-led NDA government's moves to advance the Lok Sabha polls," Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said.

"Pawar extended an invitation to Sonia for tea to discuss the political situation and other

## TWISTS & TURNS

- Sonia speaks to Pawar. Pawar calls Sonia for tea on Thursday
- Sonia replaces Congress presidents in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Orissa
- Fernandes suffers injuries in a road accident in Bihar. Erstwhile ally Harmaniani among first to wish speedy recovery
- The two Union ministers of the PMK, which had pulled out of the NDA, resign

related matters, which she accepted, and the two leaders would meet tomorrow evening," the spokesperson added.

Confirming his conversation with Sonia, Pawar said: "She told me that elections are round the corner and let us sit together and talk. I said my party's executive committee is meeting tomorrow (Wednesday)."

The NCP executive tonight eased the way for tomorrow's talks. After a three-hour meeting, the executive authorised Pawar to take a decision.

Sangma and V.C. Shukla, another former Congressman, expressed reservations about allying with the Congress, but other party leaders said a split has

been averted for the time being.

NCP sources claimed that before taking a final decision on allying with the Congress, Pawar would sound Sonia on the possibility of "region-specific" deals to leave room for manoeuvre for his restive colleagues.

If Sonia and Pawar do meet tomorrow, it will be their first one-to-one session since they parted ways five years ago on the eve of the general elections. Both were present together at two dinners since then but there has been no direct contact. Sonia had also contacted Pawar once to canvass support for the Opposition's candidate for Vice-President.

Sonia's move to call up Pawar followed her party's drubbing in the Assembly elections. Pawar's hand was forced by the Shiv Sena's thumbs-down to a BJP bid to rope in the NCP.

Tomorrow's meeting is reminiscent of the tea party that Janata Party chief Subramanian Swamy hosted in Delhi on March 29, 1999. At the party, ADMK leader Jayalalithaa had promised an earthquake. The Vajpayee government fell the next month.

The quake eventually turned out to be a storm in the tea cup with Vajpayee returning to power. (See Page 6)

**OBITUARY** | *R.K. Hegde (1926-2004)*

*R.P.P. - Janata Dal*

# The farmer who wouldn't be PM *HF 5* *1311*

BORN ON August 29, 1926 at Siddapur in north Karnataka, Hegde comes from an agricultural family. He completed a part of his studies at the Kashi Vidyapeeth in Varanasi. He had a master's degree in law.

He participated in the freedom struggle and was jailed during the Quit India Movement. "You might have gone to jail during the freedom struggle. My mother carried me into the jail in her womb," Hegde once told Congress leaders in the Assembly.

He was a Congressman till he went with the anti-Indira Gandhi faction in 1969. He was elected to the Karnataka assembly in 1957 and appointed a deputy minister, later promoted as minister. He holds the distinction of presenting 13 budgets in the Assembly. He won five more elections to the Assembly. Between 1972-78, he was elected to the state's legislative council and served as leader of the Opposition. He was detained during the Emergency.

He became a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1978-83. In 1983, he became the first non-Congress CM of Karnataka. He is best remembered for development of the panchayati



PTI

Hegde's grieving family members being consoled in Bangalore on Monday.

raj system in Karnataka.

He was among those who worked to unite the Opposition under the Janata Party in 1977. After the party lost power at the Centre it split several times till Hegde again united them under the Janata Dal.

He had also served as deputy chairman of the national Planning Commission (1989-90) and as Union Commerce Minister under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the late Nineties.

He was once considered a prime ministerial candidate but could never make it owing to the machinations of his political rivals.

# Cong and DMK clinch deal

HT Correspondent  
Chennai, January 8

THE CONGRESS and the DMK have decided to form an alliance to contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. The alliance was sealed during a meeting between Congress emissary Dr. Manmohan Singh and DMK president M. Karunanidhi in Chennai on Thursday.

Announcing the alliance, Singh said other modalities like seat-sharing would be finalised later. "At present we have decided to come together to defeat communal forces," he said, adding, the DMK would head the front in Tamil Nadu.

Karunanidhi said the talks were cordial and smooth and the front's aim would be to install a secular and democratic government at the Centre. Asked if the MDMK, a known supporter of the LTTE, which was responsible for Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, would be part of the DMK-Congress Front, Singh said: "We do not want to go into the past." Karunanidhi said the MDMK would be part of the front.

Singh felt that the absence of a prime ministerial candidate would not be a disadvantage for the new front and said the PM would be chosen by the secular front once it was fully formed. He also declared that he was not a PM candidate.

The two parties are having an electoral pact after 23 years. In 1980, the two had together contested the Lok Sabha elections and the subsequent assembly elections, which saw AIADMK founder M.G. Ramachandran being re-elected after his government was prematurely dismissed by Indira Gandhi.

According to DMK sources, of the 39 seats in Tamil Nadu, the DMK and the Congress will contest 12 seats each. Six seats will be

## Election file: The twists and turns



HAND IN HAND: Manmohan Singh and Karunanidhi congratulate each other.

**Strange bedfellows:** Cong, DMK are having an electoral pact after 23 years. In 1980, the two had together contested the Lok Sabha elections and later the assembly elections, which saw M.G. Ramachandran being re-elected.

**Akalis want more:** Akali Dal indicated that it wanted to contest more seats in the coming LS polls from Punjab than in 1999 but ruled out reconsidering its ties with NDA. "If our candidates win, it would anyway benefit NDA," Akali leader and union minister for chemicals and fertilisers Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa said.

### MEANWHILE, SOME WAIT AND WATCH...

RJD's Raghubansh Prasad Singh met Lok Janshakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan, inviting him to join secular forces. Paswan said he would decide on the matter at a rally in February



A day after the Shiv Sena refused to ally with the Nationalist Congress Party, the party authorised its leader Sharad Pawar to take a final decision, which will be announced in New Delhi on Jan 14



left for the PMK, four for the MDMK, two each for the CPM and CPI and one for the Muslim League. A deci-

sion on the lone seat from Pondicherry will be taken after consulting the local units of the parties.

The PMK is expected to announce its decision after its executive committee meeting on Monday.

## Alliance with NCP: Hope for Congress, jolt for BJP

Press Trust of India  
Mumbai, January 8

SHIV SENA poured cold water on BJP's plans to rope in NCP by refusing to ally with the Sharad Pawar-led party. In another development, advocating pre-poll ties with Congress, the Maharashtra unit of the NCP authorised Sharad Pawar to take a decision over an alliance for the coming elections.

BJP's plans to form a grand alliance of Sena-BJP and NCP in the state have been scuttled by Sena's decision, which has put a question mark over Maratha strongman's party making an entry into the NDA. BJP sources said here today.

The Sena leadership took this decision at a high-level meeting, held last night, presided over by the party supremo Bal Thackeray.

Incidentally, within a week's period, Sena has done a volte face. Thackeray had recently stated that his party is not averse to allow NCP's joining NDA. However, it came with a rider that Chhagan Bhujuwal would have no place in the new arrangement.

Thackeray on Thursday said he was firmly opposed to NCP being allowed to join the saffron alliance.

"NCP's Maharashtra unit said the party should join hands with Congress. However, a resolution was passed at the meeting, authorising Pawar to take a final decision over the issue of alliances," party spokesman Vasant Chavan said. PRI

Asked about Sena's opposition to NCP joining the NDA, Chavan said: "Nobody from the NCP has approached Sena over this issue."

# Mulayam no to Front

Statesman News Service

LUCKNOW, Jan. 7. — Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav today gave hints that the Samajwadi Party would contest the next Lok Sabha polls on its own. "Morcha only for election tickets has no meaning," he said.

The SP chief said a *morcha* was generally formed before the elections only for distribution of tickets to party candidates, and it did not serve any fruitful purpose.

Mr Yadav made it clear that formation of any *morcha* against the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance was meaningless. "The experience of forming a *morcha* in the past has been bitter," he said.

Speaking at a function in Kursi, about 20 km from here, Mr Yadav said that in the past, a *morcha* had been helpful only for the BJP. "These alliances were not based on any ideology," he said.

Mr Yadav appeared to be going a step further than what SP general secretary Mr Amar Singh said here yesterday about the Congress being "most acceptable, but that it had changed its attitude".

He had once spoken of allying with any group, even the Bahujan Samaj Party led by Miss Mayawati. "The BSP had an alliance with the BJP thrice in Uttar Pradesh, and it is no less communal," Mr Yadav said today.

This was obviously referring to the Congress' moves attempting to bring both the SP and BSP together in its fight against the NDA.



CPM eyes Tamil Nadu, rival targets Rajasthan for the kill

Heartland  
focus in  
BJP poll  
strategy

# DMK, Left deal on secular front

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 3: The BJP has given top priority to the Hindi heartland in its electoral scheme and plans to fine-tune its strategies in Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Jharkhand which make up the cow belt.

A meeting of the general secretaries held today at the residence of Pramod Mahajan, who is in charge of poll management, decided that while the party should not be "over-ambitious" about Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, it should go for the kill in Rajasthan.

In Uttar Pradesh, where the party won just 25 seats in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, sources said the endeavour would be to push the tally up to 35. But the projected increase of 10 was premised on the prospective return of former chief minister Kalyan Singh to the BJP.

Sources felt Kalyan's backward caste Lodhi Rajput origin might translate into a six- or seven-seat gain "straightaway" in western Uttar Pradesh and Bundelkhand where Lodhi Rajputs are dominant. His other "plus", they claimed, was the ability to pull non-Yadav backward caste votes away from the Samajwadi Party and even cut into the Rashtriya Lok Dal's support base among farmers.

"Kalyan's greatest asset is that he combines the social advantage of being a backward caste leader with the image of a Hindutva votary and a champion of farmers' rights," the sources stressed.

The former chief minister is likely to announce his future course of action tomorrow in Lucknow. The belief in the BJP is that Kalyan is ready to pull out of the Samajwadi-led government and merge his outfit with his former party.

In Bihar, the sources said the task was to ensure that the BJP and the Janata Dal (United) retained the 1999 tally of 30 votes — BJP 12 and Dal (U) 18. The BJP is waiting to see what Ram Vilas Paswan does. The Lok Janshakti Party leader is expected to announce his plans by February.

While the BJP is not overly confident of retaining its seats in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, the sources said Rajasthan is still "full of potential". The BJP bagged 16 of the 25 seats here in 1999.

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Chennai, Jan. 3: Marxist veteran Harkishen Singh Surjeet and DMK chief M. Karunanidhi today joined hands for a wide anti-BJP alliance in the state for the coming Lok Sabha elections.

In the ruling ADMK camp too, there was some flutter about a possible meeting between the chief minister Jayalalitha and visiting Union law minister Arun Jaitley. But the meeting did not take place as the chief minister left for Kolapakkam.

After a 45-minute breakfast meeting with the DMK chief at his Gopalapuram residence, Surjeet virtually gave Karunanidhi a blank cheque to bring together all secular forces in Tamil Nadu to fight the "communal" BJP and its allies. In reply, Karunanidhi said the secular front he would fashion "will definitely include" the Congress, CPM, CPI and the MDMK.

Struggling with a sore throat, Surjeet told reporters after the meeting that "Karunanidhi would decide on all the forces which would be there (in the secular front)".

He was also positive that the DMK chief should lead the new front. "Whether you call him a leader or not, Karunanidhi is the

rallying point and without him you cannot strike the BJP. It is he who has to help in that process as he is the most affected person."

Explaining his urgency to come to Chennai to meet Karunanidhi, the Marxist leader said all the scattered secular forces had to be brought together to "defeat the BJP" as the party was planning to advance the elections to April-May.

He said the secular front had become a necessity as the BJP was "openly communal in character" and went to the extent of changing school syllabi and revising history texts.

Surjeet said though the Left parties had their differences with the Congress, like economic reforms, "we cannot write off the Congress as it is the largest party in the country".

He agreed that without the Congress the BJP could not be defeated. The Congress had also learnt its lesson in the recent Assembly elections that "soft Hindutva does not pay", he added.

The senior CPM leader said the party was not averse to tie up with the Congress here, though they are rivals in Bengal, Tripura and Kerala. Asked if his party would favour Congress chief Sonia Gandhi as Prime Minister,

the Marxist veteran said "it is not the issue now and can be sorted out later".

The Congress chief had spoken over phone to Karunanidhi on December 30 and congratulated him for walking out of the NDA.

Surjeet rubbished the allegation that "opportunism and political machinations of the DMK" on its part led to the DMK's quitting the NDA after "enjoying" power at the Centre for four years. He said the DMK was forced to come out as Karunanidhi realised that the BJP's words and actions were contradictory.

He also clarified on his earlier utterances when he had spoken of "two fronts" to fight the BJP. He said what he had meant was that there could be "two platforms" of non-BJP forces moving in the same direction.

He replied in the negative when asked if the MDMK's pro-LTTE stance would weaken the alliance. "Our first priority is to defeat the BJP," he said.

## League switches sides

The Indian Union Muslim League has severed ties with the ADMK to join the DMK. A party general council meeting held at Tiruchirappalli decided to join the DMK front.

# Kalyan return buzz

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Lucknow, Jan. 3: Four years after he was driven out of the BJP, the distance between Kalyan Singh's bungalow at 2 Mal Avenue and the party's state headquarters on 222/85 Bidhan Sabha Road here appears to be fast narrowing.

As Kalyan's Rashtriya Kranti Party gears up to hold its national executive meeting tomorrow, the unstated agenda is whether it will merge with the BJP before the parliamentary polls.

Kalyan's bungalow was a hub of activity since early this morning, with party MLAs and district presidents thronging it.

The house has been decorated with colourful lights and shamianas have been put up on the lawns to accommodate members of the executive body. The backward leader was all smiles as he greeted party colleagues.

The party has four MLAs, including Kalyan and his son Ranjit, and one member of legislative council.

Kusum Rai, the MLC and a close friend of the former chief minister, is public works department (PWD) minister in the Mulayam Singh cabinet while Ranjit is the health minister.

Once Kalyan's party merges with the BJP, it will have to forgo the ministries. But party members, looking for greater gain, are expected to leave the final decision on the merger to Kalyan.

The political drama over his proposed re-entry into the BJP, which unfolded at the birthday bash for Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lucknow on December 24, is expected to reach its finale at another birthday bash here on January 5, when Kalyan turns 70.

Union minister of state for

home Swami Chinmayanand is to visit Kalyan's house tomorrow for a one-to-one and might even have a "birthday gift".

He is expected to formalise the deal for Kalyan's return, but the announcement is unlikely to come before the BJP's national convention in Hyderabad later this month.

On the eve of his party's meet, Kalyan said that so long it was his responsibility to run the alliance with chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, Ajit Singh and the Congress.

"But now if it breaks up, I would not be responsible," he said, hinting at a new political alliance before the parliamentary polls.

Kalyan said the new alliance might force an Assembly election in Uttar Pradesh along with the Lok Sabha polls, a claim that both Mulayam and BJP leader Kharaj Mishra denied vociferously.

# Thackeray opens arms to Pawar

Our Political Bureau

MUMBAI 1 JANUARY



THACKERAY

GIVING further impetus to speculations about inducting the Sharad Pawar led NCP into the NDA, the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray on Thursday said he was very much open to the idea. Mr Thackeray said that his party was not averse to the Nationalist Congress Party joining the ruling National Democratic Alliance at the Centre. However, as expected, the Sena chief has put a rider. The NCP will have to shed Chhagan Bhujbal, Maharashtra's former deputy chief minister.

The Shiv Sena chief categorically stated that the proposed move would not have any place for his bete noire and former Maharashtra deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal.

Mr Bhujbal, as a former home minister, had tried unsuccessfully to put Mr Thackeray, his former mentor, behind bars. "It is impossible", he told mediapersons at his residence in suburban Bandra when asked if he would allow Mr Bhujbal to be part of the proposed alliance.

The Sena chief's statement assumes significance in the wake of his recent closed-door meeting with deputy prime minister L.K. Advani in the metropolis. Though, Mr Advani met Mr Thackeray to discuss advancing the Lok Sabha polls, the issue of allowing NCP into the NDA fold also cropped up.

The Economic Times

▶ 2 JAN 2004

# BJP talks to old friends, Cong looks for new ones

CL Manoj & Sudesh Verma  
in New Delhi

Dec. 31. — The BJP has started confabulating in right earnest with old allies while the Congress has begun scouting for new ones in an overdrive to get political equations for the next general elections straight. While the BJP has asked the NDA convenor, Mr George Fernandes, to sound out allies such as the BJD and the Trinamul on advancing polls to April, the Congress has the first step towards a broad secular front to take on the BJP-led NDA.

The Congress chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the CPI-M general secretary, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet and the CPI leader, Mr AB Bardhan have formed a "strategic axis" that will work towards a "two-way" mobilisation — involving pre-poll and post-poll alliances — of anti-BJP forces.

Sources said this would include a formal "Congress-led pre-poll front" with the RJD and the JMM in Bihar and Jharkhand, the NCP and the RPI in Maharashtra, the BSP in UP and some other northern states, the DMK in Tamil Nadu, the UDF partners in Kerala, the TRS in Andhra, the PDP in J-K and the Congress allies in the north-east.

Besides this, there will be a second loose Left-anchored conglomeration of "secular parties" which may have reservations due to regional compulsions to having a pre-poll alliance with the Congress. Along with the Left parties, there will be the SP in UP, Mr Ramvilas Paswan in Bihar, DMK-MDMK in Tamil Nadu and the JD (S) in Karnataka.

While the Left will fight the Congress in West Bengal, Kera-



Mrs Sonia Gandhi with Mr Ram Vilas Paswan in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

la and Tripura, the SP will do the same in UP and JD(S) in Karnataka. But these two formations could come to a post-poll understanding against the NDA.

A broad understanding on this strategy was reached during Mrs Gandhi's meeting with Mr Bardhan on last Saturday and her talks with Mr Surjeet yesterday.

It was also been decided to underplay the leadership issue even though Mrs Gandhi's claim for that as "the leader of the largest secular party" is understood.

While Mr Surjeet met Mr Mulayam Singh today, Mr Paswan separately met Mrs Gandhi, who walked into her neighbour's house, and Mr Bardhan. Also Mrs Gandhi's man in charge of Andhra Pradesh, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, met Mr Bardhan yesterday.

Consequent to these moves, the otherwise ailing 86-year-old Mr Surjeet will now travel to Chennai to meet Mr Karunanidhi on Saturday.

The BJP on the other hand has already begun the task of consulting its partners. It intends to go to its Hyderabad na-

## Mulayam meets PM

NEW DELHI, Dec. 31. — Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav today met Prime Minister Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee here and discussed developmental projects in the state. After the meeting, the chief minister told reporters that he urged the Prime Minister to expedite the developmental projects in the state. He is also believed to have discussed the political situation in the light of talks of early Lok Sabha polls. — PTI

tional executive after consultations so that the executive may formally demand advance poll dates and leave the issue to the Prime Minister.

Mr Fernandes has already spoken to the INLD led by the Haryana CM, Mr O.P. Chautala. The latter has given his green signal, sources said. He is expected to speak to Trinamul chief, Mamata Banerjee, who is likely to get a portfolio soon.

He will also speak to other important Samata-JD(U) leaders such as Mr Sharad Yadav and Mr Nitish Kumar, sources said.

The Prime Minister himself, sources said, spoke to the TDP chief, Mr N. Chandrababu Naidu, when the latter was here recently. Post-meeting, the TDP and the BJP have decided to approach the Andhra electorate as alliance partners.

The Deputy PM, Mr LK Advani, has also spoken to the Shiv Sena Chief, Mr Bal Thackeray who has consented. The Union Law and Justice Minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, has spoken to the SAD.

That leaves only smaller allies such as the DMK and the PMK to be consulted, sources said. Although the DMK has resigned from the government it is still a part of the NDA.

# Mulayam, LF spurn Sonia alliance call

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, December 31

Front fissures

THE LEFT and the Samajwadi Party on Wednesday gave Sonia Gandhi a nasty New Year's Eve surprise by ruling out a pre-poll alliance, hours after SP president Mulayam Singh Yadav "could not take" a call the Congress president had made to him.

The announcement was made by CPI(M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet and Mulayam, who had met earlier on a day of hectic political activity.

Mulayam later told reporters that the Congress appeared to be speaking in two voices about the proposed front, saying it would not insist on the chairman's post but projecting Sonia as its candidate for Prime Minister.

Surjeet said the former United Front parties are trying to form a front of their own minus the Congress. The only hope he held out for the Congress was that the two fronts could "coordinate" to defeat the BJP.

Mulayam, however, ruled out joining any front. He said his "experience" of fronts was not good: all they did was "weaken the party organisation" and generate "controversies". But he was ready to give and receive "issue-based" support from secular parties for defeating the BJP.

The Samajwadi Party president also met the Prime Minister, NDA convener George Fernandes and Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Ajit Singh — his ally in UP — on



**CPM:** No tie-up with Cong, but a separate alliance of former United Front members. May coordinate with Cong against BJP

**SP:** Won't enter into any alliance at all. May give or receive issue-based support. Cong guilty of doubletalk on Sonia's role in proposed alliance

Wednesday, but ruled out any poll tie-up with the BJP.

Surjeet said a "broad" front led by the Congress was not possible. His party had "fundamental" differences with the Congress, particularly on economic policies.

The Congress reacted to the disappointment by saying a "grand" pre-poll alliance may not be "necessary". Spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy said, "The idea is to get maximum seats and a strategy will be evolved to achieve the goal." He hinted at working out a common minimum programme for the polls. Sonia continued her hunt for allies, though, walking down next door to wish Ram Vilas Paswan a happy new year.