

RJD to contest 175 seats, Cong 51

PRESS Trust of India
Patna, September 27

HAVING SEWN up an alliance last week, RJD-led UPA in Bihar on Tuesday announced a seat-sharing formula under which the RJD would contest 175 of the 243 Assembly seats, leaving 51 for the Congress, nine for CPI-M and eight for NCP.

The UPA allies, however, agreed to allow friendly fight in two constituencies — Sugauli and Bisfi — where RJD and CPI-M and Congress and CPI-M will cross swords.

RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav announced the seat-sharing formula at a crowded press conference in the presence of Bihar PCC president Sadanand Singh, state NCP chief Aqil Haider and others. There was no leader from the CPI-M as they were engaged in party meeting, Lalu said.

"The four UPA allies have arrived at a seat-sharing accord to defeat the communal and fascist forces out to destroy communal and social harmony", he said.

RJD supremo said though the allies would undertake joint campaign and fight the elections as "one". A "rare exception" has been allowed in respect of Sugauli and Bisfi.

He said the allied parties would now separately announce the list of their candidates and the common minimum programme of the UPA was likely to be released on September 30.

"We are going to announce what we will implement if voted to power.... There will be no false promises", he said.

According to UPA sources, the

Bihar battlelines

Total seats 243

UPA		POLLS	
RJD	175	1st phase	October 18
Congress	51	2nd phase	October 6
CPM	9	3rd phase	November 13
NCP	8	4th phase	November 19
NDA			
JDU	141		
BJP	102		

■ In the last elections, the RJD and the Congress had "friendly fights" on several seats. The RJD had fought from 215 seats and the Congress from 85

issue of five per cent job reservation for Muslims was likely to figure in the CMP which the CPI-M has opposed, saying the constitution did not provide reservation on the basis of religion. The CPI-M will contest the polls on a separate manifesto. As a result of the seat-sharing arrangement, all UPA constituents had to whittle down their share of seats.

While the RJD, which had contested 215 seats in the February polls, has agreed to contest 175 seats, the Congress' number has come down from 84 to 51. The RJD had supported Congress nominees in only 11 seats in the last polls and the two parties as well as LJP had entered into friendly contests at many places. The LJP has forged an electoral alliance with CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc this time.



RJD chief Lalu Prasad, at the release of the list of his party candidates for the Bihar elections, in Patna on Tuesday.

JD(U) releases first list

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, September 27

AFTER FINALISING the seat-sharing arrangement with its ally BJP late on Monday night, the JD(U) — which will contest 141 of the 243 Bihar Assembly seats — released its first list of 70 candidates on Tuesday.

The list included names of 13 former LJP MLAs and three Independents who supported NDA chief ministerial candidate Nitish Kumar's bid to form the government after the last elec-

tion in the state.

The BJP agreed to settle for 102 seats — three less than the number it contested last time — in order to accommodate the former LJP MLAs and Independents who joined the JD(U).

The agreement was arrived at at a late-night meeting that JD(U) leader Sharad Yadav held with BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley. The BJP has already declared names of its 80 candidates, which includes 39 MLAs of the dissolved House.

Lalu, Mishra charged in fodder case

Plea of accused to be discharged doesn't stand scrutiny: CBI

PRESS Trust of India
Ranchi, September 26

CHARGES WERE framed against railway minister Lulu Prasad and former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra on Monday by two special CBI courts in the multi-crore fodder scam. Lulu, also the RJD chief, faces charges under various sections like abusing official position for causing wrongful gains to himself and others, using forged documents as genuine, falsification of accounts, cheating, misappropriation and conspiracy.

Pleading innocence before the special CBI judge, Sanjay Prasad, who framed the charges against the railway minister and 146 others, accused in the case pertaining to fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 182 crore from Doranda treasury in Ranchi, Lulu said he should be discharged from the case as it was he who had directed to file the cases.

However, CBI counsel B.M. Singh contended that the plea of the accused to be discharged does not stand scrutiny as the same court had earlier rejected his discharge petition in the same case.

The court of another special CBI judge Alok Sengupta also framed charges against Lulu, Mishra and 29 others, accused in the

case pertaining to fraudulent withdrawal of over Rs 90 lakh from Deogarh treasury. Here too, the RJD supreme pleaded for his discharge with the same argument, but CBI counsel said the case had been filed by the CBI suo motu.

Both the former Bihar chief ministers appeared before the courts but Lulu's usual flamboyance was missing.

Accusing the investigating agency of hatching a conspiracy against him, Lulu urged the court to discharge him from the cases as the CBI had been making the same charges in all its cases.

The CBI court had completed framing of charges in all the 48 cases. Two cases had been closed. So far five cases have ended in conviction of 28 people. Mishra, in his defence during the framing of charges, said he was innocent since he had been all along anti-Lulu and had never met him.

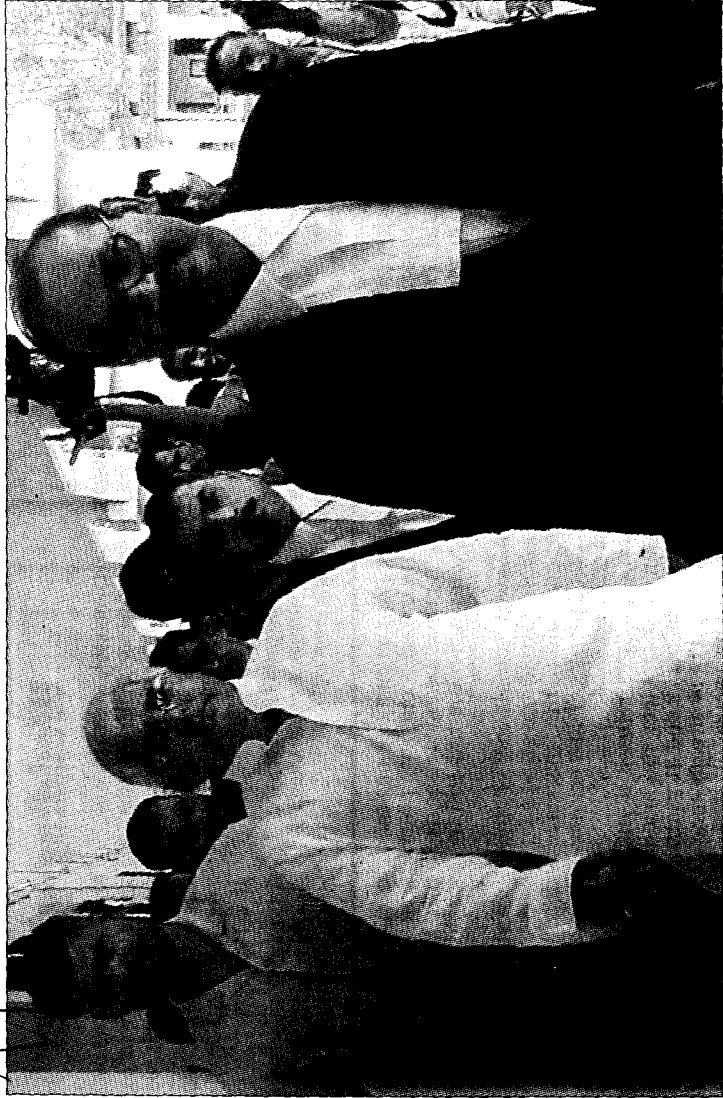
Besides producing over 150 sheets containing the probe report, the CBI appended

thousands of documents which included bills and other writing materials in the two cases. The CBI also submitted a supplementary report making four/five others accused in which former MP late Rajo Singh was one of them. However, his name would be withdrawn following his assassination in Bihar earlier this month.

The Doranda treasury scam was the largest one in terms of money. However, the amount was scaled down to Rs 139.35 crore during CBI investigations.

This is the fourth time this year that the charges have been framed against Lulu and Mishra. On April 25, a special CBI court framed charges against the RJD chief in connection with fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 37 crore from Chaibasa treasury. In May, Lulu appeared before another CBI court for framing of charges in the case of fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 3.13 crore from Dumka treasury.

Lulu is also facing a disproportionate assets case in Patna, an offshoot of the Rs 950 crore fodder scam. He had been accused of possessing Rs 42.5 lakh disproportionate to his known sources of income. In 1997, Lulu had to step down as chief minister following a court warrant in one of the cases of the fodder scam.



Lalu Prasad appears at the special CBI court in Ranchi on Monday.

Reddy sweeps TRS & Naidu aside

G.S. RADHAKRISHNA

Hyderabad, Sept. 26: YSR romped home without a crutch but rival Chandrababu Naidu looks in desperate need of one.

The Andhra civic polls today threw up Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy as the big winner, with the Congress making a sweep of 74 of the 96 municipalities to which elections were held.

The victory came in spite of the heat and dust raised by one-time ally Telengana Rashtra Samiti, which walked out of YSR's ministry in June and has been threatening to spill blood if a Telengana state is not carved out.

"It is a fitting reply to the antics and tantrums of Telengana campaigners," state Congress chief K. Keshav Rai said, making it clear the party was not the loser for splitting with the TRS.

A flash of lightning seemed to have struck the TRS, which had expected to win at least 15 municipalities in the Telengana region but managed only two.

"We don't know what struck us. Like an attack of lightning, all our candidates were felled," TRS ideologue Jayashankar said.

Chief minister Reddy, who seemed to have secured his throne in spite of the Telengana tangle, said the poll out-

come proved two things. "One, it is the people's mandate for the massive irrigation works launched by the government.

"Two, the people have faith in the leadership of Sonia Gandhi to resolve the Telengana issue."

He said the Congress's tie-up with Left parties had played a big role in trouncing the Telugu Desam as well as the BJP. He even offered to support the TRS in municipalities where results were hung.

The Desam won only in 10 municipalities in spite of a prolonged month-long campaign by its chief, Naidu. As he toured the flood-hit areas

CIVIC PULSE

Municipalities 96

Congress 74

Desam 10

TRS 2

Hung 8

Corporations 10

Congress 9

Hung 1

in Vijayawada today, he alleged the Congress had "won with money and misuse of office".

Although it seemed the Desam would have fared better with help from the BJP, party leader T. Devender Gowd said there was no question of rebuilding bridges with that party.

"Come what may, we do not want the company of the BJP," he said.

Experts say the opposition performance — the Desam and BJP contested separately — suggests the parties should review their relations if they are to prove any contest for the ruling Congress or win the confidence of the people of Andhra.

It also takes the wind out of the Desam argument that it bombed at the 2004 hustings

because of the tie-up with the BJP. Without it too, the Desam has bitten the dust.

"People are vexed with the Ram mandir issue, so they voted against the BJP and the Desam, which was once its ally," said a political analyst Nageswar over televi-

sion. "Naidu's failure is his over-dependence on women's votes. Since he does not have NTR's charm, they didn't vote for him."

A senior Congress minister, K. Rosaiah, said the results showed that "not just farmers, even women, youth, the middle classes and urban people favour the YSR regime against the Naidu regime".

9-6-08
29/9

Bihar puzzle

Third front adds to the uncertainty

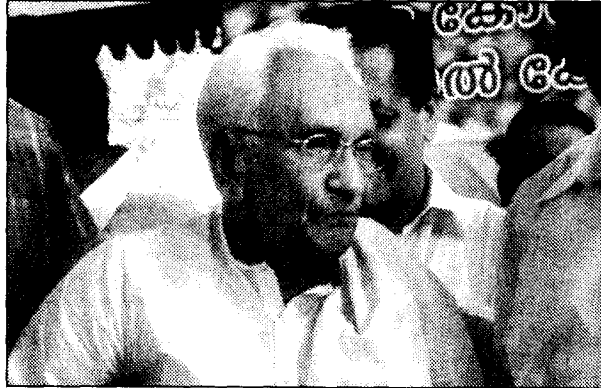
There being no meeting point between Lalu Prasad and Ram Vilas Paswan — despite the best efforts made by Congress leaders, Sonia Gandhi downwards — another realignment of political forces was perhaps inevitable. In the February election, the NDA and RJD were the main rivals with Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party at best claiming the opportunity to tilt the scales one way or the other. It would have produced a result in government formation had it not been for Paswan's compulsions as minister in the UPA government, a platform he shares with Lalu. Now, after the Congress has officially sided with Lalu, Paswan feels compelled to make a counter-move — for what it is worth. The third front he has formed in alliance with the CPI, Forward Bloc and SUCI adds to the uncertainty. For all practical purposes, the UPA and its Left supporters have been split down the middle. This could give the NDA, especially the JD-U headed by Nitish Kumar, an edge, the only element of uncertainty being the current churning within the BJP. Both Lalu and Paswan may have reason to regret that they cannot curb their ambitions — holding on to power at the Centre and establishing a separate fiefdom in their home state.

Paswan's problem will be to find replacements for those — around 20 of the 28 elected LJP MLAs — who had opted to help Nitish Kumar form the government before Buta Singh intervened to dissolve the assembly. Lalu will be virtually fending for himself with the support of the Congress which now goes out of its way to play the minority card to counter Paswan's repeated demand for a Muslim chief minister. It is shocking that the Congress should contribute to the caste and communal factors in Bihar with Digvijay Singh now talking of job reservations for Dalit Muslims. The Congress has its own reasons for preferring Lalu to Paswan but disgraces itself by resorting to this kind of pathetic opportunism. The Left Front's opportunism is not surprising. While it makes desperate efforts to heal the internal rifts in West Bengal on the Salim controversy, there are no qualms about CPI-M joining Lalu and Congress and CPI and Forward Bloc going Paswan's way. It is only a matter of getting a toehold in alien territory with someone's help. Principles don't matter at all.

21 SEP 2008

THE STATESMAN

Karunakaran alliance splits LDF wide open



Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 23 SEPTEMBER

TILL a month ago, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala was a confident and extremely united house, raring to capture power in the state next year by decimating the crumbling (ruling) Congress-led UDF.

However, CPM state secretary Pinarayi Vijayan's intriguing decision to co-opt the break-away Congress, headed by K Karunakaran, who has been projected by the Marxists over the decades as the symbol of anti-Communism and "villain of Emergency period", has overnight turned the LDF into a house of bitter differences and an object of ridicule for the UDF as also the traditional Communist supporters on the eve of the Panchayat and municipal elections.

Mr Vijayan's typically opportunist and unabashed attempt to recycle Mr Karunakaran as the new-found "Mr Clean" has triggered a series of backlash from within the CPM and also other LDF allies, who have been politically projecting him as Kerala politics' "black leg".

The Opposition leaders and CPM politburo members have used Mr Vijayan's actions as "blatant electoral opportunism" to hit back at him by rejecting the state secretary's attempt to give Mr Karunakaran a clean chit in the Rajan case, which was the most infamous episode in Kerala during Emergency.

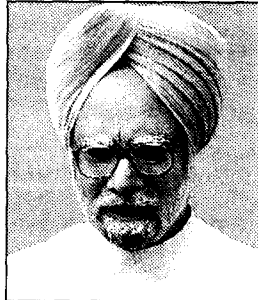
Sensing his support among the traditional partymen, comrade VS on Thursday attacked the already cornered Mr Vijayan, by charging that Mr Karunakaran was also responsible for the events that led to the murder of Azhikkode Raghavan.

Left hits out at UPA over CMP issue

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 23 SEPTEMBER

THE Left is all set for another onslaught against the Manmohan Singh-led government's economic policies. It only awaits a letter informing them of the coordination committee meeting with the UPA.

Left parties are backing the all-India protest action on



September 29 in a bid to pressurise the government into implementing the Common Minimum Programme's (CMP's) provisions.

The industrial strike comes at a time when the CPM and CPI have been promised a formal commitment against divesting navratna shares. Central trade unions have a 16-point charter of demands, including opposition to the divestment of PSU shares. The Left expected a letter soon after the PM's return from the US but there is no word from the government as yet.

SC adjourns Lalu case to Oct 19

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 20

THE SUPREME Court on Tuesday adjourned till October 19 the hearing of an application seeking a stay on the transfer of the special CBI judge at Patna handling the fodder scam cases against railway minister Lalu Prasad and his wife Rabri Devi.

The apex court permitted all parties to peruse the documents submitted by the Patna High Court registrar relating to the transfer (by way of promotion) of the earlier judge at the fag end of the trial and appointment of a new judge in his place.

A Bench, comprising justices S.N. Variava, A.R. Lakshmanan and S.H. Kapadia, had, at the last hearing, directed the new judge to refrain from hearing Lalu's defence till "further orders".

The Bench had said it did not want to be presented with a "fait accompli" when it took up the matter of transfer of the judge who is hearing a DA case stemming from the fodder scam case, and, instead, asked him to complete only the arguments for the prosecution.

The application, filed by NDA MPs Rajiv Ranjan Singh Lallan and Sushil Modi, had sought cancellation of bail granted to Lalu and Rabri Devi for trying to interfere in the trial of these cases.

The court is expected to first address the issue of maintainability of the PIL in such a matter before it takes up the application seeking a stay on the transfer of the trial judge.

"The trial judge could not be removed at the fag end of the trial", the members of Parliament contended.

They had further alleged mala fide behind moving out Girilal Paswan and his replacement with Yogendra Prasad.



LJP leader Ram Vilas Paswan addresses an election rally in Begusarai on Tuesday.

PTI

Paswan BJP agent: Lalu

LALU PRASAD on Tuesday mounted a vitriolic attack on Ram Vilas Paswan, branding him as "an agent of BJP" and charged that his Cabinet colleague's stubborn insistence on a Muslim CM was aimed at splitting the secular votes to benefit the NDA in the Bihar Assembly elections.

"Paswan BJP ke agent hain aur commission khori kar rahe hain. Musalman CM man mein nahin hai, man mein hai ki Nitish CM bane. (Paswan is a BJP agent and is taking a commission from it. From his heart, he doesn't want a Muslim as chief minister, only Nitish Kumar)", he said, addressing a convention of extremely backward classes of RJD. The RJD leader saw a conspiracy by the "communal and fascist forces" in Paswan not joining other UPA allies in fighting the Bihar elections and cautioned his party men against the "sinister designs of these forces to divide the secular votes so they can rule the state". He said the BJP had put Nitish Kumar in the forefront of its fight, "but the real force behind him is that of the communal and fascist party".

Agencies, Patna

LJP, Cong to cross swords

LJP CHIEF Ram Vilas Paswan on Tuesday said his party would fight the Congress in the Bihar Assembly elections, although it would refrain from attacking the party during its campaign, and rejected demands for his resignation as Union minister.

Paswan, who has formed a Third Front with the CPI and some others, maintained it should not be held responsible for any split in the UPA votes, which may, or may not, benefit the BJP-led NDA.

"The Congress has rejected my offer of not fielding LJP candidates in seats won by that party last time. But the Congress has said it will contest against us. So, we'll also challenge them", the Union minister told reporters here. However, to a question, he said the LJP would not attack the Congress during campaign, saying, "There's hardly anything to speak against that party. Of course, we'll speak against the RJD and the NDA".

He rubbished the charge that, by not falling in line with the RJD, he was conspiring against the UPA and indirectly helping the BJP-JD(U) combine.

PTI, New Delhi

It's a tough fight, admits Lalu

Stateaman News Service

PATNA, Sept. 20. — RJD chief, Mr Lalu Prasad, today publicly admitted for the first time that the "battle" was really tough this time, and warned that caution was needed while dealing with the nearly united Opposition in Bihar.

Mr Prasad made this candid admission at the RJD's Extremely Backward Caste Campaign Committee meeting in the SK Memorial Hall, here. "Ladai kathi hai... Opposition pariyan daant pis rahi hai, ye hamare aur aupake liye chintu ka vishay hai. (The electoral battle is tough this time as the united Opposition has ganged up against us. This is an issue of concern for me and you as well)," he said.

He appealed to the poor, backward castes and the minorities to show rocklike unity so as to neutralise the "evil designs" of the communal forces, which had now been joined by the LJP chief, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan.

Accusing the LJP of indirectly supporting the NDA's cause, the RJD chief said: "Mr Paswan does not want a Muslim chief minister. He is rather carrying forward the secret agenda of installing a BJP-brand CM like Mr Nitish Kumar in Bihar."

He again harped on the theme of alleged "harassment" of officials from the backward and minority communities and accused the Election Commission of "torturing them". Mr Prasad alleged: "A conspiracy has been hatched to defeat us in the elections." He lambasted the EC for allegedly not providing electoral photo I-cards to every voter.



CROWD PULLER: Mr Ram Vilas Paswan is all set to give a tough time to the RJD-led alliance in the Bihar Assembly polls. At an election rally in Begusarai on Tuesday. — PTI

UPA seat-sharing hangs fire

Stateaman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 20. — The seat-sharing talks among RJD, Congress, NCP and CPI-M today appeared to have entered a decisive phase. The second round of meeting was held at Mr Prasad's residence earlier in the day, attended by Mrs Sonia Gandhi's political secretary, Mr Ahmed Patel, the AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar affairs, Mr Digvijay Singh, the CPI-M Politburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechury, and the NCP leader, Mr Tariq Anwar.

The leaders claimed that the talks had gone on "smoothly" and that they will wrap up the entire seat-adjustment exercise in the course of another round of meeting, possibly tonight or by tomorrow.

Fair polls order

NEW DELHI, Sept. 20. — While asking poll observers to deploy Central government employees in maximum numbers, the Election Commission today asked them to keep a constant watch on execution of non-bailable warrants, recovery of illicit arms, collection of licensed arms from undesirable elements and detention of anti-social elements during the Bihar Assembly elections. — SNS

"There is, by and large, a broad agreement among us on the issue," said Mr Singh.

The Congress leader echoed Mr Prasad's views that the details of seat-sharing will only be announced after the EC's first notification on 23 September. He said the partners have broadly identified

the number of seats they would contest and their constituencies. In sharp contrast with the trend in the February Assembly poll, he said, the names of candidates for all 243 seats will be announced in "one go".

Sources said there are differences between the Congress and the RJD over the former's claim of seats for its nominees, which needed to be ironed out. Mr Prasad is said to be reluctant to part with more than 30 seats for the Congress which, in turn, is making the pitch for around 50 seats. The compromise formula could be some middle ground, with Lalu likely to concede 35-40 seats for the Congress. The RJD will obviously get the lion's share with around 185 seats. The NCP and the CPM are to be allotted 10 seats each, sources said.

Paswan meets his allies

NEW DELHI, Sept. 20. — LJP chief Mr Ram Vilas Paswan today met CPI leader Mr D Raja, Forward Bloc leader Mr Debabrata Biswas and the RSP's Mr Abani Roy.

Criticising the RJD, Mr Paswan also sought to turn the heat on the Congress, saying his party will also fight the Congress since the latter had refused to reciprocate his earlier gesture not to field nominees against the party's sitting candidates. Mr Paswan, however, said his party will refrain from attacking the Congress in its campaign. He also rejected demands for his resignation from the UPA Cabinet.

Describing his "third front" as the "first front in the making", Mr Paswan said since the electorate had rejected RJD, the Lalu-led alliance could not be accepted as the "real UPA". He also said if the NDA is benefited by the presence of two separate UPA alliances in the fray, the RJD should be blamed for it.

The LJP and the CPI said they would wait for the Congress to take a decision on seat-sharing before announcing their plans.

Mr D Raja said their third front were also in touch with CPI(ML) and Samajwadi Party.

21 SEP 2005

THE STATESMAN

UPA FORMULA ■ For now, 40 seats for Congress, 8 for NCP, 8-9 for CPM, rest for RJD in race for 243

Bihar deal done, Laloo says: It's me versus all

PRADEEP KAUSHAL
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 19

HIS allies and friends in the UPA may have high hopes, but RJD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav is seeking to seal the seat-sharing deal for the forthcoming Bihar polls by letting them contest in just 55-60 of the 243 seats for the Assembly.

After Laloo met Congress point-man for Bihar, Digvijay Singh, CPI(M) politburo member, Sitaram Yechury, and NCP general secretary, Tariq Anwar, at his residence here this afternoon, the formula that has emerged is: 40 seats for Congress, eight for NCP and eight or nine for CPI(M).

Sources disclosed that the Congress, after handing Laloo a list of 113 seats initially, scaled down its demand to 55 today. The party hopes that Laloo will part with at least 50.

Digvijay's argument: any figure short of this would not be "re-

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 19

His reply to EC: Paid Rs 700 for 3-km trip

UNDER the Election Commission scanner for alleged misuse of government machinery for his Bihar election campaign, Union Railway Minister and RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav today denied the charges. So much so that he claimed that his party had paid the Railway Board Rs 700 for using his official car to travel from Rail Bhavan to Nirvachan Sadan and back—a distance of all of three kilometres.

Replying to an EC notice based on an NDA complaint, Laloo attached a copy of the payment receipt made to the Railway Board for using the

"spectable" for a party with a national profile like the Congress. According to the sources, he virtually pleaded with Laloo for a larger share of seats from the "negative list" of 113 constituencies—where RJD lost by big margins during the last three elections. Contesting 84 seats in an alliance with Laloo's

car—with party colleague and MoS Company Affairs Prem Chand Gupta and Congress Bihar in-charge Digvijay Singh—on September 7, to seek rescheduling of the polls.

In his written response, Laloo said he used the official vehicle only because he was under 'Z-plus' security cover. A subdued Laloo denied that he has misused his official position, saying he was aware of election rules and was respectful towards the Commission.

EC officials said a decision on Laloo's reply will be taken once the full Commission meets. "Both Chief Election Commissioner B Tandon and Election Commissioner N Gopalaswami will be back tomorrow," they added.

RJD and Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP in the February polls, the Congress had finished with a tally of 10.

According to the bottomline drawn by the UPA alliance partners—assuming that sitting MLAs and last poll's runners-up get tickets—the Congress claim rests at 23. And for Laloo, the maximum num-

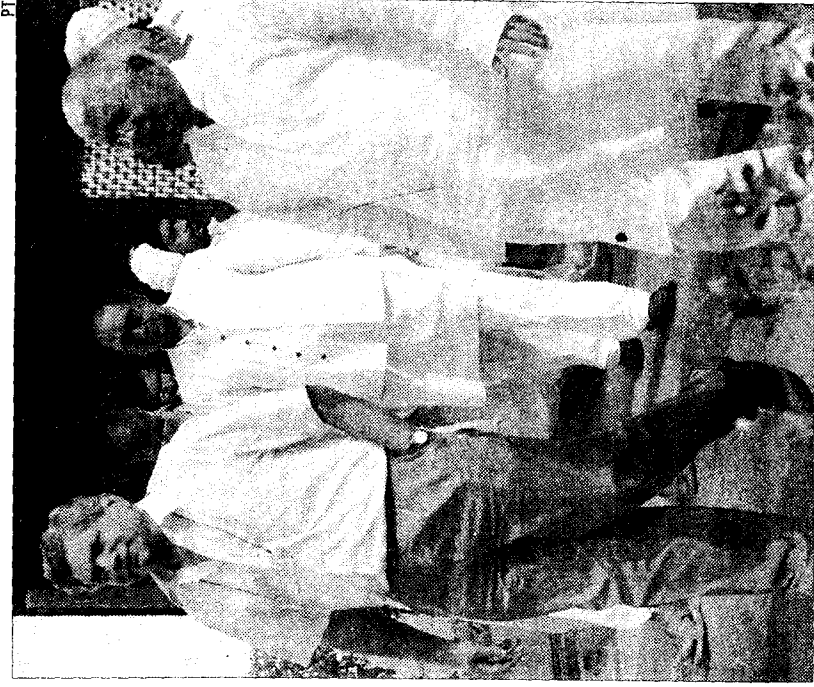
done a major chunk of the groundwork for firming up the alliance under Laloo. And this is likely to translate in to a bonus of two-three more seats.

Although the Congress has given Paswan time till September 23 to join the alliance, the UPA alliance may not wait till then. With the LJP supremo formally announcing his party's tie-up with the CPI front, they may seal their seat agreement tomorrow.

Interestingly, the sources said that efforts are now on to wean the CPI away from Paswan. Laloo told reporters: "We held preliminary talks today and by tomorrow we will finalise the seat-sharing adjustment. But if any other party wants to join the secular compartment, we have no objection."

When asked who the UPA's CM candidate would be, Laloo said: "Everyone knows, in Bihar, it has always been Laloo versus all."

Laloo with CPM leader Sitaram Yechury in New Delhi on Monday



PTI

Paswan launches third front in Bihar

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Bihar
57-1 19/9

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 18. — Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP today strengthened alliances with the CPI, Forward Bloc and the SUCI for the electoral battle. This sets the stage for a triangular contest and is a setback to the Congress-RJD's efforts for a united front against the BJP-led NDA in the Bihar Assembly polls.

After a two-day meeting of its National Council, convened to discuss Bihar elections, the CPI made public its tie-up with the LJP, asserting that the two parties were against the "misrule" of the RJD and wanted to defeat the NDA in the coming polls in the state.

"We are opposed to the misrule of the RJD. That is the reason why we have formed a separate secular alliance," CPI general secretary Mr AB Bardhan told reporters.

"There will be an alliance between our party and Mr Paswan's LJP. Talks with the CPI-ML are going on. We are also talking to parties like the Forward Bloc, RSP and the Samajwadi Party," he said, adding that the alliance proposed to contest all seats.

"By 23 September, we will complete the seat-sharing", the CPI leader said. Charging the RJD with "misrule," Mr Bardhan said though his



Mr Ram Vilas Paswan

party did not question the secularism of the Congress and the RJD, "our experience is that it is not enough to be only secular." He disagreed with the perception that a new alliance would divide the secular votes.

In Patna, Mr Paswan said the LJP had arrived at a "perfect" seat-sharing accord with the CPI, Forward Bloc and the SUCI.

Asked to comment on the CPI-ML setting a precondition that it would have an electoral understanding with the LJP if it snapped ties with the UPA and the Congress, Mr Paswan said: "Everybody knows that the CPI-ML is not on good terms with the Congress."

Pawar gets EC notice on poll sops in Bihar

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 13 SEPTEMBER

THE Election Commission (EC) has raised an objection to the announcement of certain pre-poll sops by Union agriculture minister Sharad Pawar in Bihar last week. The EC on Tuesday served him a notice, asking why action should not be initiated against him for having violated the poll code.

The Commission has given him time till September 16 to reply to the notice. It held that Mr Pawar's "promises to the electorate of Bihar on September 8, 2005, amounted to the violation of the model code of conduct."

The Union minister and NCP leader had, at a public meeting in Motipur in Muzaffarpur district, announced that the government would start sugar mills in the state to improve the lot of sugarcane farmers.

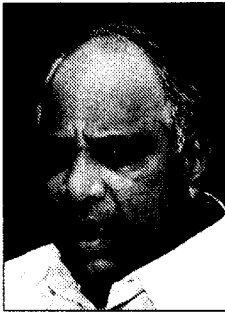
Following this, some members of the electronic media had complained that Mr Pawar's promises violated the code which has been

in force in the state since September 3. The EC then conducted its preliminary investigations and found that the minister had indeed made promises to the electorate on starting sugar mills and payment of arrears.

In the complaint received by the Commission, it was stated that Mr Pawar promised the closed sugar mills in the state would be revived and put into operation soon after polls and that the work would start with the reopening of Motipur Sugar Mill.

"The Commission has seen a video recording... (which) shows that you did make promises and assurances to the electorate in his address at the political meeting," the EC stated in its notice.

Meanwhile, a cautious Mr Pawar on Tuesday refused to comment on the notice, saying that he would rather go through it first. "I do not want to say anything on the subject. When I get the copy I will reply. Let me see the copy," Mr Pawar told reporters in New Delhi.



Top Bihar election official surrenders

Bitumen scam accused's bail plea rejected

Agencies
Patna, September 12

BIHAR ELECTION Commissioner D.P. Maheshwari surrendered before a special court of the Central Bureau of Investigation in connection with the multi-crore bitumen scam.

The court rejected his bail plea and remanded in judicial custody till September 23.

The retired IAS official, who was road department secretary when the scam took place, surrendered two days after a non-bailable arrest warrant was issued against him and superintending engineer of the road construction department, Jarnardan Sharma.

Soon after retiring as road secretary in 2002, Maheshwari was appointed state election commissioner, responsible for holding elections to panchayat and local bodies.

Former Rashtriya Janata Dal minister for road construction, Ilyas Hussain, is also named an accused in the case, which relates to irregularities in the supply and purchase of bitumen worth lakhs of rupees from oil companies.

CORRUPTION FILE

CEC in Bihar

Chief Election Commissioner B.B. Tandon will visit Bihar on Tuesday to review poll preparations in the state.

Tandon, who is visiting the state for the third time, will visit Munger and Bhagalpur and review the arrangements with senior civil and police officials. Election Commission sources said.

The Chief Election Commissioner had earlier visited Gaya and Muzaffarpur to review the poll arrangements. The Election Commission has announced a four-phase poll schedule for the politically volatile state on October 18, 26 and November 13 and 19. Counting of votes will be taken up on November 22.

RJD demand

Accusing the Election Commission of playing a partisan role in transferring Bihar government officials in the poll-bound state,

the RJD on Monday demanded reservation in constitutional bodies, including the topmost poll panel.

"Mostly, officials belonging to the Dalit and minority communities are being shifted by EC, whose actions indicate bias against our party," RJD national spokesman Shivanand Tiwari said. Denouncing largescale shifting of officials from the weaker sections of the society, Tiwari said if the trend was not stopped, the party could take recourse to "strict action".

He, however, declined to disclose what action the party proposed to take if the transfers were not stopped.

Tiwari said the way state government officials were being shifted by orders of the commission, it appeared that the posts of the Governor and chief secretary have become "redundant".

Launching a veiled attack on his bete noire LJP president Ram Vilas Paswan, RJD chief and railway minister Lalu Prasad on Monday cautioned Dalits against falling in the trap of 'fake' Dalit leaders who used them as mere vote banks.

Allies project Lalu as virtual mascot for CM

SAROJ Nagi
New Delhi, September 12

ON THE face of it, the RJD-Congress-NCP-CPI(M) have decided not to project any chief ministerial candidate in the forthcoming Assembly elections in Bihar. But, in effect, the allies have virtually handed over the state to Lalu Prasad.

"Lalu has done exceedingly well as railway minister and the Prime Minister has given him the certificate. He will perform (as chief minister) as he has performed as railway minister under the UPA's able guidance", said Digvijay Singh, AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar. The Congress leader - who met NCP's Tariq Anwar and CPI(M)'s Prakash Karat and Sitaram Yechuri on Monday to discuss seat-sharing, joint campaigns and a common minimum programme (CMP) - however, stressed that the CM candidate would be decided after the combine won a majority. Lalu, too, had made a statement to this effect, he said. In an indication of the RJD's dominant role, Lalu's party is likely to get a major chunk of 243 seats to contest when the combine enters into a triangular fight with ideological adversaries JD(U)-BJP and the Ram Vilas Paswan-led LJP-CPI front, which threatens to split the secular vote and make it more difficult to defeat the "communal" forces. The Congress, which contested 84 seats in February, lost its deposit in 57. Chastened by this, Singh now intends to focus on about 30-35 winnable seats, including the 10 held by the party. Though seat-sharing talks are on for about 113 seats that the RJD has never won, the NCP and CPI(M)'s share is bound to be much lower than that of the Congress.



Ram Vilas Paswan with at an election rally in Motihari on Monday.

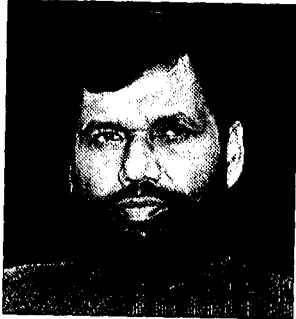
PTI

Paswan asks Cong to walk out of tie with RJD

Madhepura
11 SEPTEMBER

TAKING on Lalu Prasad Yadav in his stronghold, LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan on Sunday said the RJD supremo would barely get 25 seats in the Assembly polls and asked the Congress to snap poll alliance with the RJD, or it would be reduced to "zero" in Bihar politics.

"The people of Bihar, particularly Muslims, have realised that the RJD had been taking them for a ride all these years, and are no longer ready to support it...The RJD chief has to shed a lot of sweat to get even 20-25 seats in the upcoming polls", he told a party rally here.



"The coming polls will sound the death knell for Lalu and his RJD", he said, warning the Congress to understand the ground realities and end ties with the RJD, or it would be reduced to "zero" in state politics. Attacking Mr Yadav, he said: "I was a member of the Bihar Assembly in the late 60s, when Lalu was yet not born politically. Besides, I won the 1977 parliamentary election from Hajipur with a record margin, which the RJD chief could not even dream of achieving".

Mr Paswan said he was firm on his commitment to have a Muslim chief minister in the state, and there could be no compromise on this.

The LJP president said the Muslims had realised that Mr Prasad had been using them merely as a vote bank, and doing precious little for their welfare, and were not ready to support it in the coming Assembly polls.

"Lalu stands exposed in the eyes of the Muslims, who provided his party the crucial support to continue in the government for the past 15 years in Bihar", Mr Paswan said. —PTI

Bihar Assembly election, Mark II



ere is another record that will delight Bihar watchers: it is the first State in India's electoral history to go to the polls twice in the same year. Elections were held in three phases to the Bihar Assembly in February 2005. With the Election Commission announcing a four-phase election starting October 18, political parties are set to return to the battlefield to resume a fight that produced no victor last time. Another month-long exercise cannot be to the liking of lukewarm voters. At 46.5 per cent, the February 2005 turnout was the lowest in 43 years. To further dampen the mood, the new schedule coincides with the Hindu and Muslim festival season. So will Election 2005 Mark II be any different from its predecessor? It seems much too early for prediction but the results of the last election, and subsequent changes in ground equations, do provide some clues to how the cookie might crumble. February 2005 was an irretrievable mess, with previous alliances coming unstuck; the resulting "free for all," to quote Lalu Prasad, caused the vote to fragment. In more than 50 constituencies, the winner polled less than 30 per cent of the vote; in quite a few, the victor secured less than the preceding election's runner-up. On paper, the contest was among three broad alliances — the Rashtriya Janata Dal-Left parties, the Congress-Lok Janashakti Party, and the Janata Dal (United)-Bharatiya Janata Party. In practice, there was no agreement between the Communist Party of India and the RJD. Offered a pittance by Lalu Prasad, the Congress reached out to his *bete noir*, Ram Vilas Paswan, and then muddied the waters by claiming to be in partnership with the RJD simultaneously.

Much water has flowed down the Ganga and the Son over these seven months. The vote base of the LJP has virtually collapsed. The BJP unit in the State is better off but could be in real trouble, considering the power struggle raging in the national organisation. That the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is in the eye of this storm does not help the BJP, given the JD(U)'s proclaimed aversion to Jhandewalan. Indeed, Nitish Kumar is worried that an RSS-driven BJP might push the backward caste vote towards the RJD. An important question is: who will benefit from the erosion in the LJP's vote base? Twenty-two of the party's 29 MLAs won by defeating the RJD, and this would suggest an advantage for Mr. Prasad. However, it must be remembered that 13 of the 29 were defectors, and the question is whether they will carry their base vote with them. With Mr. Paswan severely disadvantaged and the RJD and the Congress apparently keen on correcting past mistakes, the "secular vote" looks less likely to fragment. With only 10 seats and a five per cent vote, the Congress cannot afford major ambition; nor can Mr. Prasad afford to alienate a partner. Arithmetic, however, is not everything. The RJD is up against its record in office, the Buta Singh tenure, and Nitish Kumar's seemingly boundless energy.

সনিয়ার সঙ্গে কথা, তবু অনড় পাসোয়ান

নয়াদিল্লি, ৭ সেপ্টেম্বর: এ বার আসরে নামলেন সনিয়া গাঁধী। শেষ চেষ্টা হিসাবে আজ তিনি লোক জনশক্তি পার্টির নেতা রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন। উদ্দেশ্য, রামবিলাসকে বুঝিয়ে-সুঝিয়ে লালু-কংগ্রেস জোটে টেনে আনা।

তবে তাতে রামবিলাস যে খুব একটা নরম হননি, তা বৈঠকের পরেই স্পষ্ট হয়ে গিয়েছে। রামবিলাস জানান, তিনি তাঁর পুরোন অবস্থানেই অনড় রয়েছেন। কংগ্রেসের তরফ থেকে অবশ্য রামবিলাসকে কার্যত হুমকি দেওয়া হয়েছে। বিহারের দায়িত্বপ্রাপ্ত কংগ্রেস নেতা দিগ্বিজয় সিংহ বলেছেন, “২৩ সেপ্টেম্বর ভোটের বিজ্ঞপ্তি ঘোষণা হবে। তার মধ্যে রামবিলাসকে এ ব্যাপারে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে হবে।” অন্য দিকে, বিহারের ভোটের দিন বদল করার ব্যাপারে রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির আবেদন খারিজ করেছেন মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনার বি বি টন্ডন। তবে বিহারের সরকারের আবেদন মতো স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব বদলের আবেদনে সায় দিয়েছে নির্বাচন কমিশন। সেইমতো স্বরাষ্ট্রসচিব পদ থেকে এ কে বিশ্বাসকে সরিয়ে এইচ সি সিরোহিকে বসানো হয়েছে।

তাঁর বরাবরের দলিত-মুসলিম ভোট ব্যাল্ক ধস নামানো রামবিলাসকে ইউপিএ জোট থেকে বের দেওয়ার জন্য দীর্ঘ দিন ধরে দাবি জানিয়ে আসছিলেন লালু। রামবিলাসকে জোটে না আনা গেলে এ বারে সেই দাবি আরও বাড়বে, বাড়বে চাপও। তবু, সনিয়ার সঙ্গে বৈঠকের পরে অবিলম্বে রামবিলাসের স্পষ্ট জবাব, তিনি মোটেই ইউপিএ জোট ছাড়ছেন না। এ ব্যাপারে পাসোয়ানের সাক্ষরিত কথা, ইউপিএ-র শরিক হয়েও সিপিআই ও ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের মতো বামদলগুলিও তো লালুর সঙ্গে জোটে যেতে পারেন। সে ক্ষেত্রে কী হবে?

রামবিলাস সনিয়াকে বুঝিয়েছেন,

কংগ্রেসকে দীর্ঘমেয়াদি লাভের কথা ভাবতে হবে। তবে, রামবিলাসের এই ধরনের কথাব্যক্তিকে আমল দিতে নারাজ কংগ্রেস। মুসলিম মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নিয়ে রামবিলাসের দাবিকে একেবারেই পাত্তা দিতে নারাজ কংগ্রেস নেতারা।

বিহারে ইউপিএ জোটের হাল ফেরাতে আসরে নেমেছেন এনসিপি নেতা শরদ পওয়ার্ড। আজ বিহারে দলের ওয়ার্কিং কমিটির বৈঠকের পরে শরদ জানান, লালু-পাসোয়ান বিরোধ দ্রুত মিটিয়ে ফেলা দরকার।

পটনা থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, দিল্লিতে সনিয়ার সঙ্গে বৈঠকে রামবিলাস যখন লালু সম্পর্কে নিজের অনড় মনোভাবের ব্যাখ্যা দিচ্ছেন, তখন তাঁর নিজের দলেই ভাঙন ঠেকানো যাচ্ছে না। অজয়কুমার বুলগ্যানিন নামে এক প্রাক্তন বিধায়ক আজ যোগ দিয়েছেন রামবিলাসের সবচেয়ে বড় শত্রু লালুর দলে।

এ দিকে, মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনার জানিয়েছেন, নির্বাচনের দিন ক্ষণ ঘোষণা হওয়ার পরে রাজ্যপাল আচরণবিধি ভেঙে বিহারে বিভিন্ন কমিশন গঠন করেছেন কি না, তা নিয়ে আজ তদন্ত শুরু করা হয়েছে। আজ রাজ্য সরকার নির্বাচন কমিশনকে জানিয়েছে, সব নিয়োগই আচরণবিধি মেনে করা হয়েছে।

NCP shows full faith in Lalu

A 88
B 88
C 88



Ashok K Mishra
PATNA 7 SEPTEMBER

IN search of a political toehold in Bihar, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) did manage to script its political presence in the last state Assembly elections.

Winning three Assembly seats was not a big deal but for a party which does not have any political stake in Bihar. In the coming elections, the NCP is working on bigger plans for ensuring an improved electoral outing.

With the RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav willing to part off with larger number of seats for the other UPA partners, the NCP leadership is optimistic about more seats this elections. In the February Assembly elec-



tions, the RJD chief left only two seats for the NCP which went on to win three out of the 31 seats it contested. But now that Mr Lalu's position has been somewhat weakened after the defeat in the February Assembly elections, the RJD can ill afford to ignore the seat sharing claims of the other UPA partners for the second round of polling.

The beneficiaries on this count will be the Congress, CPI(M) and the NCP, which has stepped up its claim to 15 seats. As for the LJP, it still remains to be seen whether it will mend its fences with Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav to formally join the UPA alliance in Bihar.

Interestingly, much like the Congress, the NCP has decided to play conciliatory role for bringing together the two estranged UPA leaders, Mr Lalu and Mr Paswan.

"It is very important that both Paswan and Lalu join hands together for the cause of secularism. The UPA should give a united fight so that the communal forces are defeated. The NCP will engage itself for working a truce between the two estranged leaders," the NCP president Sharad Pawar said. He said that a two member committee comprising of the union civil aviation minister Praful Patel and party general secretary Tariq Anwar would

hold talks with both the RJD and LJP leaders to develop a rapport between them. Mr Pawar was in the state capital to attend the national working committee meeting of the party.

The NCP leadership is clearly of the view that a complete al-

liance among the UPA partners will immensely improve their electoral prospect. "Even we will stand to gain if Paswan formally joined the UPA alliance in the state," a state NCP leader said.

Even Mr Pawar may be willing to concede that Mr Paswan by staying away from the UPA alliance had caused 'incalculable' damage to the prospect of the UPA candidates in the February Assembly elections.

Mr Pawar also chose to defend Mr Paswan saying he should not be excluded from the UPA government if he decided to keep away from the UPA alliance in Bihar. "As for the chief ministerial issue, it can be tackled by the UPA after the elections," Mr Pawar remarked when asked to comment on Mr Paswan's demand for a Muslim chief minister.

'Secular' split stays in Bihar

Lalu asks Muslims to dump Paswan

HT Correspondent
Patna, September 5

THE RJD and the Congress have finally given up on Ram Vilas Paswan — jointly declaring war on the LJP for the coming Assembly polls in Bihar.

Blamed for the situation in the state that led to President's rule, Paswan, a vocal Lalu baiter, might see some tough time ahead during the polls as the RJD-Congress combine launched its assault by attempting to woo the Muslims — the LJP's main vote bank.

RJD chief and railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, along with AICC general secretary and in-charge of Bihar affairs Digvijay Singh, speaking from a common platform, appealed to Muslims not to vote for the LJP to prevent division of secular votes again.

The appeal was made at a function organised by Jamait-e-Ulema at the SK Memorial Hall.

While Digvijay Singh and other senior Congress leaders promised reservations to Muslims in government jobs in Bihar if a UPA government came to power, Lalu promised concrete steps for the socio-economic development of the community.

Lalu went to the extent of asking for forgiveness for "past mistakes". "*Humari aankhen moti ho gayi thi* (My vision had blurred)."

On the brighter side of the party, Lalu said the RJD had kept communal forces at bay and had implemented the Mandal Commission recommendations in Bihar.

Continuing with the woo-Muslim campaign, Digvijay said the community should be given reservation in government jobs as was being done in Andhra Pradesh. He also said that Dalits, adopting Christianity or Islam as their religion, should get the benefit of reservations as well.

Ulema's national president, Maulana Syed Asad Madni Saheb, too did his bit when he exhorted Muslims not to vote for the LJP. "Voting for the LJP would mean voting for the Jan Sangh," he said.

Others who spoke on the occasion were Union minister Shakil Ahmed, senior Congress leader Mohsina Kidwai and state Congress president Sadanand Singh.



Lalu Prasad with Jamiat-e-Ulema chief Maulana Shiad Ashad Madni at a conference in Patna.

PTI

CPI rules out tie-up with RJD

HTC and Agencies
New Delhi, September 5

EVEN AS the CPI(M) urged all secular parties in Bihar to join hands before the crucial Assembly polls and declared that it would share seats with the RJD, the CPI on Monday ruled out any possibility of electoral tie up with Lalu Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

Instead, the CPI would tie up with Ramvilas Paswan, Left Front partners such as Forward Bloc and RSP as well as parties like the CPI(ML) Liberation to fight "RJD's misrule and NDA's communalism", CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan told HT on Monday. "Why is it that the CPI(M) finds secular forces only

Lalu to meet CEC

Lalu Prasad said on Monday that he would call on chief election commissioner B.B. Tandon to request rescheduling of poll dates for the upcoming Bihar Assembly polls. However, the Commission on Monday defended its decision saying various factors necessitated the four-phased polling.

Agencies, Patna

in RJD? Aren't Paswan or Bardhan secular? Why doesn't the CPI(M) join us instead of RJD?" asked Bardhan.

According to him, the

CPI(M)'s appeal not to divide secular votes is a "good wish cherished by all."

"But that does not explain how one should cover up RJD's failures in the development front, in maintaining proper law and order situation and in containing mafia raj," he said.

Bardhan also recalled that whenever his party had tried to ally with Lalu in the past. "He never indulged in fair play and always tried to cut his allies to size."

While CPI(M) politburo member Sitaram Yechury said that the CPI was entitled to independent policies, party general secretary Prakash Karat said while CPI(M) would share seats with RJD, there would be no joint poll manifesto with RJD in Bihar.

AICC not to take tough stand against LJP in Bihar



RUSTIC CHARM WON'T DO

CL Manoj

NEW DELHI 4 SEPTEMBER

NOTWITHSTANDING the pressure from Lalu Prasad Yadav on the Congress to arm-twist LJP leader Ram Vilas Paswan into an electoral pact in Bihar, the AICC leadership is wary of taking any unreasonably tough stand vis a vis the LJP, fearing it could lead to the first formal crack in the UPA at the Centre.

The CPI leadership, which is in the process of finalising an anti-RJD and anti-BJP alliance in Bihar along with CPI(ML), has also cautioned the Congress leadership against creating any split in the 'secular alliance at the Centre' by trying to force Mr Paswan out of the UPA and the Union Cabinet for appeasing the RJD leadership.

After AICC general secretary Digvijay Singh's visit to Patna last week and with the Election Commission notifying state elections, there is a growing realisation in Congress circles that the antipathy between Mr Paswan and Mr Yadav is too deep to work out a pact be-

tween the two at the state level.

The decision of the TRS, a UPA ally, to fight the forthcoming panchayat elections in Andhra Pradesh against the Congress, has once again driven home the point that allies may have different compulsions at the state-level even while they join hands against the BJP and NDA at the national level.

The RJD, along with the Left, had fought against the Congress-JMM pact in Jharkhand Assembly polls, citing its 'state compulsions'. The Congress leadership, perhaps at the level of Sonia Gandhi herself, is expected to make a last-ditch effort to buy peace between Mr Yadav and Mr Paswan this week, party leaders do not expect any miracles and would rather be happy if they could find a via media to minimise the split of anti-BJP-JD(U) votes.

Last time a similar attempt was made by avoiding direct clashes between the Congress and LJP nominees in many seats. "Confrontation with any of the UPA allies will only help the Opposition. Our efforts are to find an amicable solution keeping in mind every partner's compulsions at state levels," said a Congress leader. Unlike last time, the Congress is keen this time not give the RJD any scope for complaining of not aligning with it. AICC is also keen that this time RJD gives it a 'presentable number of winnable seats' in an election in which Mr Yadav has maximum personal stake and is therefore expected to show 'realistic accommodation'.

Knowing that Mr Yadav, with the tactical support of the CPM, has been trying to put pressure on the Congress leadership to threaten Mr Paswan with eviction from the Cabinet if he fails to aid RJD's power project in the state, the CPI leadership has sent Ms Gandhi and her colleagues a word of caution.

No candidates to be fielded against Cong

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 4 SEPTEMBER

IN a move clearly aimed at buying peace with the Congress leadership against RJD's pressure tactics, LJP leader Ramvilas Paswan on



Sunday announced that his party will not field any candidate against sitting Congress MLAs, even if the latter contested the upcoming assembly polls with RJD.

"We will not field any candidate against any sitting MLA of Congress, even if it goes along with RJD," Mr Paswan told reporters here. Declaring that the LJP was in the process of forming an alliance with the Left other than CPI(M), the Union minister said that his party will request the Congress to cede relation with the RJD and join them.

Dismissing any chance of the LJP joining hands with RJD for the assembly polls, Mr Paswan said: "Unless RJD supports the issue of installing a Muslim as chief minister, the question does not arise at all. This is seen as a ploy to expose the RJD chief's family power project in the state under the cover of secularism."

ELECTION ON 18 AND 26 OCTOBER, 13 AND 19 NOVEMBER

Bihar poll in 4 phases

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Sept. 3. — Barely nine months after going to the polls that resulted in a political deadlock and controversy, Bihar would take another shot at elections. The Assembly polls in Bihar will be held in four phases — on 18 and 26 October and on 13 and 19 November — the Election Commission declared here today.

The elections are being held since the first exercise in February produced a hung assembly and a political stalemate, which culminated in the dissolution of the House under controversial circumstances by the Governor, Mr Buta Singh. President's rule was subsequently promulgated in Bihar. The counting of votes will start on 22 November and be wrapped up by 23 November.

Scotching speculations over whether the Bihar polls could be held what with the Supreme Court hearing a petition by some NDA legislators challenging the Assembly's dissolution, the three-member EC met today and finalised the election schedule.

The Chief Election Commissioner, Mr BB Tandon, said the notification for the first phase of the polls would be issued on 23 September and those for the other three phases on 28 September and 19 and 26 October respectively. The last dates for filing nominations will be 30 September, 5 October, 26 October, and 2 November accordingly. Scrutiny is slated for 1, 6 and 27 October and 3 November. The last dates for withdrawal of nominations are 3, 8 and 29 October and 5 November, in that order.

The CEC parried questions on the commission's move in the event of the apex court staying the elections. He said "sufficient" Central paramilitary forces would be sent to Bihar where the Commission was "not happy" with the state of affairs in police.

'Hidden treasure'

NEW DELHI, Sept. 3. — The CEC pointed out that as many as 76,471 non-bailable warrants (NBWs), including permanent warrants, against proclaimed offenders and absconders awaited execution in Bihar as on 31 August. "It is a very sad reflection on the state of affairs. It seems there is a hidden treasure trove yielding more and more NBWs every time. I only hope it is the last find," Mr Tandon said. Most of the NBWs were in Siwan, Buxar, Aurangabad and Banka. The CEC said, given the way things were, there could be criminal activities during the poll process. **SNS**

Of the total 243 Assembly constituencies, 61 will go to polls in the first phase, 69 in the second, 72 in the third and 41 in the last. Flanked by Election Commissioners, Mr N Gopalaswami and Mr Navin Chawla, Mr Tandon said the model code of conduct would come into force with immediate effect. Voters number is 5.27 crore. Apart from 50,063 polling booths, there will be around 7,300 auxiliary polling stations.

Unlike in the last elections, when one person acted as the Returning Officer for more than one constituency each constituency this time around will have a single RO.

He also said there would be one General Observer in each Assembly constituency and at least one Expenditure Observer in each district.

Recalling that the Supreme Court had drawn the EC's attention to deployment of Central security forces inside polling booths to keep an eye on "mischief" as well on the poll staff, Mr Tandon said it had been considered necessary to ensure maximum CPMF cover for polling booths.

'Staggered' schedule: page 4

No one can question my authority: Buta

PATNA, Sept. 3. — Even as the NDA hauled the Bihar Governor over the coals, accusing him of having spied on the combine before recommending dissolution of the Assembly, Mr Buta Singh kept his own counsel.

"No comments till the hearing is over," the Governor said, adding: "The report (recommending the dissolution) concern *vastusthiti* (ground reality) and constitutional provisions. This is an official document about which nobody including myself, has any right to pass comments."

"Nobody can question my authority and the contents of the reports which I sent to the Centre on the political developments in Bihar as these were based on facts and in accordance with constitutional propriety," Mr Singh told a press conference here.

Asked if "nobody" was an umbrella expression wide enough in range to include the judiciary, he said: "Nobody means nobody." The Governor denied having been pressured by any UPA partner. **SNS**

BJP seeks ouster: page 4

Signal for 81-day Bihar marathon

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 3: The Election Commission today announced a schedule for elections in Bihar spread over 81 days starting immediately.

The commission said it was announcing the schedule despite serious misgivings about the administration in the state.

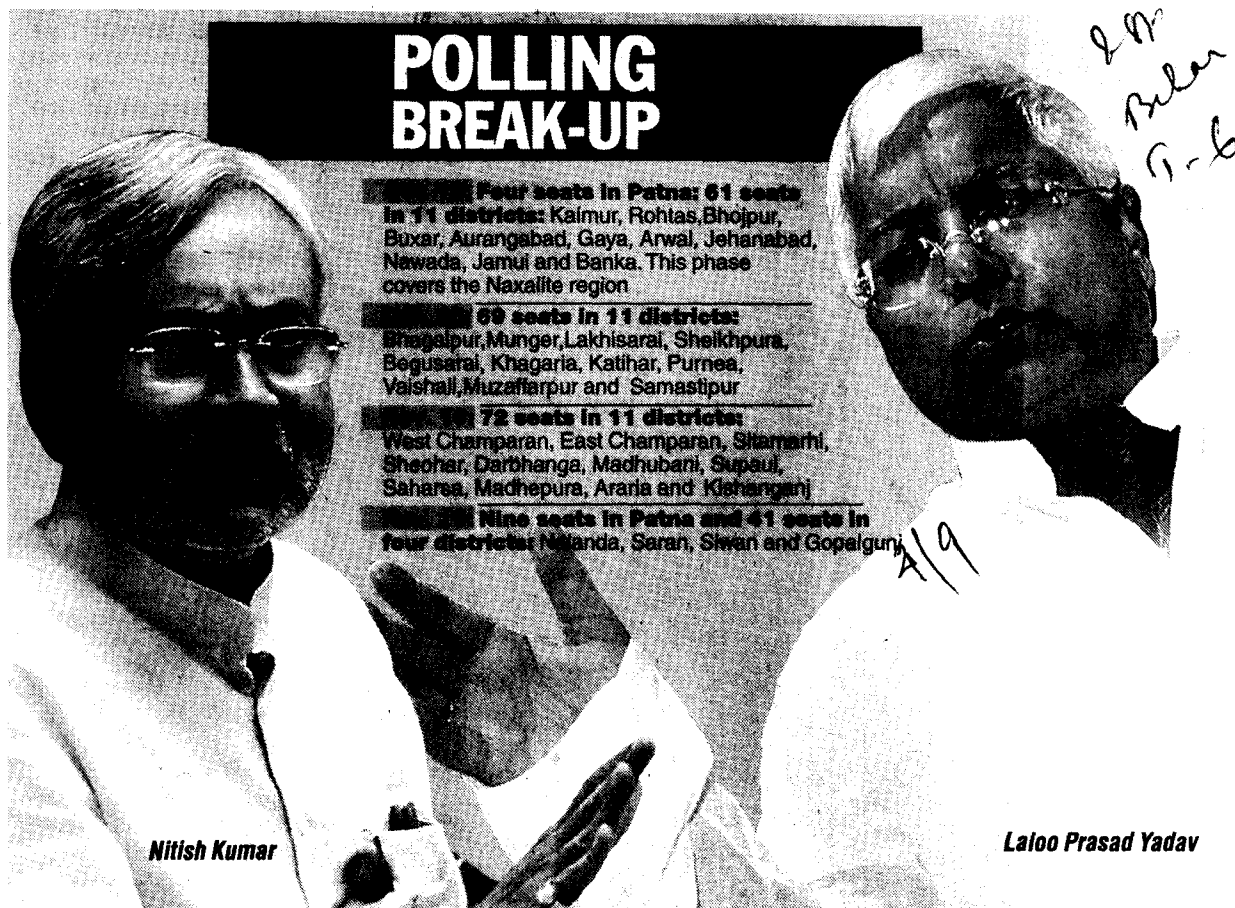
Beginning with the announcement of elections today — and the model code of conduct coming into effect instantly — the schedule sets a November 23 date by which counting is to be completed. The first phase of polling will be held on October 18 and the fourth and last on November 19. (see chart)

The schedule has been drawn up to make time for deployment of central paramilitary forces, inspecting road conditions and after checking out dates during the festival season. A number of major festivals are in October-November — Dussehra, Diwali, Id, Chhat and Guru Nanak's birthday.

"Elections have been spread over four phases and even five phases in Bihar (in 1995) in the past also," chief election commissioner B.B. Tandon said.

"We have considered all aspects to draw up the schedule and are planning an optimum deployment of central paramilitary forces because the security environment is no better than that during the last Assembly election (January); there has been a step-up in Naxal activity and more than 70,000 non-bailable arrest warrants are still pending execution."

Asked about the case in the Supreme Court that has challenged the dissolution of the Assembly, Tandon said the El-



Nitish Kumar

Laloo Prasad Yadav

POLLING BREAK-UP

Phase I: Four seats in Patna; 61 seats in 11 districts: Kaimur, Rohtas, Bhojpur, Buxar, Aurangabad, Gaya, Arwal, Jehanabad, Nawada, Jamui and Banka. This phase covers the Naxalite region

Phase II: 69 seats in 11 districts: Bhagalpur, Munger, Lakhisarai, Sheikhpura, Begusarai, Khagaria, Katihar, Purnea, Vaishali, Muzaffarpur and Samastipur

Phase III: 72 seats in 11 districts: West Champaran, East Champaran, Sharanahi, Sheohar, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Supaul, Saharsa, Madhepura, Araria and Kishanganj

Phase IV: Nine seats in Patna and 41 seats in four districts: Nalanda, Saran, Siwan and Gopalganj

lection Commission was carrying out its mandate to conduct elections in Bihar within six months since the last Assembly was dissolved.

In the event the Supreme Court, which has already told the commission to continue with its process, stays the elections, the commission will abide by the order.

Tandon detailed instructions issued by the commission to the state administration and the Centre to prepare for the elections. He said the administration had pointed out that there is a shortage of IPS officers of the rank of superi-

intendent of police. Twelve IPS officers of the Bihar cadre are currently posted with the Centre and the Election Commission had suggested to the Prime Minister that they be repatriated to Bihar for at least three months.

The commission was particularly worried after the Bihar government kept adding to the list of non-bailable warrants that have not been executed for at least six months. He said on July 7 that the Bihar government had said there were 27,123 NBWs pending for more than six months.

On August 25, when the full

commission visited Patna, it was told that there were 70,169 NBWs pending for that period.

"We were surprised," said Tandon.

"We were further surprised by the communication from the DG police received yesterday that there are now 76,471 NBWs pending execution. The DG police explained that the large number of NBWs hitherto concealed had now been found in the districts of Siwan, Aurangabad, Banka and Buxar. This is a sad reflection on the state of affairs in the police administration. It is as if there is a hidden treasure

from which more and more NBWs can be found. I hope we have seen the last find," said Tandon.

The commission said it expected all officials "to discharge their duties in an impartial manner without any fear". Action would be taken against anyone found wanting, Tandon warned.

The government has been asked to transfer officers against whom the commission has in the past recommended disciplinary action or those charged with any lapse during previous elections from posts entailing election work.

সুপ্রিয় কোর্টে বুটার রিপোর্ট পেশ, বেনজির পদক্ষেপ কেন্দ্রের

নয়া দিল্লি, ২ সেপ্টেম্বর: লোকজনশক্তি ভাঙার চেষ্টা, বিজেপি-সংযুক্ত জনতা দলের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা প্রমাণের আশ্বাস আর সরকার গড়ার জন্য আরজেডি বিধায়কদের অস্থিরতা—বিহারের নির্বাচনোত্তর পরিস্থিতিতে বুটা সিংহের কাছে এগুলিই ছিল অশনিসংকেত।

হলফনামার সঙ্গে আজ ২৭ এপ্রিল ও ২১ মে রাষ্ট্রপতিকে লেখা বুটার দু'টি চিঠিও সুপ্রিম কোর্টে জমা দিয়েছে কেন্দ্র। রাজ্য রাজনীতির এই প্রবণতা দ্রুত ঠেকানো না গেলে তা বিধায়ক কেন্দ্রবাদের সুযোগ করে দিতে পারে বলে চিঠিতে আশঙ্কা প্রকাশ করেছেন রাজ্যপাল।

আর সে জনাই 'বিধানসভা' ভেঙে দিয়ে ফের জনমত নেওয়ার সুপারিশ করেন তিনি।

কিন্তু যে ভাবে তিনি সুপারিশ করেছিলেন,

তা নিয়ে বিতর্কের অবসান ঘটতেই শেষমেশ রিপোর্ট প্রকাশের নজিরবিহীন এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে হল কেন্দ্রকে। এই ধরনের গোপন সরকারি নথির উপরে প্রভিলেজ তুলে নিয়ে তা প্রকাশ করার সিদ্ধান্তকে ভবিষ্যতে দুঃস্থ বলে ধরা যাবে না, এমন শর্তও আন্দোলনগেই তারা আদালতে জানিয়ে রেখেছে। ২১ মে বুটা সিংহ যখন রাষ্ট্রপতিকে চিঠিটি লেখেন, কলাম তখন মস্কোতে। ফলে ২২ মে মধ্যরাতের আগে মন্ত্রিসভার পক্ষে সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া সম্ভব হয়নি।

২৩ মে সকালেই বিহার বিধানসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত জানায় কেন্দ্র।

২১ মে-র চিঠিতে বুটা লিখেছেন, "সম্প্রতি সংবাদমাধ্যম, রাজনৈতিক মহল ও গোপন সূত্রে যে সব খবর আসছে, তাতে নির্বাচিত

জনপ্রতিনিধিদের দলে টানার চেষ্টা খুবই স্পষ্ট।" ২৭ এপ্রিলের চিঠিটি উল্লেখ করে রাজ্যপাল মনে করিয়ে দিয়েছেন, "আগেই জানিয়েছিলাম লোকজনশক্তির ১৬-১৭ জন বিধায়ককে ভাঙানোর জন্য বিভিন্ন চেষ্টা চলছে। সংযুক্ত জনতা দলের এই চেষ্টার প্রেক্ষিতে আর জে ডি বিধায়করাও যে সরকার গড়ার জন্য অস্থির হয়ে পড়েছেন, তা-ও জানিয়েছিলাম।" সেই আশঙ্কা যে মিথ্যা ছিল না, তা বোঝাতে ২১ মে লোকজনশক্তির সম্পাদকের পদত্যাগের খবর উল্লেখ করেন বুটা। তার পরেই সতর্কবাণী, "আরও ১৭-১৮ জন বিধায়ক সংযুক্ত জনতা দলের দিকে ঝুঁকতে পারেন। তাঁদের সামনে বিভিন্ন প্রলোভন রয়েছে, যা খুবই চিন্তার কথা।"

চিঠিতে বুটার বক্তব্য, দল ভেঙে যারা

বেরিয়ে গেলেন, তারা যদি অধ্য কোনও দলের সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে সরকার গড়ার দাবি পেশ করেন, তবে তা সংবিধান লঙ্ঘনের সামিল। কিন্তু সংবিধানের কোন ধারা লঙ্ঘিত হতে পারে সে বিষয়ে তিনি স্পষ্ট কিছু বলেননি। পাশাপাশি, বিজেপির তরফে আজ বলা হয়েছে, বিধায়ক কেন্দ্রবাদের নিয়ে কোনও স্পষ্ট প্রাণ এই রিপোর্টে নেই। কারণ নাম রাজ্যপাল উল্লেখ করেননি।

চিঠির শেষ দিকে রাজ্যপাল আশঙ্কা, এই প্রবণতা বন্ধ করতে না পারলে পরিস্থিতি আয়ত্তের বাইরে চলে যাবে। তাই বুটা লিখছেন, "আমার মতে, রাজ্যে এমন পরিস্থিতি তৈরি হয়েছে যে রাজ্যের স্বার্থেই এখন বিধানসভা ভেঙে দেওয়া উচিত", যাতে সাধারণ মানুষ আর এক বার ভোটাধিকার প্রয়োগ করতে পারেন।

প্রথম চিঠিতেই বুটা সিংহ স্পষ্ট জানিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন, "প্রাক-নির্বাচনী, নির্বাচনোত্তর কোনও জোটের সঙ্গে বা পৃথক ভাবে সরকার গঠনের পরিস্থিতিতে নেই কোনও দলই। কেউই ২৪৩ আসনের বিধানসভায় ১২২ আসনের নিরঙ্কুশ সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা দিতে পারবে না।" কিন্তু সংযুক্ত জনতা দল-বিজেপি জোট যে ভাবে এপ্রিলের শেষ বা মে-র গোড়ায় সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা প্রমাণের আশ্বাস দিচ্ছিল, তাতে শঙ্কিত হয়ে পড়েছিলেন রাজ্যপাল। বিহারীদের এই প্রচেষ্টা "আরজেডি বিধায়কদেরও অস্থির করে তুলছে" বলে তিনি জানিয়েছিলেন।

কিন্তু যে 'বিধানসভা' শপথ গ্রহণ করেনি, তা ভেঙে দিতে সুপারিশ বুটা কী ভাবে করলেন, আদালতের সামনে সেটাই প্রশ্ন। —পি টি আই

Buta dissolution report made public

House falls to straws in wind

OUR LEGAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 2: Buta Singh's fears of horse-trading in Bihar were founded on media reports, the restlessness in the Rashtriya Janata Dal and information gleaned from contacts in the Janata Dal (United), his reports to the President have revealed.

The Centre dissolved the Bihar Assembly in a rush on May 23 on the basis of the two reports, made public today in what is a first in the country's history. "I am given to understand that serious attempts are being made by JD-U and BJP to cobble a majority and lay claim to form the government in the state," the governor says in the report dated April 27.

In the second report on May 21 recommending dissolution, he says: "Reports received by me in the recent past through media and also through meetings with various political functionaries, as also intelligence reports, indicate a trend to win over elected representatives of the people".

Following this report, the Union cabinet held a meeting around midnight on May 22 and sent the recommendation for dissolution to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam who was then in Russia. Kalam signed and faxed it back in the early hours of May 23.

The documents, classified as "top secret", were today submitted to the Supreme Court



I am given to understand that serious attempts are being made by JD-U and

BJP to cobble a majority and lay claim to form the government in the state — Buta Singh

as annexures to the Centre's 141-page reply to a PIL challenging the dissolution as "unconstitutional". This is the first time a governor's reports to the President have been made public.

The PIL, filed by Supreme Court advocate Viplov Sharma and an Independent MLA of the dissolved Assembly, Purnima Yadav, has sought to make the governor a party to the case.

A five-judge Constitution bench will now decide whether the dissolved Assembly should be revived and the upcoming elections stalled. It will also judge whether the governor can be summoned to explain his decision. Besides, the bench will decide whether it can stop the Election Commission from notifying the Bihar elections. All these questions are being debated in the court for the first time. The hearings begin on September 6.

Fighting a tricky legal battle and hard put to establish the dissolution was bona fide, the Centre decided to make public the governor's reports hoping

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this would turn the tables.

In the April 27 report, Buta says: "Contacts in JD-U and BJP have informed that 16-17 MLAs have been won over by various means and attempt is being made to win over others. The JD-U is also targeting Congress for creating a split. It is felt in JD-U circles that in case LJP does not split, then it can still form the government with the support of Independents, NCP, BSP and SP MLAs and two-thirds of Congress MLAs after it splits from the main Congress by the end of this month or latest by the first week of May."

He adds that the "high-pressure moves of the JD-U/BJP is also affecting the RJD MLAs who have become restive."

The second report refers to the resignation of Nagmani from the Lok Janshakti Party. "The LJP general secretary having resigned today and also 17-18 more perhaps are moving towards the JD-U, clearly indicating that various allurements have been offered which is a very disturbing and alarming feature," it says.

"Any move by the breakaway faction to align with any other party to cobble a majority and stake claim to form a government would positively affect the constitutional provisions and safeguards built therein and distort the verdict of the people. If these attempts are allowed, it would be amounting to tampering with constitutional provisions."

■ See Page 6

Cong rejects LJP's Muslim CM formula

58-5 119
9/8/85 Bihar
Statesman News Service

PATNA, Aug. 31. — Ending days of suspense, the Congress today rejected the Lok Janshakti Party's formula for a Muslim chief minister, making it clear that it prefers Mr Lalu Prasad to Mr Ram Vilas Paswan.

"Mr Paswan's formula for a Muslim CM is not reasonable," Congress' Bihar affairs in-charge Mr Digvijay Singh told reporters today after attending a party meeting here.

"The question of the CM arises after the party has gained majority and the majority is possible only when we fight unitedly," he said and added that Muslim voters were also aware that this formula made no difference.

Finding no logic behind Mr Paswan's stand, Mr Singh asked: "Why can't we fight the Assembly elections together when we jointly contest the Lok Sabha polls, take all Cabinet decisions jointly and participate in voting in the House?" As such, the Congress, he said, wants that all the parties with secular credential should fight unitedly. Mr Singh also had words of praise for Mr Lalu Prasad who, according to him, is more liberal over seat-sharing among the alliance partners.

The LJP, on the other hand, reacted sharply to Mr Singh's statement and said that there was no question of joining hands with parties who were even remotely attached with the RJD.

In another development, the LJP today suffered a setback when some of its prominent Muslim leaders quit the party and joined the RJD. Also today, the RJD supremo accused Mr Paswan of "conspiring" against him and for victory of NDA in Bihar Assembly elections.

Bihar court battle gets bigger

R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Aug. 31: A five-member Constitution bench will decide whether the upcoming Bihar elections should be stalled and the dissolved Assembly revived, making Indian history.

The bench will also judge if the Constitution, which gives a governor certain immunities, prevents Buta Singh being summoned to explain his recommendation in May that the Bihar Assembly be dissolved.

A three-judge Supreme Court bench of Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti and Justices G.P. Mathur and P.K. Balasubramanian today heard three petitions

challenging the dissolution of the Assembly. It referred the matter to the Constitution bench — specifying five questions it should answer (see chart).

Whatever the larger bench's verdict, history has already been made with the governor's reports — one in March recommending the Assembly be kept in suspended animation and the other two months later, recommending dissolution — set to be made public.

The three-judge bench said the governor's reports must be attached with the Centre's reply. Governors' reports, especially on law and order and dissolution of an Assembly, are

from issuing an election notification. "All the issues would go before the larger bench and you argue there," it said.

The court asked if the poll panel could wait till September 6 when the Constitution bench would begin its hearings. The commission's counsel, S. Muralidhar, said the panel will come out with a "press release" announcing the poll schedule within "two to three days", but indicated that it will not be a formal notification.

Supreme Court advocate Viplav Sharma had filed a PIL seeking, among other things, the stay on the poll panel. Independent MLA Purnima Yadav, too, had made this plea argu-

ing that once a poll notification is issued, no court can interfere with it and the entire court proceedings become futile.

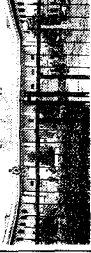
The third petition has been filed jointly by a group of NDA leaders and a member of the breakaway faction of the Lok Janshakti Party.

Sharma's petition wants the governor summoned. It asks whether Buta Singh should not have sworn in the elected members and appointed a ministry headed by a chief minister and allowed it a trial of strength. If the plea is upheld, it would revive the dissolved Assembly, something that has never happened in the country.

BEFORE THE BENCH

THE QUESTIONS

1. Can the governor be impeached?
2. Is the governor answerable to a court over non-performance?
3. Should the governor have first sworn in the legislators, made the Assembly functional and appointed a chief minister and council of ministers?
4. Should a writ of mandamus (an order that has to be followed) be issued only to the Centre even if the issue involves the governor?
5. What is the ambit and extent of immunity enjoyed by the governor under Article 361?



WHAT THE CASE MEANS

The Constitution bench will decide whether to

- Summon the governor
- Stop the EC from notifying the Bihar polls
- Revive the old Assembly

ment on the petitioners' plea that the poll panel be stayed classified "top secret".

The bench refused to com-

Congress, TRS heading for messy divorce in AP

ASHOK Das
Hyderabad, September 21

BARELY A year-and-a-half ago, the Telangana Rastra Samithi (TRS) and Congress got together to defeat their common enemy, the Telugu Desam, in the assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

That was then. Today, relations between the two parties have reached a point of no return and political observers say that it's only a matter of time before the divorce is formalised. The two warring partners are resorting to every dirty trick in the trade — blackmail, threats, counter threats, intelligence surveillance, police cases and what have you to defame each other.

While many smaller issues have contributed to the rift, the main reason is the delay in according separate statehood to the Telangana region, which is a stronghold of TRS leader and Union labour minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao. TRS leaders say that while at the Centre, the Congress was dragging its feet on the issue by appointing a committee headed by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee, in the state, chief minister Rajsekhar Reddy was trying to finish off their party by a series of measures. The rift between the allies became wide open

soon after the government banned the Naxalites. The Maoists who had contributed to the success of the TRS in the polls, served an ultimatum on the TRS to withdraw its six ministers from the Rajsekhar Reddy cabinet. The TRS is now under pressure from Maoists to quit the UPA too.

The TRS says the chief minister is the biggest hurdle in the way of statehood for Telangana. TRS second-in-command Narendra warned of "bloodshed" in case hurdles were created by in the way of Telangana. He declared that the newly-inducted Telangana Jana Sena volunteers would "hack anti-Telangana forces and wash the feet of Mother Telangana with their blood". He further called Reddy a "liar".

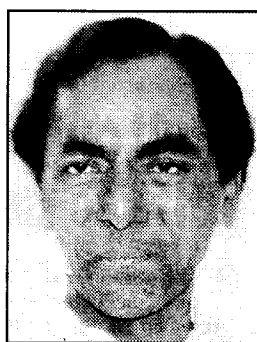
Congress circles say the TRS had become a pain and sooner the divorce the better. "A coalition cannot be run on threats and black-mails", commented a senior minister.

Meanwhile, the Rajsekhar Reddy government started addressing the grievances of Telangana by initiating a number of development projects and launching massive irrigation projects.

The municipal polls later this month will formalise the end of the alliance as the two parties have fielded their own candidates and are launching a bitter campaign against each other.



YSR Reddy



Chandrasekhar Rao

POINT, COUNTERPOINT

- TRS says the chief minister is biggest hurdle in the way of a separate Telangana state
- Congress circles say the TRS had become a pain and sooner the divorce the better
- The rift between the allies became wide open soon after the government banned the Naxalites
- TRS leaders say the Congress was dragging its feet on the issue by appointing a committee headed by defence minister Pranab Mukherjee

Chhattisgarh govt decides to ban Naxal outfits

Raipur: In the wake of increased activities of left-wing Naxals in Chhattisgarh that claimed the lives of 24 security personnel in Bastar region two days ago, the state government on Monday decided to ban Naxal organisations.

"The state cabinet, in an emergency meeting decided to ban the Naxal organisations in the state through an ordinance," chief minister Raman Singh said.

The draft ordinance was approved by the cabinet and would be sent to the Union home ministry for approval, after which through state governor Sushilkumar Shinde, it would be sent to the President for his approval, Singh said.

After the Presidential nod, the Naxal outfits would be banned through a notification, Singh said after the cabinet meet, which also reviewed Saturday's landmine blast.

Terming the situation in Bastar as "war-like", state home minister Ram Vichar Netam said that at many places the police and para-military forces were engaged in on-to-one fight with the naxals.

"Any organisation or group of individuals, involved in illegal activities or terrorist activities, will be initially banned for one year through this ordinance and after examining their activities the period of ban can be extended," Netam told reporters.

Agencies

Naxalites blow up 24 CRPF personnel

Correspondent
 pur, September 4

AT LEAST 24 CRPF personnel were killed in a powerful landmine blast triggered by Naxalites in Chhattisgarh Saturday evening. The men were mangled in an anti-landmine vehicle. The mine ripped apart the vehicle near Bijapur. IG M. W. Ansari said the landmine had been planted close to a forest along a forested stretch in Dantewada district. Such was the impact of blast that the vehicle was thrown high in the air and blown to pieces here was a 15-ft-wide crater. The vehicle was torn apart and

came crashing down with its occupants," said state home minister Ramvichar Netam.

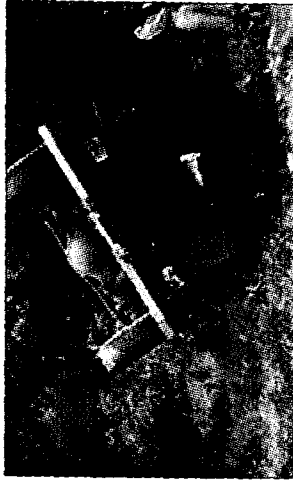
Three jawans, including CRPF commander B.K. Toppo, were admitted to Raipur Medical College.

Chief minister Raman Singh convened a high-level meeting on Sunday evening to consider imposing a ban on the CPI(Maoist) and its frontal organisations. The Centre on Sunday assured that it would make a comprehensive review of the situation and decide on counter-measures.

Netam, who rushed to the blast site with the DG and IG, said that the state government was in touch with the Centre to find out what type of explosives



The vehicle at the scene of the blast.



PTI

were used to blow up a vehicle supposed to withstand such attacks. "Moving in an anti-landmine vehicle thinking that the vehicle would withstand the pressure of an explosion has been proved wrong for the second

time," a top IPS officer. The earlier occasion was in May, when Narayanpur SP Ravindra Bhedia and 30 other jawans were injured when their anti-landmine vehicle was blown up.

The chief minister too said: "An anti-landmine vehicle is of no use if 24 people are killed in a landmine blast." The Centre, he said, should adopt new technology in combating extremist groups. Sophisticated machinery is available in the international market to trace explosives and the Centre should use it to counter such attacks.

"The blast is a blow to the state because the Maoist situation was improving in Chhattisgarh," Union minister of state for home Sriprakash

Jaiswal said in New Delhi.

He said the attack was aimed at derailing peace efforts. "We have told the state governments that unless they try to address the problem of development in these areas, they will not be able to solve the problem," Jaiswal said.

In two months, Maoist strikes have claimed 50 lives in Chhattisgarh, forcing unarmed villagers to rise against the extremists. "The people have left the political leaders far behind in the resistance campaign in the district," said Dantewada Congress MLA and leader of the Opposition Mahendra Karma, who's spearheading the campaign.

Union home minister Shivraj Patil has condemned the incident.

Andhra rethink on writer body ban



Varavara Rao: Prisoner

GS. RADHAKRISHNA

Hyderabad, Aug. 22: The Andhra Pradesh government is thinking of withdrawing the ban on the Revolutionary Writers' Association in the wake of protests over last week's arrest of the organisation's president G. Kalyan Rao and fellow rebel spokesman P. Varavara Rao.

Home minister K. Jana Reddy hinted as much today during his tour of Nalgonda district. "The government will review the situation after a few months on the demand for rescinding the ban on the Virasam," he said.

The Virasam — as the writers' association is known in Andhra — is one of the organisations that were outlawed when the state government re-clamped its ban on the Communist Party of India (Maoist) last week. The arrests of Varavara Rao, its founder president, and Kalyan Rao followed two days later.

If the home minister talked about revoking the ban, police were probing whether revolutionary folk singer Gaddar, one of the peace emissaries along with Varavara Rao and Kalyan Rao for the aborted Maoist-government talks, had links with any of the banned outfits. "...If we have proof of his involvement in any of the banned organisations, then we will take him into custody," said state police chief Swaranjit Sen.

Prominent civil rights activist K.G. Kannabiran said it

is, perhaps, the Prime Minister's "reference to Gaddar in his speech at Hyderabad" yesterday that has "halted the baladeer's arrest so long". Manmohan Singh had praised Gaddar for condemning the killing of innocent people by Maoist rebels.

The ban on the Virasam, the intellectual wing of the Maoists, triggered a wave of protests from rights activists, poets, writers and the media. "It is a ban on freedom of speech," said Olga (P. Lalitha Kumari), a prominent poet and writer.

Gaddar has sent a memorandum to chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy urging him to reconsider the arrests. "Whenever they want, the police and the government collude to build up cases against us. And whenever they don't want, they just drop all charges. Is this law and order?" he said.

Andhra govt bans Naxalites

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, Aug. 17. — Andhra Pradesh today banned the CPI (Maoist) and seven of its allied outfits. The ban initially imposed for one year can be extended further.

The Revolutionary Writers Association is the allied outfit that has been newly added to the list. The ban being re-imposed on the six other frontal outfits are Radical Youth League, Radical Coolie Sangham, Revolutionary Students Union, Si-kasa, Viplava Karmika

9 6- AP
Samaykhya and All India Revolutionary Students Federation.

The ban was notified under the AP Public Security Act — the same law under which the Naxalites were banned since May 1992. This ban was allowed to lapse in July 2004 to facilitate a peace process with Left wing extremists for the first time.

Chief minister Dr YS Rajashekar Reddy signed the file notifying the Maoists as a banned outfit in the evening. Union home minister Mr Shivaj Patil told Dr Reddy in the morning that the Centre had no objection if the state imposed the

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ban. The home minister, Mr K Jana Reddy, however, denied that the decision was taken under pressure from the Centre. "The government decided to impose the ban to remove the sense of insecurity and fear in the minds of the people," the minister added.

Asked whether this meant that the peace talks with the extremists have ended, Mr Reddy said: "Talks are needed. We will consider reviving them when there is a conducive atmosphere and when the Maoists give up violence. The government is all for talks".

THE STATESMAN

✓ Terror's reign 9/18

Ambiguity can play no role in the state's
drive against Naxalites 9/18

19/18
THE killing of Congress MLA M.C. Narsi Reddy by suspected Naxals should leave no one in any doubt that Andhra Pradesh is witnessing a phenomenon that is nothing short of terrorism, plain and simple. In this particular instance, the armed assailants not only targeted Reddy, they fired indiscriminately into a crowd and even chased the MLA's son and killed him. Just the modus operandi of the attack suggests that the so-called Naxals are now determined to create a reign of terror.

Terrorism is a word that is often used loosely, but this attack qualifies under any definition. It targeted civilians, it chose a high visibility occasion, and was brutally executed. Many, including the government of Andhra Pradesh, have harboured the illusion that the Naxals can be treated like a genuine political movement. But if they are part of a genuine political movement, why are they so afraid of participating peacefully in the political process? And even if they are disillusioned with the process, does this give them the licence to target innocent civilians? The Indian political system

has its faults, but it gives people avenues to express their grievances. If anything, it has become too tolerant of forces that resort to terror and intimidation. It is time we took a tough stand against those groups that are afraid of democracy and are trying to subvert it through violence.

This is a lesson the government of Andhra Pradesh has as yet not learnt. The tragic irony is that in his Independence Day speech, Chief Minister Y.S.R. Reddy was once again trying to be reconciliatory towards the Naxals. In the aftermath of this senseless bloodshed, he was forced to revert to talking tough. Unless the state sends clear and unambiguous signals that violence of this kind will not be tolerated, it will only embolden the perpetrators. The Andhra Pradesh government has not shown the determination to stick to a consistent line in its fight against terror. Of course, every effort can be made to bring groups into the political process. But there should be zero tolerance of those who perpetrate mass terror through unacceptable acts of violence.

Post attack, Naxalites face AP ban

PRESS Trust of India
Hyderabad, Aug 16

MAOIST GROUPS could be banned again in Andhra Pradesh after a Naxalite attack on Independence Day killed 10 people including a senior Congress legislator, C. Narsi Reddy.

The MLA was inaugurating a school when four Naxalites opened fire with AK-47s. Reddy (75) and seven others died on the spot while two others, including Reddy's son, died in hospital.

A day after the attack, the state Cabinet authorised chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhhar Reddy to take a decision on the proposed ban. A meeting of the Cabinet, chaired by the chief minister, took serious note of the attack and vowed to take stern measures to check the violence.

"The Cabinet has unanimously authorised the chief minister to review the situation and take appropriately stringent measures," information minister Mohammad Ali Shabir said. He ruled out further peace talks with Naxalites unless they gave up arms.

The minister dropped enough hints that the proposed tough measures could include the reimposition of a ban on Naxalite



The bodies of slain MLA C. Narsi Reddy and his son.

groups. Asked whether the government would seek a nationwide ban, he said the chief minister would decide.

Andhra Pradesh can be assured of support from the Centre. The Prime Minister has condemned the attack. In a statement, he has reiterated the commitment of the government to fight terrorism in all its forms, while the Union home ministry has echoed his stand.

The attack has come as a serious setback to the Andhra Pradesh government's efforts to strike peace with Naxalite

groups. The chief minister was, however, noncommittal on the possible ban.

"Naxalites are forcing us to take stern measures. If they think they can capture power through the barrel of a gun, they are thoroughly mistaken," he said.

The Andhra Cabinet condole the death of the legislator and observed two minutes of silence as a mark of respect. It was the first time that a Congress legislator had been targeted since the party came to power in May last year.

Bravehearts hurt in blast

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, August 16

TWO WOMEN on Monday risked their lives to save a train from an explosion that could have killed dozens of passengers. In the end, they were left fighting for life after the bomb exploded in their hands.

Sandhya Rani Das (35) and Sumitra Pramanik (40) had picked up the bomb when they saw it lying on the tracks. They were waiting for the train to arrive; as the train approached, they picked up the bomb despite the risk.

As a result, they saved the train and its hundreds of passengers. The track is intact and traffic normal. The two women, however, are in critical condition.

The bomb was possibly planted by Maoists, the police said. The blast was so powerful that it created a hole in the ground beside the tracks.

বুটার গোপন রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করবে কেন্দ্র

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ৩০ অগস্ট: বিহারে বিধানসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার সুপারিশ করে রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে পাঠানো রাজ্যপাল বুটা সিংহের দু'টি গোপন রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করতে রাজি হয়ে গেল কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার। দেশের গণতন্ত্রের ইতিহাসে এমন সরকারি গোপন নথি প্রকাশ করার সিদ্ধান্ত একেবারেই নজিরবিহীন।

প্রধান বিচারপতি আর সি লাহোটির নেতৃত্বে সুপ্রিম কোর্টের তিন সদস্যের বেঞ্চার কাছে আজ কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের এই সিদ্ধান্ত জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন অতিরিক্ত সলিসিটর জেনারেল গোপাল সুব্রহ্মণ্যম। সর্বোচ্চ আদালতও সরকারকে এই রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ করার অনুমতি দিয়েছে। কী পরিস্থিতিতে বিহারে রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসন জারির 'বিতর্কিত' সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছিল, তা বোঝাতেই এই রিপোর্ট প্রকাশ। বিধি লঙ্ঘনের অভিযোগে বুটা সিংহের বিরুদ্ধে নোটিস জারি করা যায় কি না, সেই প্রশ্নের অবশ্য ফয়সালা হয়নি।

এই বছরের ২৭ এপ্রিল এবং ২১ মে বিহারের বিষয়ে রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে দু'টি রিপোর্ট পাঠিয়েছিলেন রাজ্যপাল বুটা সিংহ। রাজ্যপালের বক্তব্য ছিল, বিহারের রাজনৈতিক পরিস্থিতিতে ডামাডোল চলছে এবং বিধায়ক কেনাবেচার চেষ্টা হতে পারে। তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ ভাবে এই দু'টি রিপোর্টকেই 'প্রিভিলেজ' তালিকায় না-রেখে প্রকাশ করে দেওয়ার কথা ঘনিষ্ঠে কেন্দ্র। তবে এই ঘটনাকে যে ভবিষ্যতে কেন্দ্র দৃষ্টান্ত হিসাবে ধরা যাবে না, আদালতে সেটাও জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন অতিরিক্ত সলিসিটর জেনারেল।

রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্ট পাওয়ার পরে ২২ মে মধ্যরাত এবং ২৩ মে বৈঠকে বসে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভা বিহারের বিধানসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার সুপারিশ করে। তাতে রাষ্ট্রপতি এ পি জে আব্দুল কালাম সম্মতি দেন ২৩ মে।

বিহারের প্রাক্তন এনডিএ বিধায়কদের পক্ষ থেকে মামলায় জানতে চাওয়া

হয়েছে, বিধি লঙ্ঘনের অভিযোগে রাজ্যপাল বুটা সিংহের বিরুদ্ধে আদালত নোটিস জারি করতে পারে কি না। রাজ্যপালকে যদি শেষ পর্যন্ত তাঁর সিদ্ধান্তের ব্যাখ্যা দিতে আদালতে তলব করা হয়, তবে সেটাও নজিরবিহীন ঘটনা হবে। আজকের শুনানি চলাকালীন বিধানসভা ভেঙে দেওয়ার জন্য রাজ্যপালের সুপারিশ প্রসঙ্গে প্রধান বিচারপতি লাহোটি বলেন, ওই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার সময়ে



কোনও বিধায়কের শপথই হয়নি। তা হলে "যে বিধানসভার অস্তিত্বই নেই, তাকে ভেঙে দেওয়ার সুপারিশ করা হয় কী ভাবে"— মন্তব্য করেছেন বিচারপতি লাহোটি।

প্রাক্তন অ্যাটর্নি জেনারেল সোলি সোরাবজির মত, রাজ্যপালকে নোটিস জারি করা যেতেই পারে। কারণ, কোনও সাংবিধানিক ব্যক্তিত্বের বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ এলে তিনিই জবাব দেওয়ার উপযুক্ত ব্যক্তি। তবে এই প্রশ্নে অ্যাটর্নি জেনারেলের সঙ্গে সরকারের মতের ফারাকও রয়েছে। অ্যাটর্নি জেনারেল মিলন বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়ের বক্তব্য, আবেদনকারীরা যদি তথ্য দিয়ে রাজ্যপালের বিরুদ্ধে বিধি লঙ্ঘনের অভিযোগ প্রমাণ করতে পারেন, তা হলে পরবর্তী ক্ষেত্রে আদালত রাজ্যপালকে নোটিস দিতে পারে। আর কেন্দ্রের মত জানাতে গিয়ে অতিরিক্ত সলিসিটর জেনারেল গোপাল সুব্রহ্মণ্যম বলেছেন, এই মামলায় রাজ্যপালকে পক্ষও করা যায় না।

নোটিস জারির প্রশ্ন তো দূরঅস্ত।

বিধানসভা অবৈধ ভাবে ভাঙা হয়েছিল কি না— সেই প্রশ্নের মীমাংসার উপরে নির্ভর করছে বিহারে ফের নির্বাচনের জন্য বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি আটকানোর প্রশ্ন। বিধানসভা ভেঙে রাজ্যপাল সংবিধান বহির্ভূত কিছু করেননি বলে প্রমাণিত হলে নির্বাচন কমিশনকে ওই বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি করতে বাধা দেবে না আদালত। সত্যিই যদি নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিজ্ঞপ্তি জারি আটকানো হয়, সেটাও অতীতপূর্ব দৃষ্টান্ত হবে।

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Centre ready to publish Buta report

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 30 AUGUST

IN A surprise move, the Centre on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court that it was willing to go public with the reports of Bihar governor Buta Singh, that was instrumental in dissolving the state's assembly. Additional Solicitor General Gopal Subramaniam apprised a bench comprising Chief Justice RC Lahoti, Justice GP Mathur and Justice PK Balasubramanyam of the Centre's decision, since senior advocate, arguing on behalf of the petitioners, kept on insisting that the governor's report be placed before the court for judicial scrutiny.

He said that government has no objection in making copies of reports available to petitioners. Former NDA MLAs had challenged the Centre's May 23 decision to dissolve the Bihar assembly, a move which invited severe criticism from opposition parties.

Mr Sorabjee argued that the Court should itself see the governor's reports, which claimed that the decision to dissolve the assembly was arrived at taking into account sufficient material evidence giving rise to "grave apprehensions" of horse trading.

The assembly was put under suspended animation since May 7, four days after the results were declared.

Interrupting the proceedings, Mr Subramaniam said: "The government was waiving privilege over the two reports of the governor in this case."

He, however, emphasised by recording his statement that the privilege was waived for this case only and the decision should not be cited as a precedent later.



The Bihar stables

CEC's cleansing operation raises hopes

It may not be a coincidence that the chief election commissioner and his colleagues have swung into action in Bihar when Buta Singh is going out of his way to please Lalu Prasad. The Governor is in no mood to make amends for his action in transferring 17 senior IPS officers seen to be posing obstacles for Lalu and notorious RJD elements like Mohammed Shahabuddin. Mr BB Tandon, the CEC, had acted boldly during the February election, going to the extent of ordering a repoll in several booths in Chhapra. That had prompted Lalu to launch a tasteless assault on the CEC, from which the Congress had, sensibly, distanced itself. Since then Lalu has refrained from casting aspersions on the Election Commission but has, instead, been using Raj Bhavan to achieve his dubious objectives. It is good that the Election Commission has not been deterred by the Lalu-Buta nexus that threatens to pollute the administration. The EC's drastic actions in transferring DMs and thana OCs who had failed to carry out election duties and divesting district authorities of the responsibility for deploying security personnel at polling booths suggests it is earnest about ensuring a fair climate for the November election.

The stopover by the Tandon and his colleagues revealed pathetic lapses. There are irregularities in electoral rolls; progress in the preparation of photo identity cards is pathetic; and police stations are engaged in a dangerous conspiracy to conceal information on execution of non-bailable warrants of arrest that the EC had ordered. There are around 70,000 NBWs waiting to be executed — a dangerous signal that emphasizes the links between proclaimed offenders and parties contesting the elections. The mass transfers of DMs and police officers ordered by the EC constitute a remedy that is likely to hurt Lalu and Buta who are working on a separate list of transfers. Obviously the EC is the final authority on the conduct of the assembly election but the question is whether it will get the cooperation it needs from the state administration. Lalu can be trusted to put up a fight, using all the manipulative means at his disposal. He has a lot at stake. But it will be a tragedy if the UPA does not restrain Buta and Lalu so as to allow the EC to do its duty. Tandon and his team have shown courage in attempting to begin cleaning up the mess in Bihar. That should last right through the election.

30 APR 2005 THE STATESMAN

House uproar over Lalu's Buta claim

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 23

RAILWAY MINISTER Lalu Prasad's controversial claim that Bihar Governor Buta Singh was his nominee rocked both Houses of Parliament on Tuesday and the government took refuge in citing rules that the issue of a Governor's removal could not be taken up without a substantive motion with 14 days' notice.

In the face of an unrelenting Opposition demanding the suspension of Question Hour, the Houses were adjourned in the morning. Lok Sabha was adjourned till 2 pm and the Rajya Sabha till 12 noon.

24/8
FURRORE IN PARLIAMENT

give notice for a similar motion on Lalu's remark that Singh was chosen for the post at his instance.

Malhotra said, "We had given notices for an adjournment motion against the Governor's recommendation to Lalu for transfer of a railway official but the Speaker said the conduct of Governors cannot be discussed in the House. Now we will be giving notice on Lalu's public assertions that Buta is his nominee."

As soon as the Upper House re-assembled, the agitated BJP MPs alleged that Lalu's claim about getting Buta appointed as Governor was "very serious" as only President could appoint Governors.

the House with leaders of various parties giving their consent. "I have the consent of the leader of the Opposition also," Speaker Somnath Chatterjee commented after some NDA members objected to this.

Chatterjee earlier refused to entertain the Opposition's notices for adjournment motion to discuss Buta Singh's role. "You give a substantive motion and I shall consider it," he told the agitated members. NDA leaders then decided to

SC to hear plea for stay of Bihar polls

SNS & PT

NEW DELHI, Aug. 22. — The Supreme Court today fixed 30 August for hearing of an application seeking stay of Bihar elections with the pending of petitions challenging the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice Mr RC Lahoti would also hear an application filed by former Bihar NDA MLAs seeking judicial scrutiny of the Bihar Governor, Mr Buta Singh's report that formed the basis of the decision to dissolve the Assembly.

Appearing for the former MLAs, former Attorney

General Mr Soli J Sorabjee contended that there were a catena of decisions in which it had been held that the Governor's report could be judicially scrutinised. The Bench asked Attorney General Mr Milton K Banerjee and Additional Solicitor General Mr Gopal Subramaniam to come prepared with the report of the Governor on 30 August for hearing on the application.

Mr Sorabjee also argued that the Court should issue notice to the Governor as without his report the Assembly could not have been dissolved. The Bench said it was of the prima facie opinion that no notice could be issued to a Governor due to the

bar operating under Article 361 of the Constitution but agreed to examine the issue on the next date of hearing.

Mr Viplab Sharma, who had filed a PIL challenging the dissolution of Bihar Assembly, said the election commission should be restrained from announcing the date of the election as such an announcement would render the petition infructuous.

Adjournment notice

With their notices for an adjournment motion on Bihar Governor Mr Buta Singh's conduct rejected, the Opposition NDA today decided to table a similar motion against railway

minister Mr Lalu Prasad's statement that Mr Singh was his nominee.

"We had given notices for an adjournment motion against the Governor's recommendation to the railway minister for transfer of a railway official but the Speaker said the conduct of Governors' cannot be discussed in the House. Now we will be giving notice on Mr Prasad's public assertions that Mr Buta Singh is his nominee," BJP parliamentary party spokesman Mr VK Malhotra told reporters here.

Taking strong exception to Mr Lalu's comments made to a television channel, he said: "Under Article 155 of the Constitution,

the President appoints the Governor by warrant under his hand and seal. He is aided and advised by the Union council of ministers and not one-minister." Pointing out that RJD was one of the major parties which would be contesting the coming Assembly polls, he charged Mr Buta Singh with "doing everything at Mr Lalu Yadav's behest."

"Impartial polls are not possible under Mr Singh and we demand his immediate recall," the BJP leader said. NDA MPs would also be giving separate notices for discussion on the issue after suspension of Question Hour and Zero Hour, Mr Malhotra said.

EC issues transfer directives to Bihar

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 10

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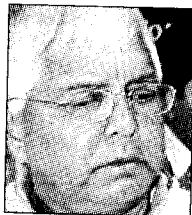
HT-3 11/8

THE ELECTION Commission on Wednesday directed Bihar government to transfer all those officers who had completed three years in a district.

"No officer connected with elections, directly or indirectly, should be allowed to continue in the present district of posting if she or he is posted in home district or home district of spouse and has completed three years in that district during last four years," the EC said in an order to the Bihar chief secretary.

The Commission has followed a consistent policy to ensure that officers, who are connected with the conduct of elections in the State, do not serve in their home districts or places where they have served for long, it said.

The instructions would not only



Lalu Prasad

cover officers appointed for specific election duties like district election officers, returning officers, assistant returning Officers but also other district level officers like additional district magistrates, deputy collectors and SDMs, tehsildars, BDOs it said.

As far as police officers were concerned, the instructions would also include IGs, DIGs, SSPs and SPs.

EC discriminating against us: RJD

A delegation of RJD MPs on Wednesday told Chief Election Commissioner B.B. Tandon that the Election Commission was "discriminating" against the party because of "pre-conceived notions".

In a memorandum, the MPs said, "There're reasons which compel us to believe that most of the acts of the Commission during the Assembly elections 2005 appeared to have been guided by certain pre-conceived notions and presumptions, including the one that we get the mandate not because of the popular support of the people of Bihar but by misusing the administrative machinery and using muscle power."

Centre seeks 11-judge Bench on dissolution

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 8

THE CENTRE on Monday told the Supreme Court that it wants an 11-judge Bench to adjudicate on the constitutional issues arising out of the Bihar Assembly dissolution.

The statement came from Attorney-General Milton K. Bannerjee during resumed hearing of the matter.

"That will depend on how forceful your arguments are," the apex court Bench, headed by Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti, said, tentatively posting the matter for further hearing on September 6.

The date was fixed after the Election Commission assured the court that the election process would only be initiated in October-November.

The order came after both the petitioners, advocate Viplav Sharma and former Assembly member Poornima Yadav, agreed that the matter involved serious constitutional issues.

The court also issued notices to the Bihar government on an application, filed by advocate Viplav Sharma, seeking a stay on the election process in the state.

Biharis insulted: Nitish

The NDA's chief ministerial candidate in Bihar, Nitish Kumar, charged the Manmohan Singh government on Monday with having insulted the people of Bihar by dissolving the state Assembly.

"The Centre, acting under pressure from an individual, dissolved the Bihar Assembly showing ut-

ter disrespect for the people whose mandate was against Lalu Prasad's RJD.

The Manmohan Singh government insulted the people of Bihar", Kumar told a press conference in the course of the NDA's 'Nyay Yatra'.

JD(U) parliamentary party leader accused Ramvilas Paswan, the Lok Janshakti Party president, too, of "not only deceiving the electorate but also undermining and insulting his MLAs".

Kumar strongly contested the Centre's stand that the Supreme Court cannot sit in judgement on Union Cabinet's decision dissolving the assembly.

"When I was railway minister, the Supreme Court had not only taken cognisance of a decision of the Cabinet relating to the railway board but also passed an order", he said.

Asserting that it took the right step in dissolving the Bihar assembly, the Centre had on August 5 filed an affidavit in the apex court saying it could not delve into the legality of the decision, as it was a "matter between the President and his council of ministers".

The affidavit was in response to a Bench headed by Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti deciding to hear on Monday an interim application seeking stay of any decision by the Election Commission notifying the election dates for Bihar polls.

(With inputs from Agencies)



Nitish Kumar

BIHAR
ASSEMBLY

ALL IN A DAY

SC NOTICE TO BIHAR

The Supreme court issued notices to the Bihar government on a plea seeking stay on the election process in the state

'SC SHOULD DECIDE'

Nitish Kumar contested the Centre's stand that the Supreme Court cannot sit in judgement on the decision to dissolve the state Assembly

Bihar parties blow hot & cold

Poll-wary Lalu sets up roving PR teams

SAROJ Nagi
New Delhi, August 7

RJD CHIEF Lalu Prasad Yadav doesn't want to take any chances in the next round of Assembly elections expected some time later this year.

After his bitter experience in February 2005, when he did not get the en bloc support of the Muslims and OBCs, he has now set up teams of roving ministers, MPs, legislators and party leaders to ensure that this vote returns to the RJD fold in the company of some of the Muslim leaders, Union Minister M.A.A. Fatimi, for instance, has already toured nine of the 38 districts in the state so far.

His next foray will take him to Muzaffarpur and 'aishali.

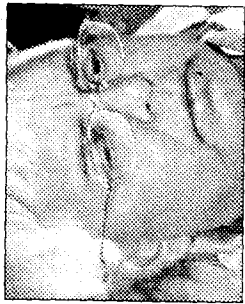
"We will complete the exercise before the assembly polls," Fatimi told

Hindustan Times. The list of minority leaders deputed to rally the muslim vote includes, among others, Shahabuddin, Aklaq Ahmed, Nihaluddin and Anwar Ansari.

Likewise, the RJD's OBC and dalit leaders have begun to fan out in the state to mobilise support.

While Lalu is confident of getting the yadav support on his own, senior Rajya Sabha MPs like Ramdeo Bhandari, Mangani Lal Mandal and Vidya Sagar Nishad are among those who have been asked to shepherd the other backward votes for Lalu.

Similarly, the party's dalit leaders Ramai Ram and Sanjay Paswan are out in the countryside, alongwith other leaders. In fact, once the Monsoon session of Parliament is over on August 26, all its MPs will join the hunt for support.



FACE-OFF: Lalu Prasad (left) and Nitish Kumar

Nitish urges EC steps

PRESS Trust of India
Madhepura, August 7

STEPPING UP his offensive against railway minister Lalu Prasad on Sunday, NDA's chief ministerial candidate Nitish Kumar urged the election commission to prohibit Prasad from "misusing" official functions for electoral purposes.

"He (Lalu) is grossly misusing the official functions of Railways in Bihar as part of his campaign for the RJD. It is in gross violation of the settled norms", Kumar, who is currently leading the NDA's Nvay Yatra (Justice march) against dissolution of the state Assembly, said.

"Only RJD leaders are invited in the Railway functions, for which crores of rupees are spent in advertisements. The EC should take note of it and stop Prasad (from misusing the official functions)", Kumar said. JD-U parliamentary board chairman Sharad Yadav and former Union minister Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain made a scathing attack on the governor for recommending dissolution of the state assembly and said, "Buta Singh will have to, once again, pay a heavy price for his wrongdoings".

NCP asks RJD, LJP to unite

Patna, August 7

NATIONALIST CONGRESS Party (NCP) on Sunday appealed to the RJD and Lok Janshakti Party to sink their differences and unite in the coming Bihar Assembly poll to defeat the NDA.

"We should take a lesson from our bitter experience in February poll and come together by sinking our differences to put up a united show to inflict a crushing defeat on the communal NDA in the coming poll", NCP national general secretary Tariq Anwar said after a meeting of the party's state executive committee. He said the meeting authorised the NCP chief and Union agriculture minister Sharad Pawar to hold talks with

2005 THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Buta puts UPA in a spot, accuses SC of interference

Our Political Bureau
PATNA, NEW DELHI 5 AUGUST

BIHAR governor Buta Singh on Friday appeared determined to complicate matters for the Centre by attacking the Supreme Court's (SC) decision to scrutinise his recommendation for dissolving the state Assembly.

"Since Parliament, the supreme electoral body in the country, has approved the resolution to extend President's rule in Bihar by another six months with effect from September 6, it is an approval of the step taken by me (to dissolve the House). When Parliament puts its seal of approval on any issue, the matter cannot be debated in any forum and there can be no judicial interference," he said in Patna.

Mr Singh did not stop there. On whether the SC notice to him on the dissolution amounted to judicial interference, he said: "Leave it to the good sense of the judiciary." The governor's statement comes at a time when the Centre is finding it difficult to defend its

midnight coup. The Centre, which had claimed it had proof of horse trading in the state, refrained from presenting before Parliament the evidence.

Mr Singh, who came out with the "politicians argument", has in the process, pushed the government to an embarrassing corner. While there are no takers for the governor's attempt to elevate himself above procedural exactness of the Constitution and democratic norms, there is acknowledgement that the judiciary has an obligation to reinforce the sanctity and legitimacy of law. The apex court's action followed a petition which said the governor did not observe established procedures while dissolving the House.

Mr Singh is, however, continuing to defend his action saying he has submitted all relevant documents to the Centre. "The Union home minister had already referred to the document relating to a specific complaint about horse trading in course of the debate on dissolution of the House in Parliament. It is the property of the House and Parliament and I will not share with you the details," he said.



The Economic Times

NDA warns against Kang's ouster

Press Trust of India

PATNA, Aug. 4. — The NDA today warned of staging protests if Governor Mr Buta Singh "shows the door" to chief secretary Mr GS Kang without answering charges of "administrative impropriety" levelled by the state's top-most bureaucrat.

"Mr Kang has raised certain issues to prove his point that the administration is not being run in the state in accordance with the constitutional norms and rules of executive business.

"The Governor should reply to the charges and if he doesn't and replaces Mr Kang, it will prove that the charges of administra-

ive impropriety were true and the NDA will strongly protest against it," the alliance's chief ministerial candidate Mr Nitish Kumar told reporters.

"Mr Kang as a person might not be important... But the issues he has raised are and they warrant clarification.

Appointment and replacement of a chief secretary is a routine business, but not so in the present case," he said, adding Mr Kang's replacement will only reinforce NDA's charge that Mr Buta Singh was "remote-controlled by UPA bosses". Mr Kumar later left for Saharsa for the Nyay yatra.

Criticising the Governor and the Union home min-

ister, Mr Shivraj Patil, for claiming that a high-power committee existed for transfer of senior bureaucrats, including IPS officers, the JD(U) parliamentary party leader wondered how could the chief secretary be unaware of the existence of such a committee.

"Mr Kang has not only disputed its (committee's) existence but also stated that he was repeatedly sidelined from the decision-making process," he said.

With Mr Kang sticking to his guns and not going to office for the fifth day today, there are reports that Mr Buta Singh was planning to appoint a new chief secretary.

THE HINDU

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2005

Playing fair in Bihar

Six months after the exit of the Rashtriya Janata Dal Government, politics in Bihar continues to revolve around the charismatic, if increasingly exasperating, personality of Lalu Prasad. Technically Mr. Prasad is Union Railway Minister and president of the RJD. But there is a third role he is thought to have appropriated that has left opponents fuming and friends dismayed — that of informal advisor to Governor Buta Singh. Naturally, it was bedlam time in the lower House. The Janata Dal (United)-led marathon debate was followed by the first division on any motion discussed by the 14th Lok Sabha. On the agenda was extension of President's Rule in Bihar, a task ordinarily treated by Parliament as routine. However, Bihar has been on a roller-coaster ride for the past half year; it has rushed from an indecisive election in February 2005 through President's Rule and dissolution of the Assembly to the prospect of a fresh election. That the JD(U) and the Bharatiya Janata Party spotted Mr. Prasad's hand in many of the decisions has only added to the mess. Mr. Prasad, for his part, has done little to dispel the impression that he is the power behind Mr. Buta Singh's throne. The latest storm is over the transfer of 17 IPS officers, among them the Superintendent of Police of Siwan, the constituency represented by the controversial RJD MP, Mohammad Shahabuddin. The political motivation behind the transfers is clear enough. Barely had the Governor signed on the dotted line when State Chief Secretary G.S. Kang went on long leave. Mr. Kang, who surrendered his official car and mobile phone presumably to drive home the point, has since gone on record to state that he was by-passed by the Governor.

The United Progressive Alliance Government won the day in Parliament. The National Democratic Alliance-sponsored motion on the situation in Bihar was defeated 172 to 100. However, Governor Singh has hardly come out of the ordeal smelling of roses. Indeed, he fairly gave the game away when he broke protocol to visit the sulking Chief Secretary, who, adding insult to injury, spurned the Governor's appeal to rejoin office. It was then perfectly in order that the proactive Mr. Singh should be summoned by Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil for an explanation. It is obvious that Mr. Patil and the UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi feel embarrassed by the Governor's actions. Mr. Patil let it be known that he had advised Mr. Singh to stay clear of controversies. Yet all this might be brave talk and little else given that the source of the trouble is the Union Railway Minister, whose 24-member Lok Sabha contingent is crucial for the well-being of the Union Government. The RJD was in power for 15 long years which is a tribute to Mr. Prasad's political acumen and popular appeal. The coming election presents him with another opportunity to prove the continuing relevance of his brand of politics with which millions in Bihar still identify. The way to go about this is by playing fair and square — not by meddling in the affairs of the State through the Raj Bhawan.

THE HINDU

EC flexes muscles in Bihar

Administration told not to transfer collectors without its consent

HTC/Agencies

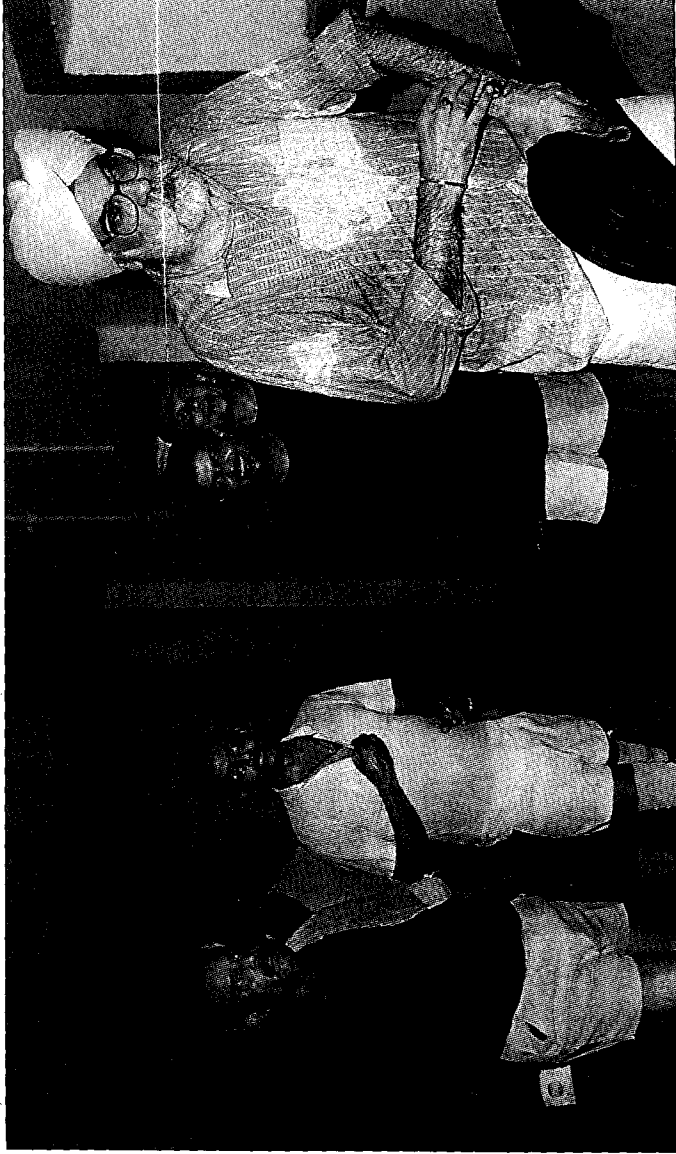
New Delhi, August 2

THE ELECTION COMMISSION on Tuesday directed the Bihar administration not to transfer any district collector and other officials involved in the election process without its consent. The Commission, however, did not make any comment over the recent transfer of 17 superintendents of police over which Governor Buta Singh and chief secretary G.S. Kang have serious differences.

"No district election officer, district and deputy collector, electoral registration officer and assistant ERO involved in election related work should not be transferred without the consent of the Commission," the Commission said in a communication to the state government.

Commission sources said this decision was taken since district collectors were involved in important electoral work like revision of rolls and issuing photo identity cards. The EC also asked the state administration to expedite the execution of non-bailable warrants and seizure of illegal arms.

Taking note of the reports of transfers of superintendents of police including that of Siwan, the Commission asked the state government to strictly follow its earlier directives of expediting the execu-



Bihar chief secretary G.S. Kang emerges from a badminton court in Patna on Monday.

tion of non-bailable warrants that were pending in the state in large numbers and conducting special search operations to unearth illegal arms. The directive had also sought unearthing of explosives and preparation of the lists of persons against whom FIRs were pending for

various electoral offences or against whom cases had been charged for various electoral offences. The Commission said the EC teams, which had recently visited non-bailable warrants against known criminals, especially ones that were pending for long time, was very slow.

PTI

03 AUG 1984

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

RS okays Bihar Prez rule

House dissolved to prevent horse-trading, says Patil

AGENCIES

New Delhi, August 1

THE CENTRE on Monday strongly defended Governor Buta Singh's recommendation for dissolution of the Assembly as the Rajya Sabha approved extension of President's rule there for six more months amid a walkout by the NDA.

Replying to a discussion on a statutory resolution seeking extension of Central rule in Bihar beyond September 7, home minister Shivraj Patil said the government decided to dissolve the House and seek fresh mandate to prevent horse trading, on Governor Buta Singh's recommendation.

The resolution was passed by a voice vote. "The election commission has said polls will be held in October-November ... The government has nothing to do with it (poll schedule).

But, we will be happy if the elections are held earlier," he said, allaying the BJP-led Opposition's fears that the polls might be put off till early next year.

Before walking out, senior BJP member Sushma Swaraj said the NDA was not satisfied with the home minister's reply as he "failed" to throw light on issues raised by it, including the row between Governor Buta Singh and state chief secretary G.S. Kang. Kang has proceeded on leave after mass transfer of IPS officers there. Backing the Governor's recommendation to the hilt, Patil told the House that Buta Singh had written two letters to the Centre pointing to horse trading and efforts to wean away MLAs with the help of "allurements, money

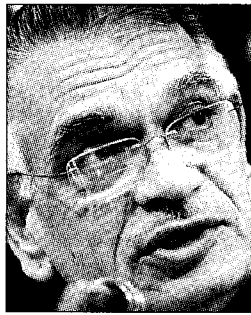
'Committee decided all transfers'

SEEKING TO downplay the controversy over transfer of officials in Centrally-ruled Bihar, the government on Monday said a committee had taken decisions on transfers after reaching a consensus.

"We were told that transfer of officials was decided by a committee by consensus," home minister Shivraj Patil said, intervening in a debate on extension of President's rule in Bihar.

He said the committee was formed to carry out transfers before the notification of elections in the state was issued.

Patil said the state chief secretary,



Shivraj Patil

the home secretary and other officials were part of the committee and they reached consensus on transfers except in case of two or three districts.

"There was an official who wanted a transfer to a particular district where his son was sick and it was done," he said.

Ravi Shankar Prasad of the BJP asked which were the districts on which consensus could not be reached.

Patil said there was no need to discuss the issue of transfers in Bihar now and if members wanted a separate discussion on it could be held later.

PTI, New Delhi

and muscle power". When Swaraj asked Patil how the Governor came to know about it, he said it was shown on TV and, besides, the Governor also had his "own information".

"The Governor was very clear he will allow a government to be formed but not allow horse trading," Patil said. Also, the Centre had not dissolved the House immediately after imposing President's rule on March 7, allowing sufficient time

for government formation.

Patil asked the NDA why it took objection to the Governor's move. "Was he (Governor) wrong in recommending continuance of President's rule and House dissolution," he asked.

He said government-formation on the basis of horse-trading would have led to a "Constitutional chaos" and any such regime would have collapsed like a pack of cards.

Bihar: nod for extension of President's rule

Patil backs Governor's recommendation

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Rajya Sabha on Monday approved the extension of President's rule in Bihar for another six months with Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil backing the Governor's recommendation for dissolution of the State Assembly to avoid "Constitutional chaos." The Opposition staged a walkout after claiming that Mr. Patil's reply failed to address their concerns.

Mr. Patil began his reply by asking the members to "bear in mind the facts pertinent to the issue" — the Governor was impartial as he rejected the claims made by the party that was in power earlier; the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) did not stake claim until the end; and the Centre and the Governor waited for months for someone to stake a credible claim, and dissolved the House when it became apparent that some parties were indulging in horse-trading.

"What was our mistake?"

"Where did we go wrong? What was our mistake?" he asked, adding that all that the Government had done was to ask the politicians to seek another mandate from the people. "Probably we have been too careful," he wondered. The Governor had sent a report after two months of the poll results recommending dissolution of the Assembly. "But we waited for some more time for someone to stake a claim."

"The Centre knew attempts were being made to win away MLAs of some parties. The question is would you accept a government formed on the basis of horse-trading? Did we commit a mistake? We did not dissolve the House [on the basis of the first report by the Governor] and time was given which was utilised for horse trading and that government would have not sus-

• Governor was impartial, says Patil

• "We waited for someone to stake a claim"

• Proof of horse-trading was on television

tained." Responding to Fali Nariman's (Nominated) observation that the Centre could have waited for the President to return from his overseas tour, Mr. Patil said the decision to suspend the Bihar Assembly was passed unanimously by Parliament.

To P.C. Alexander's charge that the Union Cabinet took the decision at midnight and the President was asked to recommend it while he was in Moscow, Mr. Patil said: "We were trying to be correct. When no one could form the Government, we could not help it."

Mr. Patil contended that the Centre would have allowed two or more parties to form the Government if the leaders of those parties had arrived at an agreement. But some MLAs of a party were discussing government formation and they did not constitute two-thirds of that party to effect a split according to Constitutional norms. "If they were not defecting, it was possible to talk in Patna. Why go to the capital of an adjoining state?" he asked. The Home Minister contended that the proof of horse-trading was on television and everyone saw it.

However, Sushma Swaraj (Bharatiya Janata Party) said the Minister had not replied to many of the charges including the conflict between the Governor and the top echelons of the bureaucracy.

The NDA walked out in protest and the resolution was passed by a voice vote.

02 AUG 2006

Boomerang on Buta

Governor's administration disgraced *Patna*

This week's mayhem in Patna is perhaps the severest indictment of the Governor's administration. It highlights the extent to which Buta Singh has unabashedly genuflected at the altar of the Rashtriya Janata Dal. A party tough with a criminal record, that includes molestation of Kashmiri women on the Jammu-Tawi Express, was appointed as chairman of the Patna Water Board, a post that should normally have gone to a civil servant or a technocrat. And he gets killed by a rival faction. President's rule stands disgraced after this gangwar inside government premises and a change in Raj Bhavan ought now to be imperative. The Centre might have intervened for much less in the case of any other state; in Bihar, Lalu Prasad's clout ensures that he functions as the non-resident chief minister. If initial findings are any indication, the RJD leader's family has a lot to answer for. The water board chief, believed to be close to Sadhu Yadav, Lalu's brother-in-law, had confronted Subhas Yadav, another brother-in-law.

Comparisons are odious. Buta Singh, who has made himself useful both to the RJD and the Congress, made a laughing stock of himself on Tuesday when he told the media that the situation in Bihar is better than in London. Which perhaps gives him further confidence to play footsie with bureaucrats. Siwan's SP may soon be transferred for his firm stand against party dons. This follows the transfer of the DM who some months ago had raided Shahabuddin's house. To add insult to injury, his wife, an IPS officer, was shunted to the back of beyond, a move that has prompted the couple to opt for the Maharashtra cadre. Also victimised was the Gopalganj DM, who was intrepid enough to confront the RJD characters. In trying to be pliable, the Governor has made a mockery of the Prime Minister's appeal for fixed tenures as no system can deliver if administrators are changed without notice. He has manipulated the bureaucracy as an RJD puppet. No wonder the MP with 40-odd criminal cases pending still thrives in Siwan. Thriving no less is Buta Singh himself with parties and politics firmly entrenched in Patna's Raj Bhavan. More theatrics can be expected between now and election day.

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THE STATESMAN

Gogoi and Sangma two sides of same coin: AGP chief

HT Correspondent
Guwahati, July 8

BRINDABAN GOSWAMI, president of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the main Opposition party in Assam, said here on Friday that Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi and former Speaker of the Lok Sabha Purna A. Sangma were both two sides of the same coin.

Both Tarun Gogoi and Purna Sangma made adverse comments during the recent crisis in the party on the issue of expulsion of the AGP's founder-president and former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the party.

Goswami alleged that both Sangma and Gogoi had conspired against the AGP. Sangma, at a public meeting organized by Mahanta loyalists here, had commented that, without Mahanta, the AGP would be even more fragmented and, finally, would no more stay a strong regional party.

On the other hand, Gogoi had commented on Wednesday that both Mahanta and Goswami were two sides of the same coin and both had a



Tarun Gogoi

dictatorial attitude.

"Three MLAs of Sangma's NCP and two MLAs of the Mahanta faction voted for the Congress candidate in the last Rajya Sabha election in the state. Sangma has been trying for a long time to destabilize the AGP", said Goswami. Mahanta loyalists Ali Akbar Mian and Abdul Jabbar – both AGP MLAs – had allegedly voted for Congress candidate Anowara Taimur. Later, both were expelled from the party.

The AGP president also alleged that both Sangma and Gogoi, who were Union ministers of the Congress during the term of Rajiv Gandhi and Narasimha Rao, had tried to create a confusion among the people of the state over Mahanta's expulsion.

AGP shows the door to founder chief Mahanta

Show cause notices to four party legislators

Special Correspondent

GUWAHATI: The Asom Gana Parishad on Sunday expelled its founder president and former Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the party for his alleged anti-party activities. The steering committee, which met in the upper Assam town Tinsukia, decided to expel Mr. Mahanta from the party and issue show cause notices to four party legislators — Sahidul Alam Choudhury, Gunin Hazarika, Bubul Das and Utpal Dutta — for defying the party whip and attending a convention organised by Mahanta loyalists here on June 27.

A confidant of the former Chief Minister and general secretary of the newly-formed Sanmilita Yuba Samaj, Assam, Pranab Goswami told *The Hindu* that now there was no option left for Mr. Mahanta's followers but to form a new party. Mr. Goswami said party president Brindaban Goswami would be solely responsible for the weakening of the AGP. He said grassroots AGP workers who are with Mr. Mahanta would launch a statewide agitation against Mr. Brindaban Goswami.

Placed for ratification

The decision of the steering committee was placed before the central executive committee for ratification.

The steering committee had served a show cause notice on Mr. Mahanta for the second time for criticising the party leadership in a television interview. The AGP had issued a whip prohibiting its party leaders and



Former Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta

workers from participating in the convention organised under the banner of the Sanmilita Yuba Samaj Assam, floated recently by some of Mahanta's loyalists. However the four legislators against whom the steering committee decided to issue show cause notice and their followers in various districts defied the party whip and attended the convention that was inaugurated by Mr. Mahanta.

The AGP had taken strong exception to the "motivated statements against the party issued by Mr. Mahanta in a section of print and electronic media" as they lowered the party's image in the eyes of the people. The steering committee had procured the relevant tape of the interview in a local satellite channel in which Mr. Mahanta had alleged that some leaders who had split the AGP with the help of the Congress in 1991 were now calling the shots.

Mr. Mahanta was earlier served a show-cause notice for

his statements against the party last year. He was stripped of all party posts and banned from campaigning outside his Assembly constituency. Although the ban was withdrawn later, the party posts enjoyed by Mr. Mahanta were not restored.

He had quit as the AGP president in September 2001 in the midst of bigamy charges levelled against him by a suspended lady official of the Assam Legislative Assembly Secretariat, Sanghamitra Bharali. The former Chief Minister, however, strongly denied the allegation and described it as a conspiracy to malign him and the party.

Political hibernation

He went into political hibernation while the party elected Mr. Brindaban Goswami as the president on September 6, 2001. He made efforts for a comeback and contested for the post of president in the organisational elections held in January this year. He, however, lost to Mr. Goswami who was re-elected at the party's Tezpur conference.

Mr. Mahanta led the six-year-long anti-foreigners' agitation in 1979 as the then president of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and was one of the three signatories of the Assam Accord signed by the student body and the erstwhile All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) with the Centre and the State Government in 1985 that brought the movement to an end. He became Chief Minister for the first time when he came to power in the same year and again in 1996 when the regional party returned to power.

YSR preparing to get rid of TRS

Cong accuses coalition partner of thriving on arm-twisting

Hyderabad, July 10

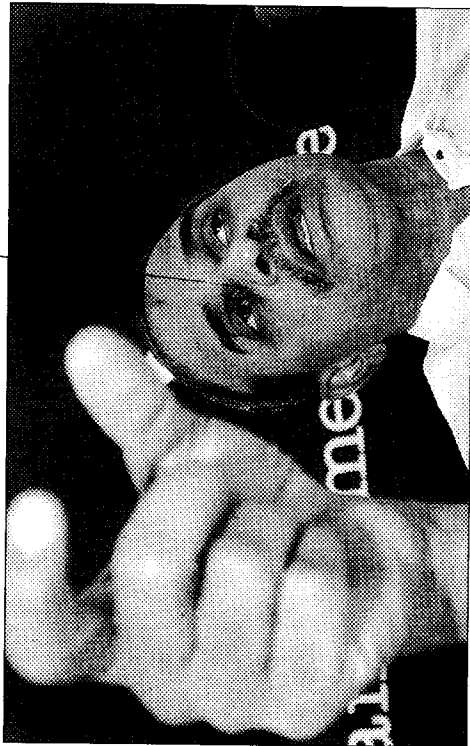
PEEVED OVER the high command's move to 'cajole' the sulking ally Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), whose ministers had quit recently on Telangana statehood issue, the ruling Congress leaders in Andhra Pradesh are preparing the ground to convince their party leadership to snap ties with the sub-regional party.

"We are convinced that TRS leadership is thriving on blackmail tactics from the beginning. We will tell our high command to treat the exit of TRS Ministers as good riddance", party sources said on Sunday.

Apart from representatives of Telangana Regional Congress Coordination Committee (TRCCC), the party leaders from coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions are also preparing to approach the high command on the issue.

What has particularly irked the state Congress leaders is the 'tone and tenor' of the statements made by TRS ministers, who had launched a tirade against chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy soon after quitting their positions.

The Congress leaders said that though their party was 'not dependent on TRS for survival as it



YSR Reddy: On a war path

has a comfortable majority on its own', the sub-regional party was accommodated in the cabinet and was given due share in power.

"What we have got in return is the litany of abuses and embarrassment. They are now criticising the government's policies after keeping mum for one year while they were part of the cabinet", the sources said.

Congress leaders are also taking umbrage over TRS' threat to organise protest rallies and inter-

sify the movement for statehood at a time when the AICC general secretary in-charge of the state was engaged in sorting out the matter.

"All along, we have overestimated the strength of TRS and given a long rope to its president K.Chandrasekhar Rao. He neither has the numbers nor the public sympathy. It is time we call his bluff and treat an independent path", Congress sources said.

"It is strange that Chandrasekhar Rao, who had openly

declared that he would drag our party President (Sonia Gandhi) to streets if she does not fall in line on Telangana issue, is being wooed now. Similarly his deputy A. Narendra was a bitter critic of Soniaji", they said.

Favouring snapping of ties with TRS, they said the Congress' image, particularly in Telangana region, was very high because of several people-friendly policies being implemented by the government.

"The land to the landless scheme, low interest loans to women self-help groups, increased old age and widow pensions and above all the focus on irrigation projects have brought the people of the region closer to Congress than ever before and this has made the TRS leadership jittery", Congress sources said.

They also warned the party leadership against wooing TRS at the cost of more reliable allies like Left parties, who are strongly opposed to Telangana statehood demand.

"There is no need to succumb to the blackmail politics of TRS, particularly when we have taken major initiatives for the development of Telangana region", they contended.

PTI

Congress blames Reddy for problems with TRS

SAROJ Nagi
New Delhi, July 9

9-6-06 AP
MSR 3/10/06

THE CONGRESS is holding chief minister Y.S. Rajashekhar Reddy largely responsible for the problems it is facing with the TRS, which recently pulled its ministers out of the state government and raised its pitch for a separate Telengana at the Centre.

The TRS' moves have undermined the objective of Congress party of projecting itself as capable of holding its allies in a coalition — be it at the Centre or in the state.

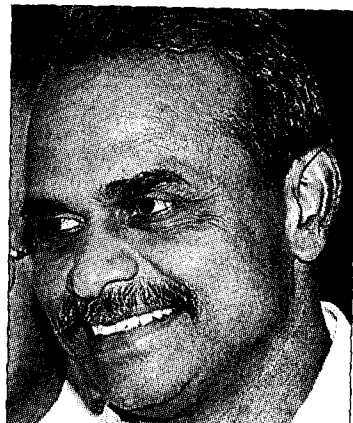
While the Pranab Mukherjee-led three member sub-committee to go into the statehood issue will meet again on July 24, Reddy's style of functioning, including his tendency to be dismissive about the TRS, hasn't gone down well with the AICC.

The chief minister, presently abroad, is likely to be told to be more accommodative towards his allies when he returns next week.

In fact, AICC general secretary in charge of Andhra Pradesh Digvijay Singh has slotted a meeting between Reddy and TRS chief K. Chandrashekhar Rao between July 14 and 21 to thrash out contentious issues. This includes working on a time-bound implementation of the list of



Digvijay Singh



Y.S.R. Reddy

projects that the TRS leader wants for the Telengana region.

The TRS' main grouse against Reddy is his insensitivity towards the Telengana region and people, including Naxals who were being killed in fake encounters. In fact, it was, reportedly, under pressure from the ultras that Rao pulled out his ministers.

The central leadership has its reservations over the manner in which Reddy is handling the Naxal issue (which could figure in the Rao-Reddy meet where Singh will also be present).

"He is treating it like a law and order problem and not as a socio-

economic problem which requires a political solution," said a Congress leader in close touch with the developments in the state.

Singh has his own recipe for tackling the Naxal problem. It calls for a pro-poor, pro-dalit approach, in which land restoration programmes are a key element, and a relook at the Indian Forest Act so that forest produce goes not to the state government but to the tribals.

"That would be path-breaking," said Singh. The AICC leader has, in fact, broached the subject with the Congress president.

10 JUL 2006

THE HINDU

WEDNESDAY, JULY 6, 2005

9.87
DP

Fallout of a nagging problem

40.10
67

The resignation of five out of the six Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) Ministers from the Andhra Pradesh Cabinet marks the first concrete manifestation of the differences with the coalition partner, the Congress, in the State. Of course, the exit of the Ministers or even the withdrawal of support by the TRS, if it so chooses, will pose no threat to the Government. Perhaps, it may even come as some relief to Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, who has left for his three-nation tour as scheduled. If he has not accepted the resignations right away, it is only because the Congress high command and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government at the Centre are also seized of the problem with the TRS and they must have their say before the State unit can decide on the future course of action. It is significant that the TRS has not quit the Union Cabinet, and its leader, K. Chandrasekhara Rao, would like to continue as the Labour Minister. Yet, he has ruled out the possibility of reviewing the resignation decision in Andhra Pradesh. For the record, the TRS has advanced two reasons for the pull-out — slow progress on meeting its demand for a separate Telangana State and the non-serious handling of the naxalite problem. The TRS is also upset at the Chief Minister's move to go in for a Greater Hyderabad at this juncture, making it impossible to partition the capital if and when a new Telangana State is created. Granting Statehood in this case is certain to give a boost to such demands elsewhere, say, in Rayalaseema or even coastal Andhra.

It is also obvious that the resignations have come soon after the deadline the Maoists had set for the TRS Ministers to step down since they have failed to get a separate State carved out as they promised during the elections. The naxalite ultimatum was that the Ministers should resign or face the bullet. It is not possible for the TRS Ministers to continue in office under such circumstances, though one of them has refused to submit to the party decision and opted to stay on. On the question of a separate State, a UPA sub-committee headed by Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee is considering the issue in all its national ramifications. There is still no word about the Second States Reorganisation Commission that was originally intended to be constituted to look at the new set of demands for separate States, including the one for Vidharba. However useful it may be to have smaller, compact States, the norms for division, as in the case of the linguistic yardstick adopted last time, will have to be clear. Such decisions cannot be taken in a hurry as they have far-reaching implications. The UPA sub-committee will have to first take a position on this before the Union Cabinet could decide on setting up a States Reorganisation Commission. The constituents of the UPA will have their own say on the issue and it is bound to be a time-consuming exercise.

PARTY THREATENS TO WITHDRAW FROM UPA COALITION

TRS revolts, pulls out 5 ministers from AP govt

Hyderabad, New Delhi

4 JULY

TELANGANA Rashtra Samiti (TRS), fighting for a separate Telengana state, pulled out five of its six ministers from the Andhra Pradesh government on Monday and threatened to withdraw from the UPA coalition at the Centre, topping serious differences with the Congress on the issue and the handling of the naxalites problem.

However, the party faced a revolt with one minister refusing to toe the party line and resigning from the Rajasekhara Reddy government. TRS has been unhappy with the Congress that not much "progress" could be made on the Telengana statehood issue and with the state government for the police action against naxalites.

Chief minister Rajasekhara Reddy, whose government does not face any threat because of the

majority enjoyed by his Congress party in the 294-member Assembly, said a decision on their resignation will be taken at the "appropriate time." Four Ministers — T Harish Rao, A Chandrasekhar, Captain Lakshmikantha Rao and Vijayarama Rao — met governor Sushil Kumar Shinde and submitted their resignation to him this morning, while N Narasimha Murthy, on a visit to the US, faxed his communication from there.

Santosh Reddy, the other minister, defied the party directive saying he was not party to a "unilateral" decision to quit the Cabinet, a decision taken by the TRS in the wake of naxalite ultimatum to them either to quit or face bullets. TRS, which has five members in the Lok Sabha and two ministers at the Centre, fought in alliance with Congress in the last year's Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

In Delhi, TRS chief and Union labour minister K Chandrasekhara Rao told a press conference, "we will decide to stay in the UPA or not after meeting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and seeing their response to our demand." Mr Rao said his party would reconsider staying in the UPA if they failed to receive a "satisfactory" response on the issue of a separate state. Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee, who heads the UPA subcommittee on Telengana, and the Congress party expressed confidence that the issue would be sorted out.

In Hyderabad, TRS floor leader Vijayarama Rao, told reporters after meeting the governor that "we have resigned from the government because of the continued neglect of the Telengana region and also the increasing police encounters." — PTI

A DATE WITH THE FUTURE

New Delhi gets its brand new Metro

The Capital goes further underground with the commissioning of the new corridor that promises to go a long way

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar

NEW DELHI: The ambitious Delhi Metro project crossed a major landmark on Saturday with United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi inaugurating the new 7-km Kashmere Gate-Central Secretariat underground corridor.

Opening the line by pulling a lever, Ms. Gandhi hoped that this state-of-the-art section -- running through the heart of the Capital and completed way ahead of schedule -- would prove to be an example worth emulating for other projects as well.

Speaking in Hindi, Ms. Gandhi -- who bought a ticket and took a ride on the system -- lauded the role of all Metro workers and officials in doing a fine job and said Delhi's face would change with the expansion of the Metro network. Noting that increasing population and vehicular density was a matter of concern for all metropolitan cities, she said the Metro would help in reducing congestion and ensuring that people reach their places of work on time.

Observing that the real impact of the Delhi Metro project would be felt only when it is fully implemented, she hoped that the upcoming Barakhamba-Dwarka corridor, which would mark the completion of Phase I of the project, would also be completed on time.

Ms. Gandhi also made a fervent plea to the people to ensure cleanliness, safety and upkeep of the system so that it attains real success and the coming generations benefit from it.

Union Urban Development Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said while the new



IT'S HERE: *United Progressive Alliance chairperson Sonia Gandhi inaugurating the new Delhi Metro underground line on Saturday.*

section was the most important and challenging one, its success would depend on its use by people for going to offices, colleges, schools and markets.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi, B.L. Joshi, said in the historic city of Delhi that had been built seven times the new Metro section would reduce travel time from the old Walled City to the new Lutyens' Delhi to just a few minutes.

It was an eagerly awaited gift for the people, he said, considering that the section passes through some of the most congested parts of the city and promises to ease congestion on the roads and pollution a great deal. Besides helping Delhi's cause in staging the 2010 Commonwealth Games, he said, the project implemented so far had also brought in a new travel culture. Describing the Metro as a good solution for traffic problems due to rising fuel costs, he said by 2020 Delhi would have eight Metro lines traversing a distance of nearly 250 km.

Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit said the project was a feather in the Capital's

cap and something India can truly be proud of. "An ancient area," she said, "will now get connected with the world-class Metro".

Catering to crowded places like Connaught Place and Chandni Chowk, she said, the new section would add over 70,000 commuters daily to the existing 130,000 daily passengers. "And while thus far about 1,000 bus trips have been reduced due to the Metro, another 1,000 would be reduced with the new section becoming operational. And by the end of Phase I -- which would cover a total of 65 km -- about 22,400 buses and thousands of private vehicles would hopefully be replaced by the Metro with nearly 22 lakh people using the system."

The decongestion on the roads will also help improve the average speed of buses from around 10 km per hour at present to 14.5 km per hour and people will have a safe, comfortable, quick and reliable mode of transport. The Chief Minister said the Metro had been an integral part of the Delhi Government's transport policy and the dream of commissioning the Metro in Delhi had been realised due to excellent Centre-State coordination in which there were no drawbacks or fallbacks.

The hero of the colossal project, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Managing Director E. Sreedharan, said the new underground section -- 6.6 km in length with six fully air-conditioned stations -- had been completed eight months ahead of schedule. Describing it as the most difficult and formidable section to construct, he said the aesthetic elegance of Lutyens' Delhi had been conserved while care was taken that the least disturbance was caused on the surface.

Noting that ridership would increase with the opening of the new section, he said the frequency during rush hour on all Metro routes now would be brought down to five minutes from seven minutes so far.

See also Page 3

Ajit Jogi's son held for Jaggi murder



Amit Jogi

NEW DELHI, July 1. — Two years after the murder of Chhattisgarh's Nationalist Congress Party leader, Ram Avtar Jaggi, the CBI today arrested Amit Jogi, son of the former Congress chief minister, Mr Ajit Jogi, for allegedly being involved in the criminal conspiracy. He is said also to have paid for the crime to be committed.

The CBI director, Mr US Misra, yesterday warned of stern action against Amit if he continued to avoid being questioned.

Amit arrived here at the CBI headquarters this afternoon in response to a CBI notice asking him to appear for interrogation. He was accompanied by a lawyer. Amit was quizzed by Special Crime unit sleuths for five hours before being arrested. Sources said the CBI required Amit's custodial interrogation to unravel the conspiracy in the case. He has been charged with murder and criminal conspiracy.

He would be produced in a court here tomorrow for transit remand as he has to be produced before a court in Raipur.

The CBI has so far arrested 14 people in the case. Some of those arrested are former NSUI office-bearers and are allegedly close to Amit. Jaggi was shot dead on 4 June, 2003. — PTI

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02 JUL 2005

11/11

Bihar chief secy takes on gov, goes on leave

By Pranava K Chaudhary/TNN

Patna: Sick of political meddling and lack of transparency, Bihar's top bureaucrat on Friday walked out of his office—on leave to protest the shifting of 17 of the ill-managed state's senior police officers.

Chief secretary G S Kang's decision to go on long leave came within 24 hours of the transfer of the SP-rank officers. Kang is learnt to have questioned the transparency in the transfer and postings of these officers.

"I have proceeded on long leave, but I will not tell you the reason. Go and ask the governor. I have said everything in my letter to the governor," Kang told reporters.

Although Bihar is under President's rule since the electoral verdict gave no clear winner, strongman Lalu Prasad and his RJD cronies are known to be still in control of the official levers. The administration is technically under governor Buta Singh's control, but it's common wisdom that because of the bonhomie between the Congress and RJD, Lalu still wields enormous clout in Bihar.

The buzz in the political circles is that it was he who got the police officers transferred ahead of the assembly

polls scheduled two months later.

Kang, not a favourite with the Rabri Devi administration, on Friday returned his official vehicles, turned in his mobile phone and, according to sources, said he was doing so to protest "the governor's action in posting of some IPS officers having doubtful credentials" to key posts.

According to sources, Kang had openly expressed his displeasure over the transfers of two young, honest and hardworking officials—city SP Shalin and Siwan SP Ratan Sanjay—who had fallen foul of close Lalu aide and local toughie, Mohammed Shahabuddin.

The 1970-batch IAS officer reached his office at 9.30 am and left his secretariat chamber half an hour later.

Advisor to Buta Singh, Arun Pathak said he didn't know about Kang's leave. "I do not know. I do not have any official communication about it." When asked about the transfers of 17 IPS officers, Pathak said these were made as per rules. He said Sanjay had sought a transfer.

Kang has been a conscientious objector in the otherwise rickety administration. As food commissioner, he had resisted transfer of food inspectors, incurring RJD wrath.

Bihar chief secy goes on long leave

Ashok K Mishra

PATNA 29 JULY

IN a development that will trigger a controversy of sorts, the chief secretary Mr GS Kang on Friday proceeded on long leave after relinquishing the office. He shot off a letter to the governor Mr Buta Singh intimating him of his decision to proceed on long leave.

The news took the bureaucracy and the political circle by surprise even as rumours flew thick and fast as to what prompted Mr Kang to take such an extreme step. Clearly, Mr Kang has left in disgust and protest over the manner in which he was being sidetracked in the reshuffle exercise of IAS and IPS officials.

The development will surely be a major source of embarrassment for the state government which was already facing the flak from the opposition on the charge of "carrying out decisions

under the dictates of Lalu".

"Our charge that the President's Rule is an extension of the Lalu raj has been vindicated. Mr Kang's protest only states the obvious that Lalu was still calling the shots in the state government affairs" said the JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar.

According to sources, Mr Kang has pointed out in the letter to the governor that he was not consulted in the transfer of 17 IPS officials effected Thursday night. If sources are to be believed, Mr Kang has stated in the letter that he instead would not like to continue in such circumstances and it will be better for him, if he was allowed to proceed on long leave. Interestingly, Mr Kang did not specify the duration of his leave period. Sources said that Mr Kang was very livid when it was made known to him that the government had transferred 17 IPS officials.

Admittedly, a number of the

IPS officials who had earlier been withdrawn from field postings have been 'awarded' with key field postings in Thursday's reshuffle. Most notably, the Siwan SP Ratan Sanjay who had waged a 'war' against the RJD MP from Siwan, Mohammad Shahabuddin has also been given the marching orders.

Sources said the special advisor to the governor, Mr Arun Pathak, who is also in charge of key home and personnel departments, prevailed on these transfers without taking the opinion of the chief secretary.

The bureaucratic circle is of the opinion that the differences between Mr Kang and Mr Pathak were coming to the head and Mr Kang eventually decided to opt for a graceful exit. Mr Pathak, known to be a Lalu loyalist, had earlier served on the post of chief secretary during the RJD government.

Asked for his reaction, Mr

Pathak said he was not aware about the letter of Mr Kang. "If we get to know, we will make alternative arrangements. There is also no truth there are differences between me and Mr Kang. As far as the transfers are concerned, they were effected in keeping with the rules" Mr Pathak said adding even the transfer of the Siwan SP was effected on his request. "The Siwan SP had thrice written to the state government for his transfer" Mr Pathak quipped.

As for Mr Kang, he admitted he had written a letter to the governor for proceeding on long leave. At the same time, he however declined to spell the reasons he had cited for proceeding on leave. "You'd better ask the governor" Mr Kang shot back.

A 1970 batch IAS officer, Mr Kang was appointed the chief secretary barely two months back following the retirement of KAH Subramanian.

NDA to field all 21 LJP rebel MLAs in Bihar

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI, 4 JULY

IN an attempt to bolster its prospects in the forthcoming assembly elections in Bihar, the JD(U) on Monday announced it'll accommodate the interests of all 21 MLAs who broke away from the Lok Janshakti Party to support the NDA's aborted bid to form a popular government in the state.

While the JD(U) has expressed its eagerness to give party nominations to all the 21 LJP rebels, there are indications at least four of them will embrace the BJP. Regardless of the choice of their eventual political destination, they have been assured their sac-

rifices will be kept in mind while selecting the candidates for the next round of assembly polls, with both the JD(U) and the BJP making winnability the most important factor determining the selection of candidates.

The decision to field the entire splinter LJP group, as also independents who are keen on joining the NDA, will mean the JD(U) and BJP may have to swap a few seats. The two parties have already reached an informal understanding they would stick to the 138:105 seat ratio finalised on the eve of the assembly polls held earlier this year.

While the proposed 'secular' alliance (comprising the RJD, Congress, Left parties, NCP and



the LJP) is yet to take shape, with the LJP and the CPI playing hard to get, the NDA is already gearing up to launch its election campaign on July 11. This is when Nyaya Yatra, being led by its chief

ministerial candidate Nitish Kumar, will be kickstarted from Bagaha in the West Champaran district, on the Indo-Nepal border. "We'll field all of the LJP MLAs who had switched their allegiance to us," Mr Kumar said here on Monday.

These legislators to join the JD(U) formally in Patna on July 7 at a function which also will be attended by party president George Fernandes.

Responding to queries, he said the independent MLAs of the dissolved House too have been invited to join the NDA. "We have given them open offer to join either the JD(U) or BJP," he said, adding many of the legislators had already been participating in

a few JD(U)-sponsored functions. The JD(U) leader claimed the decision to field these leaders would not cause any heartburn within the party as the JD(U) had finished third or fourth at those places from where the independents had won. "If at all there is any problem, it'll be sorted out amicably," he maintained.

Talking about the proposed mass-mobilisation programme, Mr Kumar said the Nyaya Yatra will be flagged off on July 11 from north Bihar. It's purported aim is to cash in on the 'sympathy' generated in favour of the JD(U)-BJP combine following the abrupt dissolution of the House when it was set to stake claim to form the next government.

Gautam Goswami surrenders finally

2-8-04
S-11-1

Patna: High-profile former Patna district magistrate and accused in the multi-crore flood relief scam Gautam Goswami on Friday surrendered in a court here after evading arrest for a month and was remanded to seven days' judicial custody, a day after his bail plea was rejected by the Patna high court.

Further tightening its noose around Goswami, the Bihar government ordered a probe into alleged defalcation of funds worth Rs 1.52 crore meant for urban development schemes during his tenure as the Patna district magistrate.

Clad in a grey-cloured check shirt and black trousers, a visibly worried Goswami, charged with fraud, forgery and cheating, surrendered before the designated vigilance judge Jitendra Mohan Prasad. He was accompanied by his lawyer Tuhin Shankar.

Named by the prestigious Time Magazine as "Asian hero" for organising flood relief last year, the 1991 batch IAS officer, sat quietly on a bench inside the court room as the formalities for the surrender were completed.

Allowing Goswami's petition for surrender, the judge remanded him to judicial custody till July 6 following which he was taken to the high-security Beur jail in the suburbs of Patna.

The judge directed the jail authorities to provide facilities to



Gautam Goswami surrendered in Patna civil court on Thursday

Goswami in accordance with the Jail Manual and arrange for medicare.

The Bihar government had rejected the resignation of 38-year-old Goswami and attached his movable and immovable properties after declaring him 'wanted'. Goswami, who had joined the Sahara group after resigning from the IAS in January, was sacked by the company earlier this month after the government

threatened to take legal action against it for not co-operating with it on Goswami's arrest.

Meanwhile, chief secretary G S Kang said that the Vigilance Bureau would probe a case relating to defalcation of the funds highlighted in the inquiry report submitted by the then Patna District Magistrate Sudhir Kumar who had earlier unearthed the multi-crore flood relief scam involving Goswami.

The inquiry revealed that Rs 76 lakh meant for Swaran Jayanti Swarojgar Yojana and an equal amount meant for National Slum Development Project (Housing) was misappropriated between June and September 2004 when Goswami was the DM.

When contacted, Neelmani, additional director general of the Vigilance Bureau said they would petition the special vigilance court for taking Goswami on police remand. The special vigilance court had already rejected Goswami's bail application on June 6 following which he had approached the high court on June 13. The high court rejected his bail plea on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the Bihar government on Thursday decided to suspend Goswami. "The state government has decided to suspend Goswami and the concerned file is being processed for being forwarded to governor Buta Singh for approval," chief secretary G S Kang said here after a meeting with Buta Singh. "The governor is likely to approve the file this evening and we will then send it to the Centre for confirmation," he said.

The governor had told reporters here that the state administration had already prepared a proposal to suspend the services of Goswami following serious corruption charges against him. PTI

Rethink Reservation

Quotas no answer to
Muslim backwardness

17-18
2/16
9-6
AP ✓

ANDHRA Pradesh chief minister Y S Rajasekhara Reddy would like to take credit for redeeming his poll promise to Muslims. He would justify it on the ground that the TDP had made a similar promise in the run-up to Elections 2004. The legal and administrative objections — the government cannot classify Muslims as a backward class, the creamy layer must be excluded from the benefit — raised by the Opposition when the move was first mooted a year ago have been cleverly put to rest. But the Andhra government's decision to introduce 5% reservation for Muslims in government jobs and in government institutions cannot be hailed as a progressive move. It is bad both in principle and in policy. It goes against the principle of secularism enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution does not sanction religion-based reservations. It provided reservations for SCs & STs as a special case for a limited period. Instead of phasing off reservations which militate against merit and put us at a disadvantage in an era of global competition, it's sad that the government should be extending it to new groups. In doing so the AP government is paying its debt of gratitude to the minority community which has helped it return to power after many years.

The move is fraught with dangerous political and social implications. It could trigger competitive populism and a scramble for Muslim votes through this politically-expedient but extremely shortsighted policy. Power-hungry politicians could take the cue from YSR and announce similar quotas to garner Muslim votes. The social cost of the move would be far greater. It could lead to much heartburn and unnecessarily pit Muslims against other communities who could resent the benefit conferred on them. Muslims must realise that quotas are not the route to real emancipation. In any case government jobs are shrinking so reservation provides no major advantage. No one is against affirmative action for a socially and economically disadvantaged group. Muslims in AP, especially in the Telengana region, are poor and illiterate. But how would reservation help improve their socio-economic condition? If the AP government is serious about improving the lot of Muslims, it should provide them free education and training in entrepreneurial skills.

22 JUN 2005

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Babbar Khalsa chief held in Delhi

Huge consignment of RDX and ammunition recovered in early morning operation.
Also in the police net: two Delhi cinema blasts accused

Devesh K. Pandey

NEW DELHI: Jagtar Singh Hawara, chief of Babbar Khalsa International in India who made a dramatic escape from the high-security Burail Jail in Chandigarh last year, and two accused in the blasts that rocked two cinema halls in Delhi on May 22 were arrested at Narela here early on Wednesday. The arrests followed an encounter with the Inter-State Cell of the Delhi police. A huge consignment of explosive RDX and ammunition was recovered from them.

Addressing a press conference later in the day, Delhi's Police Commissioner K. K. Paul described it as one of the most successful operations carried out by the cell so far.

A police team led by Inspectors Subhash Tandon, Pankaj Sood and Sandeep Malhotra was on the trail of the cinema blasts accused when it was tipped off about the duo's movement with Jagtar Singh, charged with the murder of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh. The team, under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner of Police Ravi Shankar, learnt that the three persons would come to Delhi from Punjab in a brand new Hyundai Accent vehicle around midnight on Monday night. The police laid a trap on G. T. Karnal Road in the Narela Industrial Area and in the early hours of Wednesday they spotted the vehicle without a number plate.

When the police tried to intercept the vehicle, they were allegedly fired at. The trio then tried to flee on foot. They were overpowered after a brief chase. They were identified as Jagtar Singh, Jas al aka Raja, the mas-



CAUGHT AT LAST: Babbar Khalsa International's India chief Jagtar Singh Hawara (middle) in police custody on Wednesday along with Vikas Sehgal (left) and Jaspal Singh, alleged mastermind behind the May 22 cinema blasts in Delhi.

— PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

termind behind the cinema blasts in the Capital, and his accomplice, Vikas Sehgal. According to the Police Commissioner, the police team recovered 10.35 kg of RDX, four pistols of foreign make, 207 live cartridges, three remote-controlled explosive devices and a hand grenade from the vehicle. The remote-controlled explosive devices are described as similar to the ones used to eliminate Beant Singh.

"Bid to revive militancy"

"The accused said Babbar Khalsa International was trying to revive militancy in the country, especially in Punjab, by mo-

tivating young men with a criminal bent of mind," said Dr. Paul.

Jaspal is said to have met Jagtar Singh at the instance of BKI chief Wadhawa Singh Babbar, who is now operating from Pakistan. They along with Vikas had purportedly come to Delhi to collect money from a hawala dealer after which they were to flee to Nepal.

According to the Police Commissioner, the accused said BKI had plans to eliminate politicians such as Jagdish Tytler, Sajjan Kumar and H. K. L. Bhagat, religious leaders Ajit Singh Poolah, Ashutosh Maharaj and Pya-

ra Singh Paniharwala, and the former Director-General of Punjab Police, K. P. S. Gill.

Jagtar Singh was last arrested in 1996 and, along with other BKI militants Paramjit Singh and Jagtar Singh Tara, was lodged in the Burail Jail. In January last year the three along with another inmate, Devi Singh, dug a 14-foot-deep and 100-foot-long tunnel and escaped from the high-security prison. The Punjab Administration had declared a reward of Rs. 5 lakhs on Jagtar Singh's head.

See also Page 5

Eye on Bihar

World Bank report brings good news

The most charitable explanation for the World Bank report mentioning Bihar as a promising destination for investment is that it makes sense to concentrate on one of the country's most backward states. Fifteen years of Lalu Prasad's rule has created countless gangs of outlaws thriving on crimes through political protection but very few industries that would have a lasting impact on the state's economy. To that extent, this is virgin territory and any enterprise would find interesting possibilities. World Bank officials must have done their homework well. For one thing, Lalu Prasad is on the way out if the last assembly election is any indication. That is no assurance that it will see an end to corruption among politicians and bureaucrats. But the public mood seems to be in favour of change and the report, *Bihar: Towards a Development Strategy*, may well reflect the spontaneous support that investors will receive from all quarters. There is also the perceptive observation that the people of the state are essentially hard-working — only that the fruits of their labour are got in neighbouring states like West Bengal. If industries do come up in substantial numbers, there may not be the same compelling need to seek livelihoods elsewhere.

The question is, where do investors begin? The World Bank report has pointed to roads, health, education and power. The state authorities may be encouraged by the fact that even West Bengal is woefully inadequate in just these sectors but considers itself to be ahead of Bihar in terms of social development. The report indeed emphasises the positive aspects and the natural resources that can be converted into a healthy business environment. The next step is to seek the help of the state administration. Governor Buta Singh has disgraced himself as a pawn in the hands of his political masters. The fact that he released the World Bank report at a workshop organised by the state government, the Planning Commission and the World Bank aimed at generating a positive awareness among policy makers, the private sector, NGOs and academics suggests that he has an opportunity to redeem himself.

23 JUN 2005

Advani leads protest team

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

IN between all the turmoil in his party after his resignation over his remarks on Mohammad Ali Jinnah, BJP leader L.K. Advani, today found time for Bihar and led an NDA delegation to Rashtrapati Bhawan to protest the dissolution of the assembly.

The leaders, admitting that it was just part of the election campaign, marched to Rashtrapati Bhawan with MLAs from the dissolved assembly, shouting slogans against Bihar governor Buta Singh. The NDA leaders submitted a memorandum to the President.

BJP general secretary and incharge of Bihar Arun Jaitley claimed there were 126 MLAs in the delegation. While they had letters of support from four MLAs, two were absent, he added.

Calling the dissolution a "fraud on the Constitution", Jaitley said that the President needed to know whether they had the numbers—132 to 135 MLAs—to form a government, led by JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar.

"The government did not give the right picture when it sent the report to the President who was in Moscow when he recommended the dissolution of the House," Jaitley said.

The BJP leader also accused the governor of not making any effort to install a popular government. This was the first time that an as-

Centre defends Bihar dissolution in SC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JUNE 10

ON A day when the NDA paraded its Bihar flock before President A P J Abdul Kalam, the UPA Government argued in the Supreme Court that no case could be made out for entertaining the petition filed by some Bihar MLAs challenging the Assembly dissolution.

On hearing this, a bench of Justices P V Reddi and Arijit Pasayat asked the Centre to file an affidavit substantiating its stand within two weeks. But it declined to issue any notice on the petition.

The court also said the petitioners will have to file their reply within a week after the affidavit is filed and posted the matter for hearing when the court reopens after the summer vacation.

Meanwhile, the Centre's counsel today handed over to the court confidential reports sent by Bihar Governor Buta Singh

recommending the Assembly be dissolved.

But petitioner's counsel Mukul Rohtagi said a strong case was made out for entertaining the petition. He referred to the "haste" with which the Union Cabinet had recommended the dissolution and said this was done to prevent any alternative grouping under Nitish Kumar from securing a majority.

Petitioners Rameshwar Prasad Chaurasia (BJP), Kishore Kumar Munna (IND), Rampravesh Rai (JDU) and Anil Kumar (breakaway LJP) accused the Congress-led UPA Government at the Centre of subverting democratic norms at the behest of RJD chief Lalu Prasad to prevent JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar from staking claim to form the government.

The petitioners said fresh elections should have been the last resort, adding that "sound principles were thrown to winds and the Assembly was dissolved by political manoeuvres".

sembly had been dissolved within 80 days of the announcement of results, he said.

The delgation included rebel LJP MLAs and also LJP MLAs who had switched over to the JD(U) after the dissolution of the Assembly.

Jaitley said the President heard them out and said he would look into the issue.

Jaitley also said that the charges of horsetrading over

LJP MLAs were not true. He said it was a merger.

The memorandum submitted to the President said that "ideological differences" had cropped up in the LJP and around 22 MLAs had decided to break away from the party and merge with the Janata Dal (United).

"This decision arose on account of dissatisfaction in the party since the party had contested the election on an

anti-RJD plank," the memorandum said, and added that even the governor later admitted that he had found no evidence of horse-trading. The memorandum asks the President to see if this unconstitutional move can be undone.

The delegation comprised several JD(U) leaders including George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar, Sharad Yadav, Digvijay Singh and Sushil Kumar Modi.

11 JUN 2005

INDIAN EXPRESS

NDA takes Bihar MLAs to Kalam

Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI: Bharatiya Janata Party leader L.K. Advani on Friday joined National Democratic Alliance MLAs from Bihar in their march to the Rashtrapati Bhavan to lodge a protest with President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam against the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly.

The NDA claimed the support of 132 MLAs, including 55 from the Janata Dal (United), 37 from the BJP, 17 from the Lok Jan Shakti Party, four from the Samajwadi Party, one from the Bahujan Samaj Party, and 11 independents.

Five MLAs, four from the LJP and one from the BSP, are said to have sent in their letters of support from jail.

Two independent MLAs could not make it because of ill-health, taking the tally to 132 MLAs in a House of 243 members.

A 15-member representative delegation met the President. The Independent MLAs were led by Jagdish Sharma from Jehanabad.

Addressing the media after the 30-minute meeting, Mr. Jaitley said they informed the President that it was a "colossal fraud on the Constitution" and that the Government misinformed him while recommending the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly.

He said the delegation submitted a memorandum to the President stating that the Governor made no effort to ensure that a popular government was installed in the State.

When 22 LJP MLAs declared support and said they would merge with the JD(U), the Governor recommended the dissolution of the Assembly.

"There was no evidence of horse-trading and a merger is not horse-trading. Two-thirds members of LJP were merging and that was not unconstitutional," Mr. Jaitley said.

11 JUN 2005

THE HINDU

Bihar polls in Oct-Nov

SNS & PTI 9/8/05

NEW DELHI, May 31. — Rejecting the NDA's demand for holding Bihar Assembly polls before monsoon, the Election Commission today announced that elections in the state could only be held during October-November.

Taking note of the demands for holding the poll before monsoon, the EC rejected the demand after analysing them. The process of Assembly polls in Bihar will be completed before 22 November — that is within six months of the dissolution of the Assembly.

In its representation to the EC, the BJP had demanded that the it should hold elections before the completion of President's rule by 6 September. It also submitted that the EC could hold polls before or during monsoon as Bihar only faces severe post-monsoon

Goswami to seek anticipatory bail

PATNA, May 31. — Multi-crore flood relief scam accused, former Patna DM Gautam Goswami will move for anticipatory bail in a day or two, said his lawyer Mr Tuhin Shanker here today. "I am going through the voluminous FIR and will file their anticipatory bail pleas soon," he said. — PTI

floods with the monsoon itself being not "that devastating". The EC took up the points before rejecting them.

The EC also took into account the past ten year's records of the onset and the withdrawal of monsoon in Bihar before ruling out the polls in June, July, August and September.

Predictably, while the Congress today hailed the EC announcement, saying it would give enough time for all sides to prepare for the battle of the ballot, the BJP said the delay in the

elections would not affect the NDA's prospects but wondered whether extension of President's rule in the state would have majority approval of Parliament.

"We would have preferred completion of the election process by July," said BJP vice-president and Bihar unit chief Mr Sushil Kumar Modi.

Senior Congress leader Mr Harikesh Bahadur, in-charge of party affairs in Bihar, said the Congress would now try to take along all UPA allies to turn the polls into a straight contest between the UPA and the NDA. Asked whether Mrs Sonia Gandhi would take the initiative in bringing together the RJD chief and the LJP president, he said no thought has been given to it so far. On Mr Lal Prasad's statement that he would avoid "past mistakes", he quipped: "It is for everyone concerned to evaluate what he said."

01 JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Bihar House dissolution at SC door

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 30. — Terming the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly as “unconstitutional, a PIL filed in the Supreme Court has sought quashing of the 23 May notification by the home ministry on a presidential proclamation in this regard.

The petition, filed under Article 32 of the Constitution alleging violation of Fundamental Rights, was filed by one Mr Shiw Kumar Prasad Singh, who had unsuccessfully contested the 2000 Assembly polls.

Claiming to be a “politically enlightened citizen of India and a voter in the state of Bihar”, Mr Singh also sought a stay in the election process in the state till his petition was

decided by the Supreme Court.

The petition, filed through advocate Mr RD Upadhyay, alleged that the recommendation made by the Governor, Mr Buta Singh, to dissolve the Assembly was unconstitutional, lacked bona fide and meant to “frustrate the mandate of the electorate”.

He said the Governor ought to have waited for some more time for the formation of a legitimate government in the state as it was already under President’s Rule.

Lambasting the RJD for trying to perpetuate its “misrule” in the state, Mr Singh said the Governor acted on the basis of baseless reports about “horse-trading” of MLAs and added that if the Governor had “solid evi-

dence” he should have proceeded against those indulging in such activities. He said, “The recommendation made by the Governor for dissolution of the Assembly and the proclamation of 23 May dissolving the Bihar Assembly is a colourable exercise of constitutional power and as such deserves to be quashed.”

Polls in haste: Mulayam

Alleging that fresh polls were declared in Bihar “in haste”, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, today said his party would contest the elections with full vigour, a report from Bhopal adds.

More reports on page 4

31 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Dissolution not illegal: Law Minister

"There is no question of
invoking Article 356 again"

J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI: Union Law Minister H.R. Bhardwaj on Wednesday asserted that there was no illegality in the dissolution of the Bihar Legislature that had been kept under suspended animation from March 7.

Talking to reporters, Mr. Bhardwaj rejected the allegation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) leaders that the dissolution was illegal. He pointed out that the new House was duly notified and constituted after the declaration of Assembly election results in February. But a popular government could not be formed as no party or alliance staked claim to form the government.

The Minister said President's rule imposed in Bihar on March 7 and ratified by Parliament would be valid for six months. He said there was no question of invoking Article 356 of the Constitution again as alleged by the NDA leaders since the State was already under President's rule and no party was in power. Asked whether the dissolution of the House required to be ratified by Parliament once again, he said the Supreme Court judgment in the "Bommai case" would not apply here as no floor test was involved.

Asked about the urgency with which the Cabinet recommended the dissolution of the Legislature, Mr. Bhardwaj said there were two reports from the Bihar Governor on the malpractices and horse-trading that were being resorted to buy off MLAs. The Government could not have been a silent spectator to such kind of assault on the democracy, he said justifying the Cabinet's recommendation to the President.

"It is for EC to decide now"

He said it was now up to the Election Commission to take im-

"The Supreme Court judgment in the 'Bommai case' would not apply as no floor test was involved."

mediate steps for holding Assembly polls in Bihar. He said the Supreme Court in the "Gujarat Presidential reference" had made it clear that the Election Commission must take early steps for conducting the polls but the outer limit should not exceed six months from the date of dissolution.

He said that if elections were held soon and a new government was put in place before September 6, there was no need for extending President's rule for another six months. But, if for some reason, elections could not be held before September 6, then the government would bring an amendment to the President's proclamation seeking extension by modifying the words "...in suspended animation" as "dissolution of the House" and such extension should be ratified by Parliament.

Godhra cases

Asked about the Government's stand on the demands made by the CPI (M) and Railway Minister Lalu Prasad for a CBI probe into certain Godhra riots cases, he said a Group of Ministers (comprising Home, Personnel and Law Ministers) had been set up to look into the issue. He agreed that some aspects, in particular how much communal colour was added to the riots, needed a thorough probe. The GoM would also look into the allegations made by Gujarat Additional Director-General of Police R.B. Sreekumar on the role of the Narendra Modi Government in the escalation of the riots and targeting of Muslims in the aftermath of the Godhra train carnage.

NDA'S BIHAR BANDH EVOKES MIXED RESPONSE ■ 1,100 DETAINED ACROSS STATE

Focus shifts to polls and alliances

SNS & PTI

PATNA/NEW DELHI, May 24. — A day after the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly, the focus today quickly shifted to the next state polls with political parties beginning to make their first moves for alliances, even as the Election Commission decided to send a two-member team to Patna on Friday for an assessment of the state's poll-preparedness. The EC is likely to take a decision on the timing of the elections next week. The EC team will make an on-the-spot study of the logistics and the time needed by the state administration to be ready for the polls.

The dawn-to-dusk Bihar bandh, called by the NDA to protest against the dissolution of the Assembly and to demand the removal of Governor Buta Singh evoked a mixed response today and was marred by stray incidents of violence and disruption in rail as well as road traffic. Over 1,100 bandh supporters, including state BJP president Mr Gopal Narayan Singh, his JD-U counterpart Mr Vijendra Prasad Yadav, former Union ministers Dr CP Thakur and Mr Ravishankar Prasad and state Samajwadi Party chief Mr Deonath Yadav were detained by police for trying to enforce the bandh.

Two BJP MLAs and an MLC suffered minor bruises in scuffles with the police in Patna where the windscreens of a few private vehicles were smashed by bandh supporters.

East Central Railway sources said train services had been disrupted for a few hours as NDA workers squatted on tracks at various places, including Barh, Chakia, Bhagalpur and Darbhanga. Several trains, as a result, were reported to be running behind schedule.

Besides the Samajwadi Party, which actively participated in the bandh, rebel Lok Janshakti Party leaders and Independent members of the dissolved Assembly also extended their support to the bandh.

Indicative of the reconfiguration of



LATHI POWER! BJP workers stop a motorcyclist on a Patna road during the bandh on Tuesday. — PTI

alignments ahead of the polls, expected to be held some time in September or October, the CPI-M has told the Congress that a division of votes among secular parties should be avoided and asked the Lok Janshakti Party chief Mr Ram Vilas Paswan to spell out his stand with regard to the alliances.

Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi today called on the veteran CPI-M leader, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet. Both underlined the need for the "secular" parties close ranks to prevent "communal forces" from taking advan-

tage of any division in the vote during the next Assembly polls in Bihar. Mr Surjeet recalled how a division in the secular vote had helped the NDA in the February Assembly polls in Bihar. The Congress has also asked the LJP to make its stand clear on the subject. The CPI-M Politburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechuri, also said that a split in the secular vote should be avoided at all costs.

Congress leaders, however, are divided over a grand secular alliance led by the RJD, despite Mr Lalu Prasad's assurance that he would like to have

the Congress and the Left on his side.

A section of the Congress feels the party should go it alone and have a post-poll alliance. But officially, the refrain is that the Congress would like a consolidation of the secular forces. While a large section in the Congress in Bihar has been wary of the RJD for long, some central leaders are also not happy with Mr Lalu Prasad for the tantrums he threw over seat allotment.

More reports on page 5
Editorial: House for Mr Prasad!
page 6

Worst kind of horse-trading stopped: PM

RANTHAMBHORE, May 24. — Rejecting the Opposition's tirade against the dissolution of the Assembly in Bihar, the Prime Minister today said that the Centre had "credible evidence" for dissolving the House. Speaking to reporters, Dr Manmohan Singh said: "Even three months after the Assembly elections, no government could be formed in Bihar. And such an atmosphere prevailed there that the worst type of horse-trading was taking place. So it was the constitutional duty of the government to stop such an unconstitutional thing."

Dr Singh said the Governor of Bihar, Mr Buta Singh, had submitted more than one report to the Union government regarding the developments. "We had credible evidence (regarding horse-trading)," he said. The government had no other option but to dissolve the Assembly, Dr Singh said and added that the Governor had "recommended to the Centre that there was no alternative to dissolving the Assembly".

The Prime Minister also pointed out that even newspapers had reported horse-trading on a large scale in Bihar for the past many days.

Taking a serious view of the recent bomb blasts in Delhi, Dr Singh said the government would make no compromise with terrorism and face the challenge effectively. "I have made it very clear that our country will not compromise with terrorists and anti-social elements." Dr Singh said state governments should strongly deal with law and order situations and protect citizens from anti-social elements. "There will be no compromise with all these anti-social elements," he said. — SNS & PTI

05 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Split stares Paswan in the face

Statesman News Service

RANCHI, May 23. — With the Centre announcing fresh elections in Bihar, the Lok Janashakti Party today headed for a vertical split with 20 out of the 29 legislators in the just-dissolved Assembly deciding to part ways with their party chief Mr Ram Vilas Paswan.

While 16 of the legislators were present at a press conference here today, four legislators who are currently behind bars, have also expressed their support to the dissidents. The legislators present displayed letters of support from the four jailed MLAs to the press. Sudden dissolution of Assembly has given rise to a political churning for formation of a new combi-

nation with the dissident MLAs of the LJP and the JD-U. The LJP dissidents said when the RJD was about to be wiped out in Bihar making way for a Nitish Kumar-led government, Centre chose to dissolve the Assembly. The MLAs said that they would decide the future course of action after they return to Patna. Even, a decision on formation of a new party would be taken later, they said. They, however, affirmed that they would support the NDA's Bihar bandh call.

Coming down heavily on Mr Paswan, LJP legislator Mr Munna Shukla accused him of cheating the eight crore population of Bihar for sacrificing people's mandate in the interest of his ministerial berth. "Instead of forming an anti-RJD government, he is now tilting towards Mr (Lalu) Prasad",

he said. Mr Shukla dubbed the Centre's announcement for fresh elections as "murder of democracy" and held Mr Paswan solely responsible for this.

Mr Shukla alleged that four legislators — Mrs Poonam Yadav, Mr Achyutanand Singh, Mrs Nagina Devi and Mr Anil Choudhary were forcibly taken on a flight from Patna to New Delhi by RJD member of Parliament Mr Suraj Bhan. Another MLA Mr Janak Singh said that after the elections were over, the LJP legislators were trying their best to convince Mr Paswan to form an anti-Lalu government with the help of Mr Nitish Kumar, "but he chose to ignore our pleas".

The dissidents' group rubbished allegations of horse trading brought by Bihar Governor Mr

Buta Singh. They said that they had come to Jamshedpur on their own and clarified that they footed their own expenses and were not sponsored by the Jharkhand government who only provided them with security since they were apprehensive about threats to their lives.

The 16 MLAs in Ranchi are Mr Munna Shukla, Mr Raju Singh, Mr Ajit Kumar, Mr Anil Kumar, Mr Anil Singh, Ms Aruna Devi, Mr Janak Singh, Mr Rameshwar Paswan, Mr Ajay Bulganin, Mr Pappu Yadav, Mr Vishnu Mohan, Mr Ramashraya Prasad Singh, Mr Abhay Singh, Ms Suchitra Sinha, Ms Sunita Singh and Mr Avadesh Kushwaha. Those legislators who are in jail and have expressed their support are Mr Rama Singh, Mr Dhumal Singh, Mr Shankar Singh and Mr Sheel Kumar Roy.

NDA's Bihar bandh today

Statesman News Service

PATNA, May 23. — That some major political developments are going to take place here soon had become evident yesterday itself when in a sudden move, all entry and exit routes leading to Raj Bhavan were sealed and security forces put on maximum alert. The state administration had also requisitioned 50 companies of Central paramilitary forces to tackle any eventuality.

Sources said the forces would be deployed along the India-Nepal border to prevent movement of "anti-national forces". The administration has also sounded a high alert across Bihar to deal with any situation arising out of the dissolution of the Assembly that has been

opposed tooth and nail by the NDA.

The streets of Patna today reverberated with the slogans of "Buta Singh down, down" and "sack the Bihar Governor" when a procession of NDA leaders marched through the streets carrying an effigy of Mr Buta Singh. Police resorted to a lathi-charge on them near the Dak Bungalow crossing.

The NDA has also called for a Bihar bandh tomorrow to lodge protest over the dissolution of the House just when they were about to stake claim to form a government in the state. "The Centre has taken recourse to this undemocratic step just to please the RJD chief, Mr Lalu Prasad," said former Union minister Mr Ravishankar Prasad. The

Centre must have taken into account the SR Bommai case judgment, that pleaded for the dissolution of the House only after all the alternatives had run short, before making such a recommendation," he said.

The state unit of the CPI-ML also has sought the sacking of the Governor while describing his action of dissolving the Assembly as "illegal".

This is perhaps for the first time in its political history that Bihar will be going to the polls even without seeing a government. Barely three months ago, Bihar's voters participated in the elections and cast their votes. But the fractured mandate created a total impasse in the state leading to the imposition of President's rule.

Luck gives Nitish the slip

Manoj Chaurasia in Patna

May 23. — And now, no one knows it better than the National Democratic Alliance's chief ministerial candidate in Bihar, Mr Nitish Kumar, that the cup and the lip are separated often by unsuspected slips. Just when he was preparing to stake his claim to forming the government in the state today, came the news of the dismissal of the Assembly!

He was deemed, not exactly in the remote past, close to making it, with the support of some Lok Janashakti Party Members of the Legislative Assembly — and not everyone was sure Mr Kumar was building castles in the air. But then, it was a second time that he found himself thwarted. Initially quite low-profile, the former Union rail minister suddenly picked up speed, making three attempts to get together 122 MLAs in the House of 243.

His efforts began with the Rajgir conclave in March when he drafted the common minimum programme before writing to seven political parties, excluding the BJP, his old alliance partner, seeking their support. Political experts felt the Janata Dal-United was trying to appease the LJP chief, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, who had

24/5 advised him a no-truck policy vis-a-vis the "communal" Bharatiya Janata Party. But Mr Paswan went back on his word. A few days later, Mr Kumar got going again, meeting the former State Samajwadi Party chief, Mr Dadan Singh Pehalwan, but the LJP would have nothing to do with the BJP.

Mr Kumar said he was giving up. His third and last attempt began soon after desperation could be seen to have gripped the newly-elected LJP MLAs. What rattled them was the sudden transfer of the upright district magistrates of Siwan and Gopalganj, Mr CK Anil and Mr KK Pathak, respectively, who had tried to discipline the two muscle-flexing Rashtriya Janata Dal Members of Parliament, Mohammed Shahabuddin and Mr Sadhu Yadav, followed by the appointment of a Lalu-loyalist as the governor's advisor. If party sources are to be believed, the NDA came close to pulling it off, deciding to fetch up at Raj Bhavan today. But the assembly dissolution surprised them. In March, 2004, Mr Kumar's government lasted just nine days as he failed to prove his majority in the House, leading to the return to power of Mrs Rabri Devi.

24 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Left backs dissolution of House

NEW DELHI, May 23. — The Left parties have supported the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly, terming fresh elections as the only way to get out of the chaos. However, the CPI-ML (Liberation) termed the move as a "cruel joke". The CPI-M said in a statement issued here that the "only way out is to go to the people for a fresh mandate to form a government". The CPI-M Politburo asserted that the election result had not provided a mandate to the JD-U-BJP alliance. Echoing a similar

tone, the CPI central office issued a statement that "seeking a fresh mandate is the only feasible option" in the emerging situation in Bihar. It further said that during President's rule, "all sorts of unethical and undemocratic practices, such as horse-trading and engineering defections, have caused serious concern. The Union government is left with no other option, but to accept the Governor's recommendation," the CPI statement said. — SNS

IAF top guns graduate to Hawks

RAF VALLEY (Wales, UK), May 23. — Ushering in a new era for the Indian Air Force, six of its officers today successfully completed their fast jet flying course and graduated to fly the UK-made Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer (AJT) aircraft.

Prince Charles, in his capacity as Honorary Air Commodore, presented the certificates to the officers. IAF Chief Air Marshal Bhojwani, was also present. The flying officers who graduated are Jai Singh Brar, Manoj Garg, Rohit Kataria, Saurabh Pachauri, Vinod Prabhakaran and Anand Kumar Singh. They were trained as part of a £790 million deal that India had with British Aerospace Systems. — PTI

CHAOS CHRONOLOGY

- **February 27:** Polls throw up a hung Assembly, RJD emerges largest party.
- **February 28:** Mr Paswan says he will maintain equidistance from both the RJD and the BJP.
- **March 6:** Mrs Rabri Devi stakes claim to form government.
- **March 6:** Governor recommends President's rule in Bihar.
- **March 7:** Bihar brought under Central rule for the 8th time.
- **March 31:** JD-U leader Mr Nitish Kumar asks Mr Paswan to join hands to form a non-RJD government without the BJP.
- **April 2:** Mr Paswan says he is not averse to Mr Kumar becoming CM provided he snaps ties with the BJP.
- **April 9:** Mr Kumar announces withdrawal of efforts for government formation due to Mr Paswan's stubborn stand on JD-U's ties with BJP.
- **April 15:** Mr Lalu Prasad accuses BJP of trying to bribe independents and MLAs of smaller parties.
- **April 25:** Governor Mr Buta Singh says horse-trading attempts on.
- **May 12:** Mr Paswan meets Mrs Sonia Gandhi, proposes Muslim CM from Congress with RJD support from outside. Both RJD and Congress reject proposal.
- **May 15:** Mr Buta Singh iterates horse-trading charge.
- **May 21:** Rebel LJP MLAs meet in Jamshedpur.
- **May 21:** LJP secretary general Mr Nagmani quits, Mr Paswan says MLAs held in illegal confinement by NDA.
- **May 22:** Mr Paswan parades 10 MLAs in New Delhi.
- **May 22:** Union Cabinet recommends dissolution of Assembly.
- **May 23:** President accepts Union Cabinet's recommendation. Bihar Assembly dissolved.

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THE STATESMAN

Bihar Assembly dissolved

SF-1 24/5

Judicial Bihar

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 23. — In a move with wide-ranging ramifications, the Bihar Assembly was dissolved today with the President, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, away in Moscow, accepting a recommendation to this effect by the Union Cabinet which had held its emergency meeting here late last night.

Bihar is now all set for fresh Assembly elections for the second time in a year. The polls have to be conducted by the Election Commission within the next six months. In the February elections held to the 243-member Bihar Assembly, no party or alliance could garner a majority.

The dissolution of the Assembly, which had been in suspended animation since the imposition of President's rule on the state in March, came close on the heels of fast-paced political developments triggered by many MLAs belonging to Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) revolting against him and backing the formation of an NDA government led by the JD-U leader, Mr Nitish Kumar.

Announcing the presidential approval of the Union Cabinet's recommendation, the home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, said the Bihar Assembly had been dissolved to prevent "horse-trading" of MLAs in the state. In his report to the Centre, the Governor, Mr Buta Singh, made the recommendation for dissolution of the Assembly, he said.

"Since the situation was worsening in the state, the Union Cabinet accepted the recommendations of the Bihar Governor and recommended dissolution of the Assembly to the President," Mr Patil said.

Rubbishing reports that the decision had been taken to prevent the formation of an NDA government, Mr Patil said in the given circumstances — where attempts are allegedly being made to kidnap the MLAs of a particular party and take them to another town in order to coerce them to join the NDA — the Centre was left with no choice but to recommend dissolution of the Assembly and call for fresh elections.

According to Mr Patil, it became impossible to form a government in the state though enough time had



BELOW THE BELT?

Mr Lalu Prasad at his residence in New Delhi on Monday after the Bihar Assembly was dissolved. — PTI

been given to the parties since the Assembly was in suspended animation. Following the acceptance of the recommendation by the President, the Election Commission was advised to make arrangements for early polls.

Mr Patil said Mr Buta Singh had written two letters to the Centre pointing out that horse-trading was taking place. "In the first letter, he had brought the

issue of horse-trading to the notice of the Centre a few days back but had not suggested dissolution of the Assembly. In the second letter (yesterday), the Governor recommended dissolution of the Assembly as unconstitutional, illegal and unacceptable developments were taking place in the state." The report was similar to the information available with the Centre which was

I welcome the dissolution... In the Assembly polls there will be a realignment of partners, there will be changes in the alliances. I will tread very cautiously. I have committed mistakes and will not repeat them. But I will never sever my ties with the Congress under any circumstances.

— Lalu Prasad

He (Lalu) wanted dissolution of the Assembly (because) he was feeling very uneasy out of power... he had rejected all my proposals to form a government.

— Ram Vilas Paswan

My biggest fear was horse-trading, the buying of MLAs and making them sign on papers under duress... I saved democracy.

— Buta Singh

NDA allies were engaged in large-scale horse-trading, kidnapping, bribing and other heinous crimes to muster a majority in Bihar. In these circumstances the Centre's intervention was a must.

— Congress

corroborated by some political leaders from the state, Mr Patil said.

Congress justifies steps

Justifying the government's action, AICC general secretary Mrs Ambika Soni said the move was "necessary" to check the "political atmosphere of Bihar from being vitiated". Asked about the "haste" in which Mr Singh had given his report as well as the late-night timing of the Cabinet meeting, Mrs Soni said: "There is nothing unusual about this. The report must have indicated the urgency of the situation, requiring immediate Central intervention. The Governor must be having definite information about the horse-trading." She dismissed NDA's claim that it had been "on the verge of staking claims." "Being almost there isn't the same thing as having the requisite majority needed for government formation."

More reports on page 5

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THE STATESMAN

ফের ভোট বিহারে, বানাচাল এনডিএ ছক

দীপ্তেন্দ্র রায়চৌধুরী • নয়াদিল্লি

২৩ মে: বিহারে আবার ভোট। এই বছরে দ্বিতীয় বার। প্রতিবাদে বিহারে কাল বনধ ডাকলেন এনডিএ শিবিরের নেতা নীতীশ কুমার, অন্য দিকে আপাতত নিশ্চিন্ত লালুপ্রসাদ। আর দুই তরফের মাঝখানে রামবিলাস পাসোসায়ান এখন দুশাত দিশাহারা।

‘ষোড়শ কেন্দ্রবোচা টেকাতে’ রাজ্যপাল বুটা সিংহের রিপোর্টের ভিত্তিতে কাল মধ্যরাতে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভার বিহার বিধানসভা ভাঙার সিদ্ধান্ত রাষ্ট্রপতির অনুমোদনও পেয়ে গিয়েছে। ফলে, ক্ষমতার দিকে গুটি গুটি পায় এগিয়ে চলা নীতীশ কুমারের এখন তর্জন-গর্জনই সার। আলোচনা করে নির্বাচন কমিশন ঠিক করবে, কবে ফের ভোট হবে।

সব মিলিয়ে কিন্তু গোয়া এবং বাড়খণ্ডের পরে বিহারের রাজ্যপালও এসে গেলেন বিতর্কের কেন্দ্রে। তাঁর বিধানসভা ভাঙার সিদ্ধান্ত যথার্থ ও সংবিধানসম্মত কিনা, তা নিয়ে প্রশ্ন উঠেছে। কিন্তু বুটা ঠিক করেছেন কিনা, তা কিচর করবে ভবিষ্যত। আপাতত বিহারে ভোট হবে।

প্রাক্তন কংগ্রেসি বুটা সিংহ অবশ্য নিজের সিদ্ধান্তে অনড় থেকে বলেছেন, ‘আমার সব থেকে বেশি ভয় ছিল, এর পরে বিধায়ক কেন্দ্রবোচার চেষ্টা হবে এবং জোর করে বিধায়কদের সমর্থন করতে বাধ্য করা হবে। তাই ষোড়শ কেন্দ্রবোচা বন্ধ করতে এবং গণতন্ত্র রক্ষায় আমি সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছি।’ সিদ্ধান্তের সমর্থনে তাঁর পাঠানো দলিল-সম্ভাষণেও তিনি দেখাতে রাজি বলেও মন্তব্য করেছেন সাহসী রাজ্যপাল। কয়েক

দিন আগেও ‘ষোড়শ কেন্দ্রবোচা’র প্রসঙ্গ উল্লেখ করে কেন্দ্রকে চিঠি দিয়েছিলেন বুটা। তবে তখন বিধানসভা ভাঙার কথা বলেননি। রাজ্যপালের কালকের সুপারিশের পরে নীতীশ তাঁকে সরানোর দাবি তুলেছেন।

কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল কিন্তু জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, রাজ্যপালের রিপোর্টের পরে তাঁরা বিধানসভার ভোট করাই যুক্তিযুক্ত মনে করেছেন। বিরোধীরা চাইছেন ভোট দ্রুত হোক। কেন্দ্রের শাসক জোট অবশ্য একটু ঘীরে চলারই পক্ষপাতী। তবে বিতর্ক এড়িয়ে শিবরাজ পাটিল বিধানে সিদ্ধান্ত নেবে নির্বাচন কমিশন। কমিশন সুএর ইঙ্গিত, বর্খার পরেই ভোট হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা সবচেয়ে বেশি।

ভোটের বাদি রাজ্য লালুপ্রসাদ বেজায় খুশি। কারণ, রামবিলাস পাসোসায়ানকে নতিস্বীকারে বাধ্য করতে না-পাবার পর থেকে তিনি এটাই চাইছিলেন। বামেরা বলছেন, উপায় তো আর কিছু ছিল না। তবে এ বার সীতারাম ইয়েচুরির দাবি, রামবিলাস ঠিক করুন, কোন শিবিরে থাকবেন। লালুর চাপে রামবিলাসকে মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে বিদায় দিতে রাজি না-থাকলেও কংগ্রেসও কিঞ্চিৎ অস্বস্তিতে। কারণ, বিহারে তাঁদের



আলাপ লড়া এবং রামবিলাসের সঙ্গে বোঝাপড়া তো সে দিনের ঘটনা। তবে অস্বীকা সোনি বলেছেন, এ বারে নতুন করে কৌশল ছককেনে। অবশ্য এ বার যে লালুপ্রসাদ-বাম-কংগ্রেস একসঙ্গে লড়বে, তার সম্ভাবনা শতকরা নিরানব্বই ভাগ।

আর রামবিলাস? নিজেরই সরকারের সিদ্ধান্তে তিনি এতটাই দুঃখী যে অভিযোগ করেছেন, লালুই রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন জারি করিয়েছেন। বিজেপি-লালু মিলে তাঁর দল ভাঙার চক্রান্ত করেছিল বলেও তিনি মন্তব্য করেছেন। তাঁর দাবিতে মুসলিম মুখ্যমন্ত্রী করতে রাজি হননি বলেও তিনি রাগ বেরিয়েছেন লালুর উপরে। কারণ, আবার ভোটের জন্য তিনি দায়ী, এই কলঙ্ক মাথায় নিয়ে মানুষের কাছে যাওয়া খুব সমস্যার।

আর নীতীশ কুমারের জেডি (ইউ) এবং বিজেপি এই সিদ্ধান্তে চটে লাগল। আজ বিজেপি কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের এক বছরের ‘সাক্ষরতার’ তালিকাকে ধূলিসাৎ করার জন্য ডাকা সাংবাদিক সৈন্যকে প্রসঙ্গ পাঠে বিহারের কথা তোলে। সেখানে অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী বলেন, ‘বিহারে যখন সরকার গঠনের সম্ভাবনা সৃষ্টি হয়েছিল, কেন্দ্র তখনই গণতন্ত্রের উপরে কুঠারঘাত করল।’ বিজেপি সভাপতি লালুকৃষ্ণ আডবানী এই

ঘটনার সঙ্গে জরুরি অবস্থার সময়ের তুলনা করেছেন। তিন-চার দিনের মধ্যে ১৩০ জন বিধায়ককে রাজ ভবন, রাষ্ট্রপতি ভবন ও সাংবাদিকদের সামনে হাজির করবে বলে জানিয়েছে এনডিএ। বিধানসভা ভাঙার সিদ্ধান্তের বিরুদ্ধে আদালতে যাওয়ার কথাও ভাবাচ্ছে বিজেপি। আর নীতীশ কুমারের বক্তব্য, ষোড়শ কেন্দ্রবোচার অভিযোগ সর্বৈব মিথ্যা।

কেন এত চটেছে বিরোধী পক্ষ? তারা গত দু’দিনে রামবিলাসের দল ভাঙার কাজ প্রায় সম্পূর্ণ করে ফেলেছিল। প্রায়, কারণ এখন দল ভাঙতে গেলে চাই দুই-তৃতীয়াংশ সদস্য। রামবিলাসের ২৯ জনের মধ্যে ২০ জন এসেছিলেন বলে তাদের দাবি। রামবিলাস নিজে অবশ্য কাল ১০ জনকে হাজির করেন তাঁর দিল্লির বাড়িতে। কিন্তু বিজেপি-নীতীশের দাবি, তাঁর মধ্যে এক জনের স্বাক্ষরিত চিঠি তাঁদের হাতে ছিল।

বিরোধীদের এই তৎপরতার মধ্যেই কাল মধ্যরাতে কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়, রাজ্য বিধানসভা ভেঙে দিয়ে আবার ভোট করা হবে। বিদেশ সফররত রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে ফ্যাক্স করে সিদ্ধান্ত পাঠানো হয়। কলাম এক কথায় সিদ্ধান্ত মেনে নিয়েছেন দেখে সকলকেলাই নিশ্চিন্ত স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী জানিয়ে দেন, নির্বাচন কমিশন ঠিক করবে ভোটের দিনক্ষণ।

আপাতত নিশ্চিন্ত লাগল। তিনি, সিপিএম-সিপিআই-আরএসপি এবং কংগ্রেস এই সিদ্ধান্তকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছে। এর পরে এই তিন পক্ষ একত্রে ভোটে যাবে, সেই সম্ভাবনা উজ্জ্বল। রামবিলাসকে অনেক ভাবতে হবে, তিনি কী করবেন। আর বিরোধী পক্ষ, অর্থাৎ বিজেপি-নীতীশ কাল কবের পরে নামবে প্রতিবাদ আন্দোলনে।

Laloo gets bail

The Bihar governor has set a dangerous precedent which cannot do democracy any good

RASHTRIYA JANATA DAL supremo, Laloo Prasad Yadav, has been bailed out yet again by the Centre. The mandate of the Bihar elections which was held earlier this year had clearly gone against him and his family who had ruled Bihar for 15 long years. If Laloo could not form the government in Bihar, he also showed himself incapable of breaking the irreconcilable deadlock that had emerged in the aftermath of the election. But when it looked as if an alternative formation might be able to break away some MLAs from the Lok Janashakti Party to try and stake a credible claim, the assembly was immediately dissolved.

The prospects of an elected government being formed were still uncertain and the deadlock in Bihar might have continued. Even if there was the threat of horse-trading such suspicions needed to be established. It would have honoured the mandate thrown up by the last election better, if the Centre had first ensured that all possibilities of forming a government within the existing assembly had been exhausted. It was premature to come to the conclusion that no one was going to be in a position to form a government. Waiting a few weeks more, until the sustainability of all possible combinations had been explored and ex-

hausted, would have given the decision to dissolve the assembly at least an aura of credibility. The unholy haste with which the assembly has been dissolved therefore suggests only one conclusion: the Centre has gone out of its way and used every constitutional contrivance to protect and further Laloo Prasad Yadav's brand of politics and governance. In the process it has grievously let down a state that was waiting to be delivered from a regime that had all but destroyed its present and blighted its future prospects.

What the state's voters will make of all the grandstanding, bargaining, constitutional trade-offs that have been on display during the last few weeks is still an open question. What they make of these circus acts being staged ostensibly to protect secularism is still a matter of doubt. But hopefully they will display the maturity of seeing through the RJD's cynical tactics and punish the party by conclusively voting it out — and even more decisively this time around. By doing so, they would only be punishing those whom they see as responsible for the governance mess that Bihar exemplifies today. As for the Bihar governor, it needs to be emphasised unequivocally that he has set a dangerous precedent which cannot do Indian democracy any good.

Paswan faces revolt

Party secretary-general quits, MLAs "spirited away"

9-80 Bihar
HP 1 22/5

K. Balchand

PATNA: The Lok Jan Shakti Party of Union Steel Minister Ram Vilas Paswan is in a crisis with a section of his newly elected MLAs in Bihar raising the banner of revolt. This has given rise to fresh political churning for government formation, elusive for almost three months thanks to the fractured verdict.

In New Delhi, Governor Buta Singh met Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil and discussed the latest developments.

The problem for the LJP with 29 MLAs cropped up on Saturday with its secretary-general Nagmani resigning his post and party membership in protest against Mr. Paswan's "inflexible attitude" to government formation. He said the legislators were "disillusioned" with Mr. Paswan's failure to install a non-Rashtriya Janata Dal Government.

Mr. Nagmani announced his

resignation amid speculation that over a dozen LJP MLAs had been spirited away to Jamshedpur and some others to Hazaribagh in Jharkhand, where the BJP is in the saddle. Reports suggest the possibility of their being shifted to Rajasthan.

It is also claimed that at least three of the MLAs, now behind bars, are favouring a government under Janata Dal (United) leader Nitish Kumar.

Saturday's developments came in less than a fortnight of Mr. Paswan's failed formula suggesting a Congress Chief Minister from the minority community. He had sought time to implement the formula to overcome dissensions in the LJP, with the legislators divided in their support to the JD(U) and the RJD.

Mr. Nagmani and 18 other legislators favour a government under Mr. Nitish Kumar, who recently gave up his move charging that Mr. Paswan had

"ditched him." The LJP's support is crucial for government formation with neither the National Democratic Alliance nor the RJD-led combine being able to cobble up the required number of 122 MLAs for forming a stable government, as desired by the Governor.

The LJP called off its legislature party meeting here on Saturday with most MLAs staying away. The party chief has convened a meeting in Delhi. One of his staunch supporters, Suraj Bhan Singh, MP, along with some legislators close to him, left for Delhi. Senior LJP leaders claimed that at least seven of their legislators had been kept "hostage" by the JD(U) and that there was a "conspiracy to split the party." They urged President Abdul Kalam to take action against those indulging in horse-trading.

The BJP leaders have accused the Governor of trying to break the NDA and assisting the Unit-

ed Progressive Alliance in government formation.

The JD(U), with 55 MLAs, is counting on the support of the BJP, which has 37 members. It also received the support of all 17 Independents when Mr. Nitish Kumar made the move to form a government six weeks ago. His inability to garner support from the LJP led to Mr. Nitish Kumar giving up his effort.

The RJD too gave up its effort to form a government under Rabri Devi. The RJD has 75 MLAs and received the support of the Congress (10), the NCP (3), the BSP (3) and the CPI-M (1).

The CPI-ML (7) sought to remain neutral, while the CPI (3) also took a detached view. The Samajwadi Party (4) sought to support Mr. Nitish Kumar in case a non-BJP Government was put in office.

Governor meets Patil: Page 8

22 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Buta transfers two 'anti-Lalu' DMs

Statesman News Service

PATNA, May 19. — The king is down but not out. That Mr Lalu Prasad is who controls Bihar, in spite of President's rule and the Governor, became clear today when both the district magistrates of Siwan and Gopalganj, Mr CK Anil and Mr KK Pathak, respectively, were given transfer orders. And as if that did not suffice, the Centre appointed Mr Prasad's acolyte, Mr Arun Pathak, adviser to the Governor, Mr Buta Singh.

A 1959 batch IAS officer, Mr Arun Pathak retired as the chief secretary during Mr Lalu Prasad's tenure as chief minister. He emerged as the Centre's first choice for the Bihar Governor's adviser. But a formal notification to this effect got delayed owing to a showdown between Mr Prasad and the LJP chief, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan,

over the matter. Mr Paswan favours a "neutral" officer for the post.

As for the DMs, both Mr CK Anil and Mr KK Pathak, during their short tenures defined good governance in their areas. They bulldozed criminal gangs into submission and razed their bastions irrespective of their political affiliations. They also took on strongmen who had eluded the law for years. While Mr Anil took on Md Shahabuddin, Mr KK Pathak made efforts to discipline Mr Sadhu Yadav, the youngest of the brothers-in-law of Mr Prasad himself. Both Md Shahabuddin and Mr Sadhu Yadav are RJD MPs.

The BJP and the LJP have charged Mr Buta Singh with appeasing the RJD boss. "Two upright IAS officers, who have been striving to end the terror spread by Shahabuddin and Sadhu Yadav, have been given their transfer orders without any plausible reason," said BJP leader Mr Sushil Kumar Modi.

THE STATESMAN

CONGRESS COLD, RJD SAYS NO Paswan hits on new ploy

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 12. — In a bid to break the deadlock in Bihar, the LJP president, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, today shed some of his aversion to Mr Lalu Prasad and favoured a Congress-led government with a Muslim chief minister but the RJD rejected it outright while the Congress cold-shouldered it.

“As the Congress had made sacrifices in the cause of secularism by making Mr Deve Gowda and Mr IK Gujral as Prime Ministers others should also sacrifice in favour of the Congress for a secular government in the state,” Mr Paswan along with his MLAs told reporters here.

He wanted Mr Lalu Prasad’s party to see reason and help form a Congress-led government as the RJD had been “rejected” by the people winning less than a third of the seats in the 243-member Bihar Assembly.

Amidst reports that his MLAs were getting restive over the continuing impasse in government formation, Mr Paswan, whose 29 MLAs hold the key to the new government, met the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, along with about 20 legislators and suggested that her party form a government with a Muslim as chief minister.

“If the Congress gives a Muslim candidate for the post of chief minister, we can reconsider our stand on not taking RJD support in Bihar,” he told reporters. He said the Congress president had told him that she would consider the proposal in consultation with party leaders.

Congress general secretary, Mrs Ambika Soni, said the party had only 10 members in the Assembly and it had no role in Mr Paswan’s scheme of things.

She also said the party had

already given in writing its support to the formation of an RJD government.

At the party’s daily press briefing, the Congress spokesman, Mr Anand Sharma, said: “There is nothing new in Mr Paswan’s proposal. He is an important part of the UPA coalition... (But) whatever stand the party had taken, we are sticking to that.”

Mr Sharma was responding to a question as to what would be the Congress’ reaction to Mr Paswan’s proposal that he was ready to reconsider the LJP stand towards the RJD in forming a government in Bihar if the Congress proposed a Muslim chief minister.

Mr Sharma said the Congress, soon after the Bihar Assembly poll results were known, had given a letter of support to the RJD in the formation of a secular government in the state.

Asked if the party was ready to review its stand in the wake of Mr Paswan’s formula, he said the Congress had taken the decision to support the RJD considering all aspects.

Dismissing the formula, the RJD spokesman, Mr Shivanand Tiwary, said no government was possible by Mr Paswan’s proposal and it was just an attempt to keep his MLAs together.

The LJP, together with the Congress (10), RJD (76) and the Left parties (15), could be in a position to muster majority in the House of 243 if Mr Lalu Prasad agrees to the proposal that the chief minister will not be from his party.

Mr Paswan, who is reportedly at the receiving end of the JD-U and the RJD as being the stumbling block in government formation, also stuck to his earlier stand of forming a government with the help of the JD-U provided it severed ties with the BJP and proposed a Muslim candidate for the chief minister’s post.

লালু-পাসোয়ানকে বুঝিয়ে বিহারে সরকার গড়তে উদ্যোগী সনিয়া

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১২ মে: রাজনৈতিক জটিলতা থাকা সত্ত্বেও বিহারে সরকার গঠনে সনিয়া গাঁধী নতুন করে উদ্যোগী হয়েছেন। প্রথম ধাপেই অবশ্য রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান এবং লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব নিজেদের কড়া মনোভাবের মুখে তাঁকে পড়তে হচ্ছে। কিন্তু প্রায় তিন মাস রাজ্যে রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন চলার পরে সনিয়া দু'পক্ষকে বুঝিয়ে একটি সমাধান সূত্রে নিয়ে যেতে চাইছেন।

বিহারে ভোটের দাবি উঠতে শুরু করাতেই সনিয়ার এই প্রয়াস। সম্প্রতি বিহারে গিয়ে এই দাবি তুলেছেন সিপিএমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক প্রকাশ কারাট। এই অবস্থায় ভোট এড়াতে লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব এবং রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানকে বুঝিয়েসুজিয়ে সরকার গঠনের জন্য চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছেন কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী। কাল এবং আজ তিনি রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের সঙ্গে কথা বলেন। আজ বৈঠকের সময়ে লোকজনশক্তি পার্টির নেতার সঙ্গে ২২ জন দলীয় বিধায়ক ছিলেন।

দু'দফায় আলোচনার পরে সরকার গড়ার ব্যাপারে রামবিলাস একটি সূত্র দিয়েছেন। সেই প্রসঙ্গে রামবিলাস

আজ বলেন, "কংগ্রেস কোনও মুসলিমকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী করলে আরজেডি-র বিষয়ে আমাদের মনোভাব পুনর্বিবেচনা করতে পারি।" কংগ্রেস সরকার গঠন করলে 'যে কোনও আত্মত্যাগেও' তাঁরা রাজি বলে জানান রামবিলাস।

ফের ভোটের সম্ভাবনাই রামবিলাসকে কিছুটা নরম করছে বলে রাজনৈতিক মহলের ধারণা। পাশাপাশি, যত দিন যাচ্ছে, সরকার গঠনের জন্য দলের ভেতর থেকেই তাঁর উপরে চাপ বাড়ছে। এনডিএ-র সঙ্গে তাঁর সমঝোতা হবে না, এ কথা স্পষ্ট হওয়ার পরে তাঁর কাছে বিকল্পও খুব কম। সনিয়াও তাঁকে বোঝাচ্ছেন, সরকার গড়া না গেলে ভোট অনিবার্য হয়ে উঠতে পারে। নতুন করে ভোট হলে রামবিলাসের দল কতটা কী করতে পারবে বলা মুশকিল। তাই ফের ভোট আটকাতে এবং বিজেপিকে ঠেকাতে রামবিলাসকে কিছুটা নমনীয় হতেই হবে।

তবে রামবিলাসের এই সমাধান সূত্রে এখনও রাজি নন লালুপ্রসাদ। কারণ, মন্ত্রিসভায় লালুর ঘনিষ্ঠ আত্মীয়েরা কেই থাকতে পারবে না

বলে রামবিলাস এখনও যে গোঁ ধরে আছেন, তা মেনে নিতে রাজি নন লালু। এ দিন তিনি পটনায় বলেছেন, কংগ্রেসের মুসলিম কোনও নেতাকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী করে সরকার গড়ার বিষয়টি বস্তাপচা সূত্র। তিনি বলেন, "আসলে দলের ২৯ জন বিধায়ককে ধরে রাখার জন্যই রামবিলাস এই সব বস্তাপচা সূত্র বাজারে ছাড়ছেন।"

কংগ্রেস মহলের খবর, দুই নেতাই এখনও যে গোঁ ধরে আছেন, তা সনিয়ার অজানা নয়। এটি জেনেই সনিয়া আলোচনা-আলোচনার মাধ্যমে একটি সমাধান সূত্রে পৌঁছতে চাইছেন।

দুই নেতার অনড় মনোভাব এদিন তাঁদের কথাবার্তা থেকেই স্পষ্ট। লালু যেমন রামবিলাসের সূত্র উড়িয়ে দিয়েছেন, তেমনই রাজ্য রাজনীতির বাধ্যবাধকতার কথা মাথায় রেখে লালুকে কটাক্ষ করতে ছাড়েনি রামবিলাস। তবে ফের ভোটে যেতে লালু ও রামবিলাস খুব একটা আগ্রহী নন। সনিয়ার এই নতুন প্রচেষ্টার পিছনেও আছে বিহারে ফের ভোটের সম্ভাবনা আটকানো। কারণ, তিনি চান না বিহারে এনডিএ কোনওমতেই সরকার গড়ার সুযোগ পাক।

13 MAY 2005 ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

RJD slaps 'caste bias' charge on EC

Patna, May 8

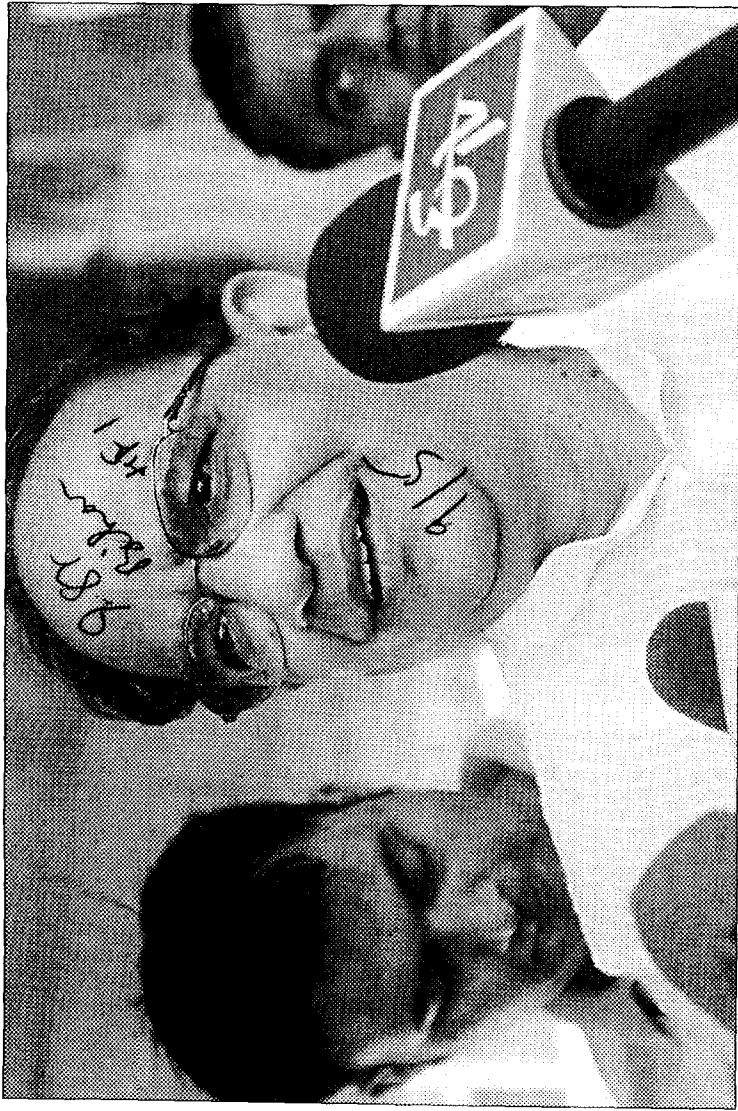
TO FURTHER strengthen its case against the Election Commission, the RJD on Sunday said that the district magistrate-cum-returning officer for the Chhapra Lok Sabha polls, B.B. Pradhan too had submitted a report to the Commission accusing it of a "caste bias". This was in addition to the charges raised by special observer for the polls, L.V. Saptarishi. The RJD also demanded that the Commission make both the reports public.

"Not only the report of Saptarishi, which highlighted that the EC acted with a bias to countermand Chhapra Lok Sabha polls last year, the report of the then DM-cum-returning officer for Chhapra polls, B.B. Pradhan, to the Commission on May 5, 2004 made similar charges", RJD spokesman Shivanand Tiwari told reporters in Patna.

"There is a similarity in the reports of Saptarishi and Pradhan that the EC had acted with caste bias and under NDA's pressure, while cancelling the Chhapra polls," Tiwari alleged.

He demanded that the Commission make public the reasons for 'ignoring' the reports of the two, who were their own appointees, while taking a decision on Chhapra polls.

Without naming chief election commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy, the RJD leader said, "A decision taken unanimously does not mean it is always right." Asserting that it had become more than clear that the Election Commission acted "with a caste-bias" in the case of Chhapra and also during the Bihar Assembly polls, Tiwari favoured introducing reservations



T.S. Krishnamurthy acquaints the media with his version of the issue in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

in high constitutional bodies like the EC and also in the judiciary to make them more impartial. Drawing similarities in the two reports, Tiwari said Pradhan commented that the manner in which Rao and Ananth Kumar conducted their probe in Chhapra reflected that they were "prejudiced".

"The whole thing points to the fact that the EC did not act with fairness in this case," he said. The RJD spokesman sought to underline that the RJD was not levelling any charges against the EC, but quoting only from Sap-

pradhan's report to "highlight the facts". Tiwari further said that not only in last year's parliamentary polls in Chhapra and elsewhere, the EC had been biased against the RJD in the Bihar Assembly elections too.

Replying to a question on the two UPA partners — Congress and LJP — not sifting with the RJD on the issue, Tiwari said while the Congress' views are "balanced", Paswan was reiterating what the BJP was saying, possibly because of his association with the BJP.

Agencies

Sack Saptarishi: Nitish

Patna, May 8

SENIOR JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar on Sunday demanded the immediate sacking of L.V. Saptarishi for violating service conduct rules by raising fingers at the Election Commission.

He also asked the UPA to act against RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav, who had been "maligning" Constitutional institutions with impunity. "Saptarishi should be immediately removed from the government job for violating service conduct rules by levelling charges against a highly esteemed constitutional body like the EC," Kumar said.

Suspecting proximity between Lalu and Saptarishi, Kumar demanded a thorough probe into this "nexus" and also action against all those who played a role in this "drama."

"How did the letter written by Saptarishi to the Union law minister land in Lalu's hand in no time?" he asked.

PTI

Paswan doesn't agree

Patna, May 8

The Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) on Sunday defended the Election Commission saying it had conducted the polls in Bihar "efficiently and impartially".

EC is a constitutional body. LJP is of the opinion that the EC had conducted both the Lok Sabha and Bihar Assembly polls in an efficient and impartial manner," LJP president and Union minister Ramvilas Paswan told reporters in Patna.

The EC had curbed malpractices during both the polls in the state by "efficiently" deploying para-military forces, he said praising the Commission for conduct of polls in the state.

PTI

Lalu fires quit salvo at CEC-in-waiting Tandon Named In Tell-All Of Plot To Defeat Minister

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Patna: Railway minister Lulu Prasad on Saturday demanded the immediate resignation of chief election commissioner-designate B B Tandon and election commissioner N Gopalswamy after a sensational disclosure that they were part of a conspiracy hatched to ensure his defeat from Chhapra constituency during the 2004 general election.

L V Saptharishi, a special election observer for Bihar during the polls, made the claim, adding that former Prime Minister L K Advani had allegedly masterminded the plot to benefit BJP candidate Rajiv Pratap Rudy.

These two EC officials had also acted against the RJD in the assembly elections, Lulu alleged.

Quoting extensively from a letter addressed to Union law minister H R Bhadrachari by Saptharishi on May 6, Lulu said Tandon and Gopalswamy not only acted as an agent of the BJP to countermand voting in Chhapra even as nothing abnormal happened there but also ensured a re-poll in the constituency conceding unreasonable demands of Advani and Rudy.

Speaking to an agency, Tandon later strongly refuted the charges.

Lulu also charged Tandon with making disparaging remarks against the Yadav community stating 'no Yadav can be trusted' in the presence of Saptharishi when the latter had gone to

the election commission to submit his report on Chhapra.

Lulu said Tandon and Gopalswamy prevailed on CEC T S Krishnamurthy and did not allow him to accept Saptharishi's report and forced him to go for the re-poll. The two officials dismissed Saptharishi from the room saying it was enough that he had submitted a report beyond which he had nothing to do with Chhapra.

"Tandon has insulted Ya-



GETTING HIS OWN BACK?

davs while Gopalswamy had said something dramatic has to be done to fix Lulu Prasad and teach him a lesson. Both of them wanted to teach both me and Yadvavs a lesson," Lulu said, quoting Saptharishi. He expressed hope that the UPA government would take appropriate action in the light of disclosure made by Saptharishi. The official is ready to affirm and swear before any authority or court of law regarding the conduct of Tandon and Gopalswamy during 2004 LS polls, Lulu added.

When reminded that the UPA had recently appointed Tandon as CEC, Lulu said Saptharishi's letter was dated May 6.

Twin Delhi blasts target moyie

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 22: Blasts rocked two Delhi theatres, both screening a film that has angered Sikh religious bodies, within minutes of each other this evening, killing one and injuring at least 40 people.

The large Sunday audience was watching *Jo Bole So Nihaal* at Karol Bagh's Liberty hall when a bomb kept under a seat ripped off the first 15 to 20 seats, injuring over 30 people.

The explosion at Patel Nagar's Satyam cinema occurred in the ground floor toilet. Chief fire officer R.C. Sharma would not confirm a bomb blast.

"Some people said there was an explosion in the air-conditioning and we are looking into it," he said.

All other theatres in the city were evacuated within minutes. No group has claimed responsibility for the blasts.

The film was withdrawn from all cinemas across Punjab last week following a protest by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee.

Jagir Kaur, the president of the committee, condemned the blasts, saying the Sikhs were not against the film but some "objectionable" scenes.

■ Picture on Page 5

2 MAY 2005

23 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Women feeling insecure in Delhi, says Chief Minister

Centre must act fast to restore confidence, Home Minister told

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Expressing serious concern over continuing incidents of crime against women in the Capital, an all-women delegation led by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit met the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, here on Monday demanding that a mechanism be put in place urgently to "instil confidence" among women who were "feeling insecure" venturing out of home.

The delegation, which included elected representatives of the citizens, demanded that the police force be made more visible to enable it to respond faster to information received and leads obtained.

It was pointed out that women had started feeling less confident about venturing out of their homes under the present circumstances and this trend must be checked.

It was also suggested that helplines for women should be made functional for all 24 hours



daily as well as on holidays and weekends.

Pointing to the growing sense of insecurity among the women of Delhi in the wake of a series of rape incidents in the recent past, Ms. Dikshit impressed upon the Union Home Minister the urgency to bring about amendments to the Indian Penal Code by doing away with the minimum prescribed punishment for rape and replacing it with life imprisonment as the only designated sentence for this heinous crime.

It was also recommended that the discretion of the courts wherein they can impose lesser sentences than is statutorily

prescribed by giving special reasons be taken away as in the case of dowry deaths.

Mr. Patil was requested by the delegation that laws pertaining to molestation and rape be made more stringent so that they are not only punitive but also demonstrative and at the same time the process of delivery of justice should be made quicker.

These cases should be taken up on a day-to-day trial basis and long adjournments should not be allowed.

This would produce immediate results and deter criminals from such dastardly acts, the delegation argued.

The Union Home Minister assured the delegation that he had started the process of taking the required steps to curb occurrence of such heinous crimes and instil confidence among the people.

He said he would also look into the suggestions made by the delegation and the demands raised by it.

17 MAY 2005
THE HINDU

Meningitis spreads to Delhi's vicinity; 33 more cases reported

9.10 Delhi HD-1

Ghaziabad, Gurgaon, Noida and other areas under scare of the dreaded disease

9/8

Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: Though no deaths due to meningococcal meningitis were reported in the Capital during the past 24 hours, but the number of new cases of the deadly disease increased alarmingly with the infection now spreading to various parts of the Capital as well as to the neighbouring towns.

On Sunday, 33 new meningitis patients were admitted to various city hospitals with fresh cases being detected in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. As many as 116 patients are presently undergoing treatment in city hospitals, while 43 have been discharged so far. However, the death toll has remained at 15.

Stating that no deaths have been reported from the Capital in the past 24 hours, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi's Director (Hospital Administration), J. N. Banavaliker, said though fresh cases were coming up, but still the disease had not assumed epidemic proportions. He also noted that patients from other places like Ghaziabad, Noida, Jhansi and Moradabad have also been admitted to hospitals in Delhi.

Dr. Banavaliker said many patients had been admitted merely on suspicion of showing symptoms of meningococcal meningitis. Of the new patients admitted to various hospitals, a maximum of 10 were admitted in Lok Nayak Jaya Prakash Narayan



A LONG WAIT: A relative of a meningitis patient waiting outside a special ward at LNJP hospital in New Delhi on Sunday.

Hospital, six in All India Institute of Medical Sciences, five in Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital, three in Guru Teg Bahadur, two in Bara Hindu Rao Hospital and one each in Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Max, Safdarjang, Swami Dayanand, Sanjay Gandhi and Shanti Mukund hospitals.

The civic body has constituted medical teams for monitoring and coordinating treatment and arrival of fresh cases at Bara Hindu Rao, Swami Dayanand and Kasturba hospitals, said Dr. Banavaliker, adding that a ma-

majority of cases were from the Walled City while fresh cases have been reported from Sadar Paharganj and Shahdara (North) zones.

Stating that all necessary measures have been taken to check the spread of the disease and a massive awareness campaign had been launched, particularly in the affected areas, Dr. Banavaliker said there was no shortage of medicines and more vaccines were being procured. He has also asked private hospitals to immediately report any suspected case of the disease to

the MCD or State Government authorities concerned.

Meanwhile, a high-level team of Central Health Ministry visited various hospitals to check whether directions issued by it to check spread of meningococcal meningitis were being complied with. They found that basic preparations like 24-hour availability of doctors and para-medical staff, isolation wards and proper stock of medicine were well in place. They asked the authorities to step up the exercise to vaccinate doctors and other staff who are coming in direct contact with the patients as well as their attendants and close relatives.

Chandigarh Correspondent reports:

Four cases of meningococcal meningitis (brain fever) have been reported in the areas of Haryana adjacent to New Delhi and one case has been reported from Chandi Mandir in Panchkula district.

In a statement here on Sunday, a spokesman of the Health Department said that while two of these cases had been reported from Gurgaon, one each had been reported from Faridabad and Bahadurgarh. The fifth case, reported from Chandi Mandir, had got infection from Delhi. One more patient suffering from brain fever had come from Delhi and was under treatment at B.D. Sharma Post Graduate Institute of Medical Science, Rohtak.

09 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Seven killed in violence

Staff Reporter

PENUKONDA: The countdown to the Penukonda Assembly by-election began on a violent note when six Telugu Desam Party (TDP) activists and an Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police were killed and scores of others were injured around the time the party candidate, Paritala Sunita, filed her nomination on Friday.

The police fired as many as 300 rounds, lobbing dozens of teargas shells to quell violent mobs of TDP workers outside the office of the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) where Ms. Sunita had gone in the forenoon to submit papers. In the violence that ensued, irate mobs set afire ten lorries and a police jeep on the National Highway 7 in front of the office while retreating. The NH-7 and the surrounding areas resembled a war zone with blood and stone strewn all around. The Chief Minister, Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, squarely blamed the TDP, more particularly its president, N. Chandrababu Naidu, for the violence, and

rejected the demand for a judicial inquiry since a magisterial probe had already been ordered. He criticised Mr. Naidu for rejecting his proposal that both the Congress and the TDP desist from fielding candidates belonging to families with a factional background. Dr. Reddy announced his decision to keep away from the three-week-long election campaign.

Mr. Naidu, on the other hand, demanded a judicial probe, and the suspension of the Rayalaseema Inspector-General of Police, R. P. Meena, and the Anantapur Superintendent of Police. He said the Election Commission should take note of the "attempt by the Congress to subvert the democratic process" by deputing special observers and police officers from outside for the bypoll.

He said that the violence was the handiwork of outsiders but the Chief Minister retorted by saying that the only outsiders in Penukonda were the former Ministers — T. Devender Goud, N. Janardhan Reddy and other TDP leaders from Hyderabad —

and that they had instigated the violence.

Trouble began even before Ms. Sunita, wife of the slain TDP MLA, Paritala Ravi, went to the RDO's office to submit her nomination.

Thousands of her late husband's supporters had gathered there. Wielding lathis, they tried to gatecrash into the office.

When the police tried to push them out, the TDP workers reacted violently by throwing stones at them and seriously injuring several officers and policemen. As the mob began getting unruly, the police first used lathi-charge and then opened fire into the air.

Finally, they trained their guns on the mob killing three TDP activists at the entrance of the RDO's office.

Three more bodies of party workers were found — one near the Mandal Revenue Office and two beside the compound wall of the RDO's office.

The ASI from Hindupur, Kullayappa, who was grievously injured in the stone-pelting, succumbed to his injuries.

Mulayam hints at new govt in Bihar sans BJP, RJD

Ashok K. Mishra

PATNA 20 APRIL

THE Samajwadi Party (SP) presi-



dent, Mu-
layam Singh
Yadav, has
predicted in-
stallation of a
popular gov-
ernment in
Bihar sans
the support
of either the
Bharatiya

Janata Party (BJP) or the
Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). At
the same time, Mr Yadav made it
clear that the SP was not in
favour of holding fresh elections
to end the political stalemate
marked by the continuation of
the president's rule.

The SP president told reporters
here on Wednesday that the
mandate had clearly gone against
the RJD and it would be fool-
hardy to involve it in any gov-
ernment-making exercise.

"A secular government with-
out the support of the BJP and
the RJD can be formed. In fact,
such a government will be in-
stalled," Mr Yadav maintained,
adding the party will take the ini-
tiative as and when required.

When asked why attempts at
government formation had hit a
roadblock so far, the SP president
said a popular government
should be in place but his outfit
would not be a party to any dis-
pensation that will include either
the RJD or the BJP.

To another query as to
whether fresh elections could be
a way out of the political uncer-
tainty, he remarked, "I am not in
favour of election".

He also said both Ram Vilas
Paswan and Nitish Kumar should
talk to each other to discuss the
nitty gritty of government forma-
tion. The state Samajwadi leader-
ship even brokered for peace be-
tween Mr Paswan and Mr Ku-
mar, but didn't succeed.

Talking about the three-day
national convention of the party,
opening here on Thursday, Mr
Yadav said Bihar had remained
hooked to the socialist ideology in
the past and this was precisely
why the national executive com-
mittee of the party decided to
hold the national convention in
the state.

21 APR 2005

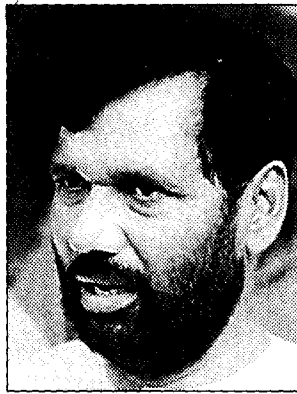
The Economic Times

Paswan strategy poses barrier to govt formation

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 19 APRIL

LOK Janshakti Party (LJP) chief Ram Vilas Paswan's strategy of maintaining equal distance from the RJD and the BJP seems to be falling apart and the party might just have to pay a heavy price for being seen as the major stumbling block in the formation of the next government in Bihar. Two months into the President's rule, LJP MLAs have been left wondering whether Mr Paswan's game plan would end up short-circuiting their ambitions of enjoying the trappings of power.

As murmurs of dissent grew louder, the Union minister stepped in by suspending former Lok Sabha member Anwarul Haq from the party for six years for carrying on "anti-party activities" — a euphemism for instigating a section of the newly-elected



legislators to ask Mr Paswan to either take the lead in forming the next government or allowing railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav to form the next government with the LJP's help.

Mr Haq was suspected by the party leaders as the main brain behind Mohiuddinagar MLA Ajay Kumar Bulganin's defiant stance urging his party president

to bury his differences with the RJD chief to form a "secular" government in the state.

A Yadav by caste, Mr Bulganin is said to have met the railway minister who, in turn, asked him to impress upon his party chief to forge a "secular" coalition. This was something which was simply unpalatable to the majority of the LJP MLAs, comprising mostly of upper caste Bhumihars and Rajputs, who felt that having been elected on an anti-RJD plank, it would have been suicidal for them to embrace the RJD yet again.

Mr Bulganin's salvo was immediately countered by these MLAs. Sensing trouble in his party, Mr Paswan rushed in to stall any poaching moves from Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav. Taking an about turn from his publicly-declared stance, the LJP chief has now promised to pave the way for installing a government in the state in "the next three months."

20 APR 2005

The Economic Times

Fresh crack at Bihar govt

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, April 16: Fresh efforts are being made to prop up a United Progressive Alliance regime in Bihar within a month, comprising the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Lok Janshakti Party and headed by a member outside Laloo Prasad Yadav's family.

UPA sources said a formula was being worked out that would at once be a face-saver for LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan — he has steadfastly opposed truck with the RJD — and facilitate the installation of a government.

Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, who had brought the warring Bihar leaders together on the eve of last year's Lok Sabha polls, is keen that the two Union ministers team up in Bihar.

The initiative is being taken in the wake of Janata Dal (U) leader Nitish Kumar ruling out the possibility of his party snapping ties with the BJP. The sources said the only option left now was for the RJD and LJP to join hands.

Legislators from all parties were also growing restive because they were not getting salary and allowances, the sources said. There were fears that snap polls might be held.

Some senior central ministers favoured elections, but the Prime Minister was against it, the sources said. If elections were held now, the RJD could be the gainer and the LJP the biggest loser.

Contrary to the impression that 17 of the 29 upper caste LJP legislators were anti-Laloo Prasad, as many as 12 were pressing Paswan to join hands with him, the sources added.

LJP MLAs Ajay Kumar Bughanin and Poonam Devi suggested as much in Hajipur yesterday. Others too are believed to be in touch with him. But the LJP hurriedly convened a

news conference today and denied any cracks in the party.

Sources said even as the Congress, Left and Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar were urging Paswan to bury the hatchet with Laloo Prasad, there were suggestions that he could help by opting out of the numbers game.

Strategists working on the formula said the strength of parties backing an RJD-led government was now 111 — RJD 75 + Cong 10 + NCP 3 + BSP 2 + CPM 1 + CPI 3 + Independents 17.

If the 29-member LJP abstained from voting, the strength of the House would be reduced to 214. The UPA would then need only 107 members to form a government.

The four-member Samajwadi Party and the seven-member CPI (ML), which would never back an NDA government, could also similarly abstain. Once the LJP decided to play ball, these two parties would be of no consequence.

If the LJP, Samajwadi Party and CPI(ML) — a block of 40 — abstained, only 102 members would be required to form a government. The UPA alone, barring the LJP, has 94 members and the RJD would need only six of the 17 Independents to put a government in place.

In Patna yesterday, Laloo Prasad said a government led by Rabri Devi would be in place within a month-and-a-half. "With Sankranti festival over, we have begun efforts to form a government led by Rabri Devi. I am confident our government will be formed in 45 days," he said.

"We neither favour a prolonged stint of President's rule nor do we want our poor state to shoulder the burden of a snap poll. So we have initiated efforts to form a secular government," he said.



Laloo Prasad

Non-starter in Bihar

Nitish, Paswan fail to strike deal

Had Nitish Kumar and Ram Vilas Paswan succeeded in forming a government in Bihar, it would have been a miracle possible. Their staunchest supporters may not ever have considered a political fence. Nothing has changed since the February election except a growing sense that time may be running out and the Governor may have no option but to recommend dissolution of the House. However, opportunities for grabbing power are hard to resist though Nitish and Paswan would be throwing all principles to the winds. Except for shared animosity towards Lalu Prasad, there is nothing that brings Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party and Nitish's JD-U together. Paswan had fought the election alone drawing away Dalit and Muslim votes from the RJD, while Nitish had a firm ally in the BJP. The moves last week were shocking even by Bihar standards. After apparently reaching a power-sharing arrangement, Paswan declared in Ranchi there was "nothing wrong" in seeking BJP's outside support. Nitish, on his part, went ahead with drawing up a common minimum programme and sending it to all parties which he thought would be his allies in government, except the BJP, his poll partner. The signals were clear: JD-U and LJP would form the government with Nitish as chief minister, the BJP would support it from outside and, wonder of wonders, Paswan had hoped to hold on to his portfolio in the UPA government.

Paswan made no secret of his greed by dissolving the Bihar unit of the LJP, claiming thereby it was no part of the "national LJP" which is a constituent of the UPA. Nothing could be more preposterous than the prospect of Paswan remaining a minister in Delhi with his party sharing power in a JD-U-led, BJP-supported government in Bihar. The Left and the Congress were quick to react, and rightly so. They effectively shot the opportunistic plan down. Paswan evidently values his ministership in Delhi more than propping up an equally ambitious Nitish. Which is why, when challenged by the Left, he scurried back to his old position of favouring a Muslim chief minister for Bihar and spurning all support from the BJP. The outcome of all this is that government formation in the present context is a non-starter. The pre-poll divisions are such that any jugglery will amount to insulting the electorate. For now, Bihar seems destined for President's Rule.

07 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

Paswan, CPI stonewall Nitish plan

HTC & Agencies
Patna, April 3

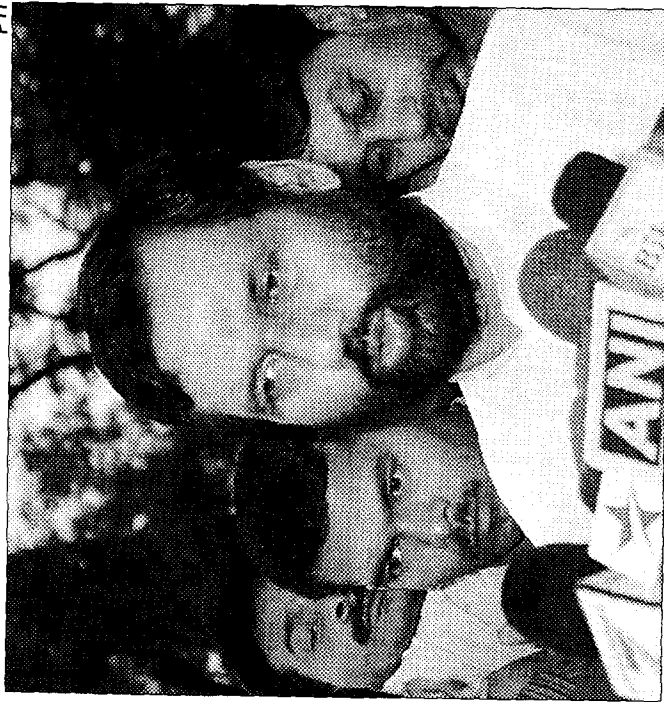
JANATAL DAL(U) leader Nitish Kumar on Sunday, once again, made an effort to evolve a formula to form a government in Bihar, but it came unstuck with the LJP insisting on his snapping ties with the BJP.

Nitish sent letters to 17 Independent MLAs and six parties outside the RJD and BJP brackets and held talks with BJP president L.K. Advani on Saturday night and apprised him of the exercise. He said that along with 48 MLAs from the six parties and the Independents, JD(U) — which alone has 55 MLAs — could reach a total of 120, two short of a simple majority in the 243-member Bihar assembly.

The six parties are LJP with 29 MLAs, CPI(ML) seven, SP four, NCP and CPI three each and BSP two. Kumar is also understood to have held talks with Mulayam Singh Yadav to seek support of his four Samajwadi Party MLAs.

However, the LJP and CPI both dashed Nitish's hopes. Paswan, who also met Governor Buta Singh, reiterated his anti-RJD and anti-BJP chant and made it clear that the party would help form a government in the state on its own terms.

"I have not even opened the letter written by Nitish soliciting support of LJP and other non-RJD parties to form a government in the state and I will



Ram Vilas Paswan after meeting Governor Buta Singh in Patna.

not do it as long as the JD(U) continues it ties with the BJP.

"The LJP will take steps for government formation only on its own terms, that is if Nitish party will have no truck with any combination in which the RJD or the BJP have a role," Paswan said.

The CPI, whose three MLAs have been included by the two in Nitish's scheme of things, also ridiculed the move saying it appears to be an "opportunistic gathering hungry to come to

power. "If Paswan thinks he can sail in two boats then he can try the experiment.

"As far as Nitish Kumar is concerned, he is still with the BJP and supports it. We will not give any letter of support to him," CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan told reporters in Chandigarh.

On the other hand, senior JD(U) leaders kept asserting that the BJP cannot be kept out of attempts to end the political logjam. JD(U) leader George

Who's saying what

PASWAN: Has advocated continuation of central rule and said that as long as JD(U) remains an ally of the BJP, there will be no change in his stand

CPI: Has ridiculed the efforts of non-RJD parties to form govt, calling it an "opportunistic gathering hungry to come to power"

BJP: Not unduly worried by Nitish knocking on doors of other parties as it believes his efforts to cobble up a majority will come to naught

RJD: Has said both leaders (Paswan and Nitish) are fooling each other

BJP knew it wouldn't work

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, April 3

THE BJP never expected JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar's efforts to cobble up a majority in Bihar to succeed, given Ramvilas Paswan's predilections.

Nevertheless, the party didn't want to pour cold water on Nitish's bid. Hence, party leaders did not reiterate their opposition to the concept of "outside support" to such a government as they did two weeks ago.

On Sunday a day after Nitish met BJP chief L.K. Advani to explain his efforts, BJP spokesperson Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi described his move as "constructive" and said his party saw "positive signals" for a non-RJD alternative in the state.

"Constructive steps are being taken to form a government in Bihar. We see positive signals in this regard. Just wait and see what happens", he had said. "From the beginning, the BJP hasn't wanted central rule after the people gave their verdict. We wish a non-RJD government is formed".

Naqvi had, however, declined to comment on whether the BJP would support the JD(U) from outside or whether the LJP would also be roped in finally.

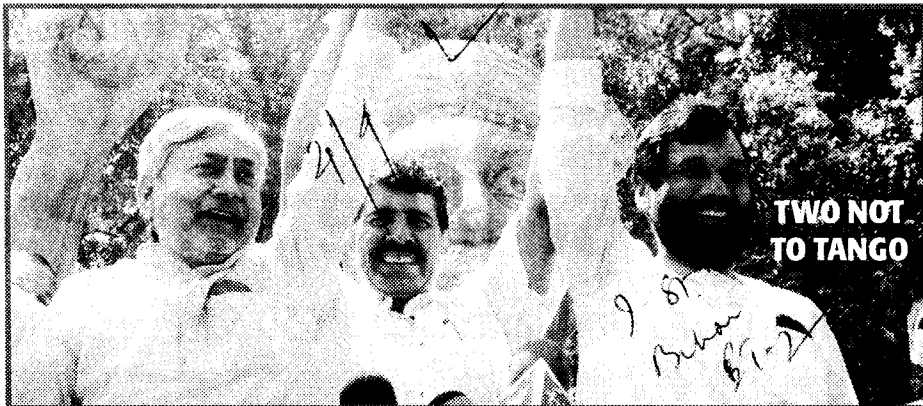
Kumar had told Advani that along with 48 MLAs from six parties and 17 Independents, the JD(U) — with 55 MLAs — could reach a total of 120, two short of a simple majority in the 243-member House.

The six parties are Paswan's LJP, the CPI(ML), Samajwadi Party, NCP, CPI and BSP.

Fernandes told reporters that no government can be formed on the conditions set by Paswan and efforts towards that cannot move ahead by keeping the BJP out of the process.

Fernandes' party colleague Sharad Yadav too envisaged a role for the BJP in ending the political logjam in Bihar saying, "we have to find out in what form BJP's cooperation can be taken to help form a stable government in the state."

Cong tells Paswan: UPA or BJP, take your pick



Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 3 APRIL

JUST when it seemed that the JD(U) and the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) would finally bury their differences to form the next government in Bihar with the help of smaller outfits and 17 Independents, Ram Vilas Paswan was forced to revert to his "no-truck-with-the-BJP" line. Mr Paswan was compelled to take this stance after the Congress made it clear that he'll have to quit the UPA before embarking on such a course of action.

The LJP chief, however, is waging a grim battle. He is sandwiched between his flock of increasingly restive MLAs on the one hand and Independents & leaders of smaller parties like the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the BSP on the other. The BSP and the SP want an anti-RJD government to be sworn in soon.

The Congress' central leadership decided to act tough with Mr Paswan after there were reports of an apparent softening in the LJP leader's stand on seeking the BJP support for such a coalition. The riot act was subsequently read out to him — he'd have to choose between the UPA and any Bihar alliance which had either the direct or covert support of the BJP. Choosing the latter option would obviously have meant giving up the Union Cabinet minister's tag. The Congress' view was endorsed by the CPI(M), with senior politburo member Sitaram

Yechury going to the extent of labelling the LJP chief as an "opportunist." He made it clear that Mr Paswan would have to make an exit from the UPA if the LJP stitched an alliance with the JD(U) to form the next government in Bihar, with the BJP offering to extend "outside support."

The belligerent stand of his UPA partners thwarted Mr Paswan's gameplan of retaining his ministership at the Centre while securing a foothold in the state through an alliance with the JD(U), Independents and sundry outfits. Mr Paswan is not prepared to give up his ministership yet. He reverted to his oft-repeated theme of favouring a non-RJD, non-BJP government in Bihar on Saturday. He reiterated it during his party's brainstorming session in Patna on Sunday, while rejecting senior JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar's offer to join hands to ensure the revocation of President's rule in the state.

"There's absolutely no relevance of the letter purported to have been written by Mr Kumar, seeking the LJP's support for government formation, as long as the JD(U) continues its friendship with the BJP," Mr Paswan said. Reacting to reports on the LJP softening its stand on seeking BJP support, Mr Paswan said: "My statement in Ranchi a couple of days ago on the issue was in a different context and it was quoted out of context." However, the independents actually responded favourably to Mr Kumar's initiative.

Paswan spurns JD(U) offer on govt formation

Ashok K. Mishra
PATNA 3 APRIL

GIVING a jolt to those who may have been hoping for an early end to the prolonged political stalemate in Bihar, the LJP chief, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan on Sunday spurned the proposal moved by the JD(U) leader, Mr Nitish Kumar for putting a popular government in place on the basis of the Common Minimum Programme (CMP). Instead, Mr Paswan harped on the old theme demanding that the JD(U) first sever its ties with the BJP for the formation of the government.

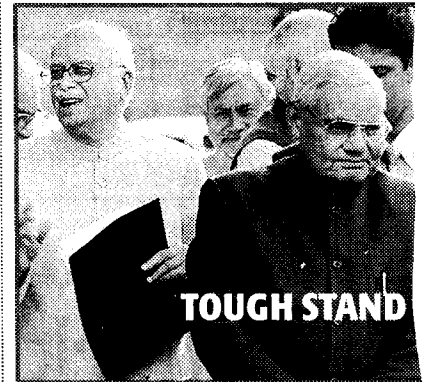
Mr Paswan sounded very dismissive over the CMP proposal. "I have not gone through the CMP. But I can tell you our party manifesto is much better than the CMP forwarded to us by the JD(U). The JD(U) is silent about whether it will break its ties with the BJP," Mr Paswan said. He implied that the JD(U) must break free from the NDA formation before making any move for government formation. Prospect of government formation had assumed a realistic proportion when Mr Paswan recently hinted that he was not averse to the idea of the BJP supporting a non-RJD government from outside.

"If anyone is ready to support us from outside, what can we do in that case? Should we tell them that we will not accept their support?" Mr Paswan asked.

Spurred by Mr Paswan's statements, the JD(U) leader wrested the initiative for government formation and moved the CMP proposal. Giving due weightage to Mr Paswan's anti-BJP sentiments, Mr Kumar discreetly avoided the name of the saffron party when he spoke of forming a non-RJD government with the support of seven political parties including the 17 independents.

But Mr Paswan again reverted to his old stand insisting the JD(U) must break its ties from the BJP. Perhaps Mr Paswan was forced to get back into his old groove after the Congress sounded a stern piece of advice to him. "The Congress will not seek my advice for giving statements," added Mr Paswan.

"The CPM's reaction was natural after an agency reported that I have changed my stand vis-a-vis the BJP," said Mr Paswan. In the same breath, he added: "I cannot do anything if the government is not formed."



BJP won't let LJP enjoy an edge

Girish Kuber
MUMBAI 3 APRIL

TOUGHENING its stand on Ram Vilas Paswan, the BJP on Sunday said it would not support the Dalit leader or his LJP if the new government in Bihar was not headed by the NDA.

"The new government has to be led by Nitish Kumar-led Janata Dal (United). We will not support it if it's headed by Paswan or the LJP," a top BJP leader told ET.

"We don't want to create another Mayawati," a senior national BJP leader said referring to the party's botched-up Uttar Pradesh experiment a few years ago, which ended up alienating the party's traditional upper caste vote bank in the state.

"That move clearly was aimed at reaching out to Dalits. But it backfired. In no way it did it help the party in widening its base. On the contrary, it antagonised our traditional voters," he said. "Mayawati couldn't have been what she is today had the BJP not stood by her then," he pointed out. Having burnt its fingers in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP now plans to bring Mr Paswan down from his high pedestal. "The numbers make us unavoidable."

We will not support any arrangement that will make Mr Paswan or his Lok Janshakti Party member the new chief minister," he said.

The BJP was determined to support the government only if it was led by Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United). "We may not join the government but the party will be very much there," he pointed out.

The Bihar arithmetic too would help it. In the 243-member House, the NDA has 93 legislators, with JD (U)'s 55 and BJP's 38 while the LJP has 30 MLAs.

39A 5/10
JD-U sends CMP letters to parties except BJP saying it 'won't mind'

Nitish proposes, Paswan disposes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA/ NEW DELHI, April 2. — In a day of swift political developments, JD-U chief ministerial candidate Mr Nitish Kumar today landed himself in an embarrassing situation in his bid to cobble up an anti-RJD coalition in Bihar.

Even as the JD-U nearly dumped its old and trusted ally, the BJP, to ensure support of Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party, the latter backed out, apparently under pressure from the Left parties.

Mr Kumar sent copies of a Common Minimum Programme prepared by his party to the LJP, CPI(ML), CPI, SP, BSP and NCP and 17 Independents seeking their support for the formation of a non-RJD government.

The BJP was not sent a copy. "This is purely a JD-U initiative. I do not think the BJP will put any roadblocks in the process of government formation," he told reporters. The BJP on its part said it would fully support Mr Kumar in his bid to cobble together a majority.

Mr Kumar said Congress and the CPI(M) have not been involved in the process because they have already pledged their support to a RJD-led government.

Mr Kumar met Mr Paswan at the residence of the state SP president Mr Dadan Pehalwan. His euphoria ended soon. Appearing before media shortly, Mr Paswan sang his old tune of not being part of the government of which either RJD or BJP has any role to play, even from outside. "Hamara stand saaf hai — BJP/RJD se koi samjhauta nahin, bahar-andar se; CM Muslim hone ke stand par bhi ham kayam hain, aaj bhi (Our stand is clear — we cannot compromise on our principle of opposing both the BJP and the RJD. We stick to the stand of the post of chief minister being given to a Muslim)," he said.

The swift change in Mr Paswan's stand came moments after the Left parties went hammer and tongs accusing the former of being an opportunist. "How can he take two boats? While on the one hand he tries to be secular

being a part of the UPA, on the other he is hobnobbing with communal forces in Bihar," asked senior CPIM leader Mr Sitaram Yetchuri in New Delhi. The CPI too reacted in the same way. Quite interestingly, the SP, BSP and the CPI-ML from which the JD-U has sought support too made it amply clear that they will not be part of the government where the BJP has any role to play.

Only yesterday, Mr Paswan had said he would have no objection to the BJP offering outside support to the process started by Mr Kumar after the conclusion of the three-day 'introspection camp' of the JD-U in Rajgir. "What's wrong if the BJP lends outside support to the government. After all, it has said it is ready to make sacrifice (to prevent the RJD from staging a comeback)," was what the LJP president had told the media yesterday.

RJD on snap poll

Disfavouring a snap poll in Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal today said it could be held only when all attempts to form a government fails.



SHORT-LIVED HARMONY: (From left to right) Mr Nitish Kumar, Mr Dadan Pehalwan and Mr Ram Vilas Paswan join hands in Patna on Saturday. — PTI

Buta raj tones down Team Lalu

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 1 APRIL

AFTER being masters of Bihar's destiny for 15 long years, the RJD leaders are now waking up to the changed ground rules. Till the other day their wish was the command for most bureaucrats, with the weak-kneed ones allowing themselves to be coopted into the Lalu Yadav Durbar and the daring ones getting banished to irrelevant postings. Barely a month into the governor's rule, RJD top guns are getting the taste of the law of the land under a group of officials, sensitive to the demands of their authority.

The latest one is Mr Shivanad Tiwari, who was a senior minister in the Lalu regime with pretentious of being a political strategist. Mr Tiwari on Friday got a taste of the new world in Bihar when his entry was banned from Siwan district for two months for his alleged utterances against the district magistrate C.K. Anil at a function which was also addressed by railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav. The likes of Mr Tiwari, like their boss, have been making a public show of humiliating or running down bureaucrats. This time he made the mistake of taking out his old habit in a changed order.

Mr Tiwari chose to be in his normal self with the same Mr Anil, who along with SP Ratan Sanjay literally tamed and banished to jails the notorious Siwan don and Lalu pointsman Mohammed Shahabuddin during the Assembly elections. If Shahabuddin has been finding his world crashing under his feet, Mr Tiwari has now realised that he is no more living in a Bihar where laws were made to be broken by powerful politicians.

Taking cognisance of media reports, Mr Anil warned Mr Tiwari of "stringent legal action" under Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code if the latter violated his directive, an official spokesman said.

Mr Tiwari while addressing a function at Siwan railway station where Lalu inaugurated an unreserved ticketing system had castigated Mr Anil for banning the entry of his party colleague Shahabuddin and reportedly threatened to "teach the DM a lesson". Ironically it is now Mr Tiwari who is left to learn new lessons.

The experience of Mr Tiwari should be the latest shock to the RJD brass, who have already been delivered with a series of reality checks. The other day, K.K. Pathak, the district magistrate of Gopalganj, the home district of Lalu which is also the Lok Sabha constituency of his controversial brother-in-law



BROTHERS IN ARMS: Lalu Prasad Yadav with former Pakistan Prime Minister C.H. Shujaat Hussain in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

— Sadhu Yadav — chose to give a royal snub to the family pride of the dethroned 'Raja of Bihar', Mr Pathak did it by choosing a sweeper of the local hospital to inaugurate the new hospital building. Gone are the days when not even a foundation stone of any ceremony could have laid by anybody other than Laloo or his family members.

Not just that, Mr Pathak also slapped a community fine on an entire village in the district for the action of some local to attack a police van. Used to the show of power by the Laloo clan, even villagers in the area have been emulating the "role model" in their own way till they were shown by the DM that rules of the game have been changed drastically.

Though the RJD boss has been boasting of calling the shots under the President's rule the trend seems not very encouraging for them given some of moves of governor Buta Singh.

Having already decided to meet the people on a regular durbar at the Raj Bhawan, Mr Singh has already exercised a reshuffle of the police brass. At least some officers who had fallen out RJD boss have now found revival of their fortunes by getting plum posts. Already a state-wide drive in on, under court direction, to nab criminals who have been used to political patronage.

Govt formation may feature in LJP meet

Ashok K. Mishra
PATNA 1 APRIL

FOR sure, the formation of a popular government in Bihar will be a much talked about issue in the third poll review meet of the LJP opening here on Saturday. Though the question relating to government formation is not on the agenda, the issue may not be wished away as a section of party MLAs are keen that the party should adopt some flexible stand for installing a popular government.

If party sources are to be believed, a number of LJP MLAs are getting restive and mounting pressure on Ram Vilas Paswan to shed his obstinacy so that a popular government was installed. As of now, Mr Paswan has been pressing for a non-RJD and a non-BJP government.

It seems less likely that any breakthrough will be achieved by toeing such a political line. At the same time, the delay in the government formation is expected to accentuate the frustration level of the party MLAs who in course of time may be willing to go even beyond the *lakshman rekha* for putting a popular government in place.

Admittedly, Mr Paswan is aware of such a development which could unfold in the future. The fact that he has dissolved the state unit may be part of a move to ward off any uprising within the party ranks. Interestingly, JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar is now proactively working for the formation of the popular government.

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The Economic Times

The Economic Times

নতুন সূত্রের খোঁজ নীতীশ, পাসোয়ানের

সূত্রত বসু • পটনা

এপ্রিল: দলের বিধায়কদের চাপে অনেকটাই বেসামাল হয়ে পড়েছেন রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান। বিহারে সরকার তৈরি নিয়ে নীতীশ কুমারের জেডিইউ-র সঙ্গে তিনি ফের আলোচনা শুরু করেছেন। সরকার তৈরি নিয়ে নতুন কোনও সূত্র খোঁজার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছেন দুই দলের শীর্ষ নেতারাও। রামবিলাস এমন ইঙ্গিতও দিয়েছেন, বিজেপি বাইরে থেকে সমর্থন করলে জেডিইউর সঙ্গে সরকার গড়তে তাঁর আপত্তি নেই।

পাসোয়ান-নীতীশের আঁতাতের পথে এখনও সবচেয়ে বড় বাধা বিজেপি। এ বারের নির্বাচনে পাসোয়ান যথেষ্ট পরিমাণে মুসলিম ভোট পেয়েছেন। তাঁর পক্ষে তাই সরাসরি বিজেপি-র সঙ্গে গাটছড়া বাঁধা সম্ভব নয়। রামবিলাস চেয়েছিলেন, নীতীশ কুমার এনডিএ ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে এসে বিহারে সরকার তৈরির ব্যাপারে উদ্যোগী হন। কিন্তু নীতীশ বা জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ এনডিএ ছাড়তে রাজি হননি। এই অবস্থায় সরকার তৈরি করা অসম্ভব হয়ে পড়ে।

কিন্তু কয়েকদিন ধরে রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের দলের নবনির্বাচিত বিধায়কদের চাপে অনেকটাই নরম হয়ে এসেছেন। রামবিলাসের দলে রয়েছেন ২৯ জন বিধায়ক। এই বিধায়কদের অর্ধেকের বেশি উচ্চবর্ণের। এঁদের একটি বড় অংশই চান, বিহারে লালু-বিরোধী সরকার তৈরি হোক। এঁদের চাপে পড়ে রামবিলাস সম্প্রতি নীতীশ কুমারের সঙ্গে সরকার তৈরি নিয়ে টেলিফোনে

একপ্রস্থ কথা বলেছেন। রামবিলাস অবশ্য আজও জানিয়েছেন, কোনও অবস্থায় তিনি বিজেপি-র সঙ্গে মিলে সরকার তৈরি করবেন না। জেডিইউ যদি বিজেপি-র সঙ্গে ছেড়ে আসে তবেই বিহারে জেট সরকার তৈরি সম্ভব বলে রামবিলাস বলেছেন। এর পাশাপাশি রামবিলাস অবশ্য এই ইঙ্গিতও দিয়েছেন, বিজেপি বা অন্য দল যদি বাইরে থেকে এই জোটকে সমর্থন করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয়, তবে তা নিয়ে তিনি আপত্তি তুলবেন না।

রামবিলাসের এই নতুন সমাধানসূত্র নিয়ে জেডিইউ নেতারাও আলোচনা শুরু করেছেন। জেডিইউ নেতাদের বক্তব্য, রামবিলাসের সঙ্গে জোট বেঁধে সরকার তৈরির সময়ে বিজেপি-কে বাইরে রাখলে যদি সমস্যার সমাধান হয় তবে দলের নেতাদের তা-ই করা উচিত। নীতীশ কুমারও অনেকটাই এই মতের পক্ষে। ভোটের পরেও তিনি রামবিলাসকে কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিত্ব ছেড়ে চলে আসতে বলেছিলেন। রামবিলাস তাতে রাজি না হওয়ায় হতাশ নীতীশ আলোচনার রাস্তা তখনকার মতো বন্ধ করে দেন।

কিন্তু বর্তমান পরিস্থিতিতে রামবিলাসের মতো তিনি এক পা পিছিয়ে নতুন কোনও সমাধানসূত্র খোঁজার চেষ্টা করছেন। জেডিইউ-ও রামবিলাসের সঙ্গে আলোচনা করার দায়িত্ব তাঁর উপরে দিয়ে রেখেছে। নীতীশ কুমার বিজেপি-র সঙ্গে বসেও এই নিয়ে আলোচনা করবেন বলে দলের নেতারা জানিয়েছেন। রামবিলাস এবং বিজেপিকে কী করে একসঙ্গে মেলাবেন সেটাই এখন নীতীশ-জর্জদের সবচেয়ে বড় সমস্যা।

02 APR 2005

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

Sheila to stay, but 'under watch'



WORRY OVER? The Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, coming out of the Congress General Secretary, Ashok Gehlot's office shortly before meeting the party chief, Sonia Gandhi, in New Delhi Monday.

PHOTO: V.SUDERSHAN

'Mind your behaviour, or anything could happen'

K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, earned a reprieve on Monday night with the party high command cautioning both the Chief Minister and the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee president, Ram Babu Sharma, to be mindful of their behaviour.

After a two-hour meeting at the 10 Janpath residence of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, the senior Delhi leaders were told that they would be "under watch" and "anything could happen in future". Ms. Dikshit has been under fire since she walked out of a party meeting here last Tuesday and compounded matters further by publicly airing her views and defending herself as a person wronged.

UNI adds: "Everything will be alright. It's a family affair," the AICC General Secretary,

Ashok Gehlot, told reporters after the meeting.

He said the "misunderstanding" between the two leaders had been removed and that they would work together as a family, indicating the storm over Delhi's ruling Congress had ended. The meeting of Mr Sharma and Ms Dikshit with Ms Gandhi came shortly after the AICC discussed the infighting that triggered speculations about a change of guard in the Delhi Government.

At the AICC headquarters, Mr Sharma too showed signs of reconciliation with Ms Dikshit as he also called his wrangling with her a "family affair".

The Chief Minister, surrounded by her supporters, left the AICC headquarters without making any comments. "Her walkout was indeed an unfortunate affair, but the issue will be resolved by the Congress family," Mr Sharma said.

26 APR 2005

THE HINDU

Lok Sabha approves President's rule in Bihar

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. The Lok Sabha today approved President's rule in Bihar. However, the Government came in for considerable embarrassment as the Rashtriya Janata Dal MPs, including Ministers, were absent when the issue was put to a voice vote at the end of a five-hour discussion.

During the course of his reply, the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, said a minority government in Bihar was a possibility that could be explored, provided stability was a guarantee. Responding to queries about why no attempt had been made to put in place such a government, he said the Governor probably thought it was not possible to have such an arrangement.

Minority government

Elaborating, he said the margins between the possible combinations were so wide that the Governor probably thought any such arrangement would not be able to provide a stable government. "But if this difference is narrowed, then a minority gov-

ernment can be considered."

Seeking to allay the Opposition fears that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance would try to rule Bihar by proxy through President's rule, Mr. Patil urged the newly elected MLAs of the State to work out a viable arrangement at the earliest.

On the demands for scrapping Article 356 of the Constitu-

tion and doing away with the office of Governor, he said consensus on every such debate — after the dust had settled — had been that both should stay. He ruled out issuing directives to Governors on dealing with hung Assemblies. No two situations could be the same and blanket guidelines, too, could be subject to interpretation, he said.

Earlier, the discussion saw Bi-

har's key political leaders challenge each other to form a government in the State with the Lok Jan Shakti Party leader and Union Chemicals and Fertilizers Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, being the main bone of contention.

Opening the debate, Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United) came down heavily on Mr. Paswan and asked the Congress how long it would continue with its balancing act with the LJP leader on one side and the Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, on the other.

Through the discussion, several permutations and combinations were floated. To Mr. Kumar's offer to Mr. Paswan to get 68 and take the 55 MLAs in the JD(U) kitty, Devendra Yadav (RJD), retorted: "Couldn't you have done something."

Maintaining equi-distance from the Bharatiya Janata Party and the RJD, Mr. Paswan wanted to know from Mr. Kumar whether his offer of 55 MLAs meant that he would leave the National Democratic Alliance. "You say bring 68; I will bring 75 in that case."

UPA embarrassed

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government today faced an embarrassment when the Opposition pointed to the conspicuous absence of Ministers belonging to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), when the Lok Sabha was to vote on the imposition of President's Rule in Bihar.

After the RJD members, led by Ram Kripal Yadav, walked out of the House stating it did not agree with the decision to bring the State under Central rule, the

party's Ministers, including Lalu Prasad, Prem Gupta, Kanti Singh, and M.A.A. Fatmi and others, remained seated on the Treasury benches for a while before gradually leaving.

Soon after the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, concluded his speech, the Janata Dal (United) leader, Nitish Kumar, pointed towards the seats vacated by the RJD Ministers and asked Mr. Patil about the "collective responsibility of the Cabinet." He said their absence reflected a division within the ruling coalition.

THE HINDU

MAR 2005
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TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2005

END OF AN ERA

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, Lalu Prasad exploded on the political canvas of Bihar as a messiah of the underclass and thus commenced the still substantially semi-feudal State's eventful tryst with social change. That election year was remarkable in two respects. For the first time upper caste members in the State Assembly were outnumbered by those belonging to the Other Backward Classes. Secondly and hearteningly, the poor and the socially marginalised turned out to vote in larger numbers than before. The voter turnout figures bear this out, although only indirectly. In the 1990 Assembly election, the overall poll percentage jumped from 56.2 to 62.04. More significantly, and perhaps coinciding with Mr. Prasad's grand advent, the turnout improved from 51 to 58.6 per cent in Scheduled Caste constituencies and from 40 to 49 per cent in those reserved for Scheduled Tribes. The next five years saw Mr. Prasad grow into something of a legend. The belligerent spokesperson of the downtrodden told his legion of followers he had given them *swar* (voice) if not *swarg* (heaven). By the 1995 Assembly election, it was as if the floodgates had opened. The overall turnout dipped slightly to 61.79 per cent but quite remarkably Scheduled Tribe constituencies surpassed the general constituencies, registering a record turnout of 62.19 per cent. Admittedly, tribal folk are not the only voters in tribal constituencies. Yet it is worthwhile remembering that these constituencies reported abysmally low turnouts in the 1970s and early 1980s — 32.27 per cent in 1977 and 34.04 per cent in 1980.

The social transformation was visible equally in the legislature where the number of upper caste members stood reduced to less than half the strength of their OBC counterparts. The wheel might have turned a full circle for Bihar — and its charismatic OBC leader — judging by the statistics thrown up by the 2005 Assembly election. Mr. Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal lost 40 seats and its vote share plunged from 33 per cent

in 2000 to 25 per cent, indicating a major erosion of his support base. Having found their *swar*, his voters wanted their *swarg* as well. Interestingly, if the RJD chief's peak years witnessed a surge in voter turnouts, his defeat coincided with a massive drop in voter participation — from 62.57 per cent in 2000 to 46.5 per cent now. It is certainly disturbing that 2005 saw Bihar record its lowest voter turnout in 43 years. (In 1962, only 44.47 per cent of voters exercised their franchise in the State.) The drastic fall needs serious explanation and analysis, all the more given the recent trend of high turnouts. Psephologists will no doubt take note of this puzzling aspect. It is a democratic imperative that the Election Commission, which has seemed intent on targeting Bihar aggressively and as a special problem, investigate the reasons for this worrying reversal.

The analysis of the Bihar election and the post-poll survey done by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and published recently in *The Hindu* leave no doubt that if Election 2005 belongs to anyone, it is to Ram Vilas Paswan. Emerging from minor league status, his Lok Jana Shakti Party won 29 seats on the basis of 12.6 per cent of the popular vote. Even more impressively, the script ran as if Mr. Paswan had written it: Bihar came under President's Rule, as he advocated publicly. At least for now, the Dalit leader has it both ways: a decisive future role in the State and Ministership at the Centre. The undisputed silver medallist is the bloc comprising the smaller parties and Independents, which caused more damage to the main players than is suggested by its combined share of 17 seats and 16.2 per cent of the popular vote. Hype notwithstanding, the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal (U) combine did only marginally better than the RJD alliance, with the latter, in fact, polling more votes. Worse, the BJP-JD(U)'s only hope of winning a forlorn game remains Mr. Paswan — the man who walked out on them before the 14th general election.

THE HINDU

15 MAR 2005

9/11/05 RULED OUT 18

In a way, president's rule lives up to the mandate in Bihar. The people voted for change but were still uncertain about the new dispensation, thereby throwing up a hung assembly. With the imposition of the Centre's rule, the people have the change they wanted — from the fifteen-year rule of Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, by himself or by his wife, Ms Rabri Devi, as the chief minister by proxy. At the same time, the fractured mandate made it difficult for the governor, Mr Buta Singh, to settle for a new regime. There were cases in the recent past when the single largest party or pre-poll alliance had been allowed to form a minority government. But two things seem to have made such a decision difficult for the Union home ministry. First, offering such an opportunity to Mr Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal and its allies would have violated the mandate for change and deepened the rift within the United Progressive Alliance. Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, Mr Yadav's colleague in the UPA government at the Centre, had made it clear that he would do anything to stop the RJD from returning to power in Patna. Second, after the damage suffered in Goa and Jharkhand, the Union government could not risk another muddle in Bihar. President's rule has earned the beleaguered Congress leadership a reprieve.

However, the Centre's rule could see the beginning of the next phase in Bihar's complex politics. With Mr Yadav's long and unchallenged reign over, other parties, including the UPA partners, will definitely compete to expand their own space. Since the new assembly has been kept in suspended animation, the parties will try to multiply their flock, hoping to muster a majority by the time the assembly is convened. But even this new game will be subject to the compulsions of keeping the UPA intact in New Delhi. The people of Bihar would, however, like to see other things happening during president's rule. They would like to see the interim administration lift the state from the abyss into which it has sunk, thanks mainly to the politicians who have violated with impunity all norms of civilized conduct. President's rule would thus be an acid test for the governor and his mentors in New Delhi. It would be naive to expect it to be an easy task; the malaise has struck too deep for cosmetic cures. But Bihar desperately needs at least an honest attempt at cleaning up the mess.

9/3 HD-1

Bihar: Manmohan for selection of advisers 'on merit'

9/3/05
Maha

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, has initiated a search for advisers to the Bihar Governor, Buta Singh, to administer the State during President's rule.

Dr. Singh has made it clear, say informed sources, that the advisers would be selected "on merit" and the selection is not subject to any bargaining, especially from the two United Progressive Alliance constituents, the Rashtriya Janata Dal

and the Lok Jan Shakti Party.

The National Democratic Alliance leaders have already urged the Government to select "neutral" advisers.

Traditional preference

Traditionally, advisers are selected from retired IAS officers; in some instances, retired IPS officers too have been selected.

The advisers, generally, are former Chief Secretaries, DGPs or the head of a Central police organisation or Secretaries to

the Government of India.

Conventionally, one adviser is chosen from among the IAS/IPS officers belonging to the cadre of the State concerned.

However, there is a marked reluctance to tap any Bihar cadre officer now, lest there be a charge of partisanship in favour of Mr. Lalu Prasad. Given the fact that the Rashtriya Janata Dal had ruled the State for 15 years, almost all Bihar cadre officers are deemed to be ineligible for the post of adviser to the Governor.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9, 2005

UNAVOIDABLE, FOR A WHILE, IN BIHAR

IT MUST APPEAR odd that any State can be brought under President's Rule by political consensus. That events have raced towards such a denouement in post-election Bihar is thanks to another seeming contradiction: the reluctance of the State's political parties, otherwise thought to be Machiavellian and power-obsessed, to come together to form a government. The impasse was built into the Assembly election result. In a House of 243, the Rashtriya Janata Dal and its Left allies bagged 79 seats while the two other alliances, the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal (United) and the Congress-Lok Jana Shakti Party, claimed 92 and 39 seats respectively. For a solution to emerge out of this hopelessly 'hung' House, it was imperative that Ram Vilas Paswan should hitch his wagons either to the RJD or the BJP-JD(U). The possibility ended with Mr. Paswan writing to the Governor to say that he intended to stay neutral. Vexing as the crisis in Bihar was, President's Rule was far from being a happy solution to it. After all Article 356 militates against both federalism and elective democracy and is a constitutional provision that has been repeatedly misused, belying Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's fond hope that it would "never be called into operation" and would remain "a dead letter." Of course, it is some consolation that the situation in Bihar was not one where the Article was misapplied in the classic sense. There was no dismissal of a government here; it was simply that a government refused to be born. The deadlock was such that it left the Centre, the Governor, and the political parties — Lalu Prasad registered a token protest — with only one option. However, there is no case for allowing the current compulsions to become an excuse for prolonging President's Rule, which even in this situation is best seen as a necessary evil. If no end to the impasse is in sight after, say, six months, it is best to go for fresh Assembly elections in the hope the deadlock-causing parties might have learnt some lessons from the experience.

Nonetheless, a deadlocked Assembly resulting

in President's Rule is not as much of an oddity as it might appear. Uttar Pradesh was twice (in 1996 and 2002) placed under President's Rule because unclear election results forced political parties to adopt intractable positions. On both occasions, the crisis was on account of verdicts split three way — among the Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party, and the BJP. In 1996, the State was already under President's Rule when the election produced a hung House. The upshot was almost comic with the President issuing two proclamations on October 17, 1996 — the first to revoke President's Rule and the second to re-impose it. In U.P., the key to the problem rested with Mayawati just as in today's Bihar it rests with Mr. Paswan. In 1996 as in 2002, Ms. Mayawati was caught between the BJP, which she had condemned as "manuwadi," and Mulayam Singh, whom she self-confessedly abhorred. On each occasion, the prolonged drama came to an end with Ms. Mayawati and the "manuwadi" party joining forces against Mr. Mulayam Singh.

Bihar became a story foretold the day Mr. Paswan went on record to declare he preferred President's Rule to siding with either of his opponents. He has been widely criticised, by his political rivals as well as constitutional experts, for willingly allowing Bihar to slide into the uncertainties of Central Rule. Yet the LJP leader appears to be caught in a peculiar dilemma. If like Ms. Mayawati in U.P., he is looking to build an enduring constituency of Dalits and Muslims in Bihar, he must necessarily place himself in opposition to the RJD and the BJP. However, while Ms. Mayawati's many dalliances with the BJP may not have adversely affected her undisputed Dalit vote base, there is no evidence that Mr. Paswan commands anything like her committed following. For the LJP leader, President's Rule in Bihar is clearly a way to eat his cake and have it: he blocks Rabri Devi's return as Chief Minister, he keeps out the BJP, and he retains his Union Ministership. Bookmakers might already be taking bets on how far he can travel along this cynical path.

রাষ্ট্রপতিশাসিত বিহার

বিহারে রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসন যে অনিবার্য, তাহা আগেই বুঝা যাইতেছিল। প্রতিবেশী ঝাড়খণ্ডে খিড়কির দরজা দিয়া ক্ষমতা দখলের প্রয়াস বিরোধী পক্ষের তৎপরতায় কিছুটা ধাক্কা খাওয়ায় এবং সেই ধাক্কার টেউ জাতীয় রাজনীতিতেও প্রতিকূল প্রভাব ফেলায় বিহারের ক্ষেত্রে রাজ্যপাল তথা কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রক তথা কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব যে কোনও ঝুঁকি লইবেন না, তাহা একপ্রকার স্বতঃসিদ্ধই ছিল। বিরোধী পক্ষ বিজেপি-সংযুক্ত জনতা জোট একক গরিষ্ঠ প্রাক-নির্বাচনী জোট হওয়া সত্ত্বেও নিরঙ্কুশ গরিষ্ঠতার অনেক দূরে দৌড় সাঙ্গ করিয়া সরকার গড়ার দাবি না তোলায় রাজ্যপালের কাজটি অপেক্ষাকৃত সহজ হইয়া যায়। তৃতীয় শক্তি রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান কোনও মতেই লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের রাষ্ট্রীয় জনতা জোটকে ক্ষমতাসীন হইতে না দিবার পণ ঘোষণা করায় সেটা সহজতর হয়। তবু যে রাজ্যপাল বুটা সিংহ অযথা কালক্ষেপ করিতেছিলেন, তাহার কারণ সম্ভবত কংগ্রেস হাইকমান্ডের কাছ হইতে সবুজ সংকেতের অভাব। লালুপ্রসাদকে সমর্থনের লিখিত প্রতিশ্রুতি সম্বলিত চিঠি প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব লিখিয়া দেওয়ায় বুটা সিংহের বিভ্রান্তি আরও বাড়িয়াছিল। শেষ পর্যন্ত লালুপ্রসাদ-রাবড়ী দেবীর দাবি অগ্রাহ্য করিয়া রাজ্যপাল রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসনের সুপারিশ করায় বিহারে আপাতত সাংবিধানিক ঔপচারিকতা রক্ষিত হইল। তাহাতে রাজ্যের রাজনৈতিক অনিশ্চয়তার অবসান হইল, এমন কথা অবশ্য জোর দিয়া বলা যাইবে না।

রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন বিহারে লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের পনেরো বছরের নিরবচ্ছিন্ন আধিপত্যে ছেদ টানিয়াছে, এটুকু অবশ্য নিঃসংশয়ে বলা যায়। লালুপ্রসাদ অবশ্য চাপ দিতেছেন, রাবড়ী দেবী সরকার নিযুক্ত শীর্ষস্থানীয় প্রশাসনিক আমলা-অফিসারদের যেন সরানো না হয় এবং রাজ্যপালের উপদেষ্টা মনোনয়নের আগে যেন তাঁহার সহিত পরামর্শ করা হয়। মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার লালুপ্রসাদের আবদার শিরোধার্য করিবেন কিনা, কে জানে। তবে কেন্দ্রে কংগ্রেসের সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল মোর্চার সরকারে লালুপ্রসাদের জনা চক্ৰিশেক সাংসদের সমর্থনের ওজন নিশ্চয় মনমোহন সিংহের খেয়াস থাকিবে। বিজেপির সনিয়া-বিরোধী প্রচারের পর্বে লালুপ্রসাদ যে রূপ দৃঢ়ভাবে সনিয়ার পাশে দাঁড়াইয়াছিলেন, তাহাও কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব সহসা বিস্মৃত হইবে বলিয়া মনে হয় না। তা ছাড়া বিহারে আপাতত রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসন জারি হইলেও অ-বিজেপি 'ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ' সরকার গঠনে লালুপ্রসাদই যে শ্রেষ্ঠ বাজি, তাহা অস্বীকার করার উপায় নাই। সম্ভবত ভবিষ্যতের জন্য সেই সম্ভাবনা জিয়াইয়া রাখিতেই ত্রিশঙ্কু বিধানসভা ভাঙিয়া না দিয়া বহাল রাখা হইয়াছে। ইহার ফলে ঘোড়া কেনাবেচার সম্ভাবনাও জিয়াইয়া রাখা হইল। কেননা যে দল বা জোটই সরকার গড়ার মতো অবস্থায় উপনীত হইতে সফল হোক, দলত্যাগরোধ আইন এড়াইয়া অন্য দল ভাঙাইয়াই তাহা করা সম্ভব হইবো লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব, নীতীশকুমার ও রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান— সকলের ক্ষেত্রেই ইহা কমবেশি সত্য। অস্যার্থ, বিধানসভা জিয়াইয়া রাখিয়া দিয়া রাজ্যপাল দলবদলের অর্থাৎ আয়ারাম-গয়ারামদের খেলাও জিয়াইয়া রাখিলেন।

প্রশ্ন হইল, ইহা ছাড়া কি উপায়ান্তর ছিল? রাজ্যপাল বিধানসভা ভাঙিয়া পুনর্নির্বাচনের আদেশ দিতে পারিতেন বটে। কিন্তু সেই নির্বাচনও যে রাজ্যকে পুনরায় ত্রিশঙ্কু বিধানসভা উপহার দিত না, তাহার নিশ্চয়তা কী? উত্তরপ্রদেশের মতো বিহারেও যে কোনও একটি দল পরিষদীয় গরিষ্ঠতা পাইতেছে না, তাহার কারণ সেখানে রাজনীতির খণ্ডীকরণ। বিভিন্ন দল এখানে বিভিন্ন জাত-পাতের প্রতিনিধিত্ব করে। যখন অনগ্রসর ও দলিত বর্গগুলির নিজস্ব রাজনৈতিক সংগঠন ছিল না, তখন তাহারা হয় জাতীয় দলকেই ভোট দিত, না-হয় তাহাদের বুথে যাওয়ার অধিকারই ছিল না। এখন রামমনোহর লোহিয়া, জয়প্রকাশ নারায়ণ, কপূরী ঠাকুরের সামাজিক ন্যায়ের আন্দোলন এবং মণ্ডল রাজনীতির ব্যাপক অনুশীলনের ফলে হিন্দী বলয়ের হৃদয়পুরে উচ্চবর্ণের জাতীয় দলগুলির সমান্তরালে নিম্নবর্ণীয় খণ্ডিত জনগোষ্ঠীর নিজস্ব সব রাজনৈতিক সংগঠন গড়িয়া ওঠায় নির্বাচনী গরিষ্ঠতা নির্ভর করে এই সব খণ্ড জাতের সমর্থন সংগ্রহের উপর। সামাজিক স্তরভেদের বিভিন্ন সিঁড়িতে যেহেতু এই সব জাতের অবস্থান, তাই সব জাতের সংগঠন একই জাতীয় বা আঞ্চলিক দলকে সমর্থন করিতে পারে না। এই বাধ্যবাধকতাই নির্বাচনোত্তর পরিষদীয় গরিষ্ঠতা অনিশ্চিত করিয়া আইনসভাকে ত্রিশঙ্কু করিয়া তোলে। উপর্যুপরি নির্বাচনের অনুষ্ঠান করিলেই রাজনীতির এই খণ্ডীকরণ বা তাহার পিছনকার সামাজিক ভগ্নাংশকরণ ঘুচিয়া যাইবে না। তাই বিধানসভা ভাঙিয়া না দিয়া তাহা জিয়াইয়া রাখাই প্রকৃষ্ট পন্থা।

09 MAR 2005

KALAM RATIFIES PRESIDENT'S RULE ■ HOUSE IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION ■ RJD CHIEF, PASWAN SKIP MEET

CURTAINS FOR LALU REGIME

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 7. — Bihar was brought under President's Rule late tonight eight days after elections had thrown up a hung Assembly even as RJD chief and railway minister Mr Lalu Prasad decided to stay away from the Cabinet meeting held in the evening to approve Governor Mr Buta Singh's recommendation for Central rule.

President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam approved the Cabinet decision, Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesman Mr SM Khan said. The Assembly will be kept in suspended animation. This brings to an end the 15-year Lalu-Rabri rule.

Besides Mr Prasad, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan was also absent at today's

Cabinet meeting.

While the LJP leader and Union steel minister, who has been demanding President's Rule, could not make it because his flight was late, Mr Prasad and his principal lieutenant, Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, chose to keep away saying they did not want to approve imposition of President's Rule.

That the Centre would clear President's Rule today was hardly in doubt after Congress chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mr Paswan agreed to disagree. Mr Paswan refused to support the "secular alliance" as he felt the mandate was principally anti-RJD.

Mr Prasad's absence was deliberate. He met Mrs Gandhi and CPI-M general secretary Mr Harkishen Singh Surjeet, perhaps in a last-ditch effort

to ward off President's Rule. For, he has maintained that RJD is the single largest party and his coalition the one with the most seats.

Asked after his meeting with Mr Surjeet whether he would attend the Cabinet meeting, Mr Prasad said he didn't want to be a rubber stamp. He added: "I told Madam (Mrs Gandhi) I will stay with her till my last breath, making it clear that whatever happens in Bihar, the UPA alliance will continue. But it did not stop him from being bitter about the imposition of President's Rule for which he blamed Mr Paswan.

Mr Prasad ruled out fresh elections, maintaining that the RJD and his allies would form a government soon. He also said he would not ask for LJP's

Munda moves SC

NEW DELHI, March 7. — Former Jharkhand chief minister Mr Arjun Munda today challenged in the Supreme Court Governor Syed Sibtey Razi's decision to appoint Mr Sibhu Soren as the chief minister. The Supreme Court (coram: Lahoti, CJ; Dhar-madhikari and Lakshmanan, JJ) today adjourned till 14 March hearing on the petition challenging Goa Governor Mr SC Jamir's 2 February decision to dismiss the BJP government. The Bench observed that Mr Parrikar's counsel, Mr Soli Sorabjee's prediction that President's Rule would be imposed has come true. — PTI

expulsion from the UPA.

Paswan, secular politics & UPA: page 4



EXEUNT THE RAJA OF BIHARI Lalu Prasad after meeting Sonia Gandhi on Monday. — PTI

Bihar Governor recommends President's Rule

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 6. The Bihar Governor, Buta Singh, today recommended President's rule in the State as no political party or a coalition of parties was in a position to form a stable government. The Governor's report reached the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, this evening. The term of the Bihar Assembly ends tonight.

A formal press release in Patna stated that the Governor under Article 174 (2) of the Constitution had dissolved the outgoing Assembly whose term had come to an end. The Election Commission has notified the formation of the 13th Assembly, but its new members are yet to take oath.

Sonia meets Manmohan

The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, met Dr. Singh today. They were joined by Mr. Patil. It is understood that the Bihar situation was discussed.

Till late in the day, there was no indication that the Union Cabinet would meet to recommend President's rule. Official sources said the Cabinet would discuss the Bihar issue and recommend President's rule soon after the leaders of the two major allies, Lalu Prasad and Ram Vilas Paswan, returned to the capital. This is expected to take place in a day or two.

Mixed reaction

There has been mixed reaction to the latest development. The Congress, the Janata Dal (United) and the Bharatiya Janata Party seemed reconciled to the fact that there was no

other option. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) suggested that if no government was possible even after a spell of President's rule, political parties could agree to get the new House dissolved and have fresh elections.

As for the Lok Jan Shakti Party, it is happy to keep the RJD out of government, apparently not heeding to the JD(U) warning that President's rule meant rule by the Centre, in which Mr. Prasad, as a major UPA partner, is bound to have a major say.

Over the last few days, the Governor met representatives of the UPA, including Mr. Paswan and the Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, and those of the National Democratic Alliance. Only the RJD staked claim to form government on the basis of emerging as the single largest party. While Mr. Paswan told the Governor that he would not support either the NDA or the RJD, the NDA was not been able to muster the numbers to stake claim.

No acceptable formula

Intense negotiations took place between Mr. Paswan's LJP and the NDA, but no acceptable formula emerged. Mr. Paswan throughout the electioneering and after maintained that he would not mind the imposition of President's rule, but would certainly not like to see the RJD make a comeback or allow the BJP to get a foothold on power in the State.

Rajeev Dhawan, constitutional expert, felt that even if the imposition of President's rule was delayed by a few days "there can never be a vacuum" as Ms. Rabri Devi had been asked to continue as Chief Min-

ister until alternate arrangements were made. There were three options: One, Ms. Rabri Devi could continue. Two, between now and March 31 she could go the Assembly to get the State budget passed, or she could hand over charge to the next Chief Minister, if one has been appointed by then. Three, in the event of the budget not being passed, President's rule would have to be imposed and the budget would then be passed by Parliament.

The Governor has to be advised by a Council of Ministers or the Centre. In short, either a government has to be in place or President's rule has to be imposed. But there is no immediate constitutional crisis if President's rule is delayed for a while.

Another legal expert, P.P. Rao, said the new House could be constituted and the new members could take oath. A new leader of the House need not be appointed immediately. He felt this should be done before President's rule was imposed.

Politically, it would seem that the Congress was keen to consult both Mr. Prasad and Mr. Paswan before taking the next step. There is also a view that a few months of President's rule could help cool down tempers and create a proper climate for a rapprochement between the two squabbling UPA allies.

With Mr. Paswan, who has 29 MLAs in the new Assembly, bent upon voting against an RJD-led government or a government with the BJP in it, the arithmetic was just not adding up favourably towards a stable government.

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THE HINDU

07 MAR 2005

Rabri Devi stakes claim

By K. Balchand

PATNA, MARCH 6. The caretaker Chief Minister of Bihar, Rabri Devi, today staked her claim to form a coalition government.

Accompanied by the Rashtriya Janata Dal supremo and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, the Chief Minister called on the Governor, Buta Singh, in the morning and requested him to invite her to form the government as she happened to lead the single largest party with 75 MLAs.

Ms. Rabri Devi also submitted letters of support from the Congress (10 MLAs), the Nationalist Congress Party (3), the CPI-M (1), and the Bahujan Samaj Party (2) to back her claim she had the requisite numbers.

The RJD informed the Governor that the CPI would be backing a secular government once it came into existence.

The RJD told the Governor that it was confident of securing support from other parties and independents as well and stressed that the floor of the House was the appropriate place to test the numbers.

The other reason given was that no other party or configuration had staked its claim so far and that their exercise had been limited to preventing the

RJD from forming the government. The RJD cited the precedent set by the then President, Shankar Dayal Sharma, inviting Atal Bihari Vajpayee to form the government at the Centre on the basis that he happened to be the leader of the single largest party.

It was so even in the case of Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh. In Bihar, Nitish Kumar was invited by the Governor, V.C. Pandey, in 2000 when Mr. Kumar demis-

tted office in less than seven days even without putting his claim to test.

The Governor, according to Mr. Prasad, said he would take an appropriate decision. The term of the present House expires tomorrow and the Governor notified the constitution of the new House yesterday.

Mr. Prasad said he would not mind if any other party or group staked its claim if it had numbers exceeding that of the RJD.

Though he was unwilling to specify the numbers with the RJD, according to party sources, he has 106 MLAs, 16 short of the half-way mark of 122 in a House of 243.

Mr. Prasad said he was not in favour of President's rule and that the Independents would have to reckon with the situation and take a decision accordingly.

Buta Singh: 122 MLAs needed

UNI reports:

The Bihar Governor, Buta Singh, today said that only a political group, which has the letters of support or affidavits from 122 legislators would be invited to form the Government in the State.

The Governor told this to the various delegations, including that of the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the National Democratic Alliance and independents, who had called on him at the Raj Bhavan. After meeting the Governor, the Bharatiya Janata Party national vice-president, Sushil Kumar Modi, leading the NDA delegation, told this to newsmen.

Mr. Modi elaborated that all independents would have to submit their letters of support to the Governor.

Paswan set to resign as Minister

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MARCH 5. The United Progressive Alliance's political establishment was tonight bracing itself for the departure of the Lok Jan Shakti Party leader, Ram Vilas Paswan, from the Union Cabinet. The UPA's political managers expect Mr. Paswan to send in his resignation tomorrow before he hitches his wagon to the anti-Lalu Prasad camp in Bihar.

These managers believe

that Mr. Paswan would make available his crucial 34 legislators to a Nitish Kumar-led arrangement in order to prevent the Rashtriya Janata Dal from getting a gubernatorial invitation to have the first crack at forming the government.

The UPA is not unduly worried about the loss of the four members Mr. Paswan has in the Lok Sabha. The calculation is that the loss would be easily made up in the changed scenario.

Bihar edges near President's rule

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 4 MARCH

WITH Lalu Prasad Yadav failing to get the "secular" spectrum back, his party's claim to lead the next government and the NDA's unwillingness to enter into a political deal with the LJP on Ram Vilas Paswan's terms, Bihar on Friday looked headed for a spell of President's rule.

The term of the outgoing Assembly comes to an end on Sunday and the new House has to be constituted by March 7. Till late on Friday evening, none of the major players have been able to

garner the support of enough MLAs to receive the go-ahead for forming the next government.

Lalu Yadav was expecting the governor to play ball but the Jharkhand coup has sealed its possibility.

With the government at the Centre facing a major image crisis after the Congress-inspired adventurism in Goa and Jharkhand, the Patna Raj Bhavan will be asked to go by the rule book.

Ram Vilas Paswan, who was expecting the NDA to make the first move for forming an alternate government, also did not receive any good news on Friday. The BJP is still backing Nitish Ku-

mar's claim to lead the next government. The party is learnt to have made it clear that formal negotiations can begin only if Mr Paswan leaves the UPA. There is also resentment in the BJP over Mr Paswan's continued attack on the party.

While the NDA has a strength of 92 in a House of 243, the RJD, which won 75 seats on its own in the just-concluded elections, has the backing of Congress (10), NCP (3) and the lone CPM member, taking its tally to 89. Mr Paswan's LJP, with 29 MLAs in its kitty, claims to have the support of seven MLAs belonging to the CPI(ML), Samajwadi Party (4) and BSP (2) for its "anti-RJD, anti-BJP" line.

The CPI, which has three MLAs in the newly-elected House, has refused to back the RJD's efforts to secure the governor's nod to form the next government, though it has asserted that it was for a "secular government". NDA leaders here are not expecting any realignment to take place before the imposition of President's rule. The imposition of central rule is expected to increase the anxiety levels of smaller parties and kick off real negotiations. The upper caste leaders in the LJP, meanwhile, have been trying to get the NDA to back their leader's candidacy for the chief minister's post.

3 wise men fret over unfair play

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 4 MARCH

SHARING the widespread anger over the "partisan and unprincipled" role of governors in Jharkhand and Goa, three ex-Prime Ministers on Friday came forward to express their "distress" over the developments and described them as "a dangerous signal for the future of democracy in the country."

Saying the current discourse on what happened in Goa or Jharkhand needed to be conducted above party levels, Mr Chandra Shekhar, Mr I.K. Gujral and Mr H.D. Deve Gowda in a joint statement regretted the "flouting of all constitutional norms (in Jharkhand) as the governor did not invite the leader of the largest pre-poll alliance/single largest party." The open criticism of the three Prime Ministers is seen a shot in the arm for the NDA.

Central rule looms on Bihar

OUR BUREAU

Patna/New Delhi, March 4: Bihar looked to be inching towards at least a brief spell of central rule on the sixth day of the political stalemate over government formation.

Raj Bhavan sources said governor Buta Singh was determined not to invite any person to form a government unless he or she could categorically convince him, with necessary documents, about commanding a majority in the 243-member House.

The elections have thrown up a critically fractured mandate. The governor issued a

notification today for the constitution of the Assembly.

"The criticism faced by the governors of Jharkhand and Goa has shut all scope for adventurism in Bihar," a source said.

"Goa has been put under President's rule despite the Congress proving a majority in the House today. The Jharkhand governor has been forced to advance the date of majority test. The iron hand will continue to be wielded in Bihar, too," the source added.

Even the zest with which the Rashtriya Janata Dal had been insisting that it, by virtue of being the single largest

party, would stake claim to form the government appeared to be disappearing today.

"What do we stake claim for when we know that the magic figure of 122 is hard to get? Central rule is not to our liking but we do not see any option unless (Ram Vilas) Paswan reconsiders his (anti-RJD) stance," a senior RJD leader said.

The situation took a turn for the worse as the number of Independent MLAs who had vowed not to support a government having any truck with the RJD rose to nine from six yesterday. The 17 Independents have formed a front of sorts.

Even the Left parties—the CPM and the CPI, which are pre-poll allies of the RJD—distanced themselves from Laloo Prasad Yadav's efforts to form a government.

The RJD chief today called up CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan, seeking a letter of support for the governor. Bardhan refused and said his party's three MLAs would make no difference to government formation.

According to the CPI leader, "his (Laloo Prasad's) tally would come to about 95 seats" with the support of the Congress, the NCP, the BSP and the Left. "Even then he would

require the support of Paswan and his 29 MLAs."

A party statement said President's rule "is unacceptable to the CPI", yet Bardhan told Laloo Prasad he would consider giving a letter of support only after the RJD chief staked claim on his own as the chief of the single largest party.

The CPM leadership in Delhi is unhappy about the party's Bihar state committee giving the governor a letter of support for the RJD. They believe their lone MLA can hardly make a difference to the numbers game.

The Janata Dal (United), the BJP's ally and, with 55

MLAs, the largest party opposing the RJD, also went on the backfoot during a meeting of its legislators. They were unanimous about wanting Nitya Kumar as their leader but authorised the party's central leadership to decide at an "appropriate time".

The BJP, which with 37 MLAs is larger than Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party, appeared to be running out of patience. "President's rule will be unfortunate. But the person whose stubborn stance is preventing government formation will be responsible for it," BJP general secretary Giriraj Singh said in a veiled attack on Paswan.

Lalu draws a blank at 10 Janpath

Statesman News Service *Bihar*

NEW DELHI/PATNA, March 3. — Mr Lalu Prasad today met Mrs Sonia Gandhi at her residence, apparently to ease the way for Mrs Rabri Devi to continue as chief minister, but got no firm commitment.

Mr Prasad was probably hoping for an assurance that Mr Buta Singh, a loyal Congressman for many years and now the Governor, will invite the chief minister to form a government after the polls.

The RJD leader had apparently said that with Independents and other allies, it has 110 MLAs supporting his wife.

Despite the defeat, the RJD supremo has put up a brave face saying that his party has won the largest number of seats in the Assembly and the pre-poll alliance has emerged the strongest.

The LJP leader, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, has already met Mrs Gandhi and asked for the formation of a government that does not include either the RJD or the BJP. The LJP's 29 MLAs hold the key to government formation, but he and Mrs Gandhi did not appear to agree on the RJD issue.

Mr Paswan met the Governor today and requested him not to invite either the RJD or the BJP. "The LJP will oppose the RJD both inside and outside the House if the latter was given a chance to form the government," Mr Paswan told the media after the meeting. Sources said, Mr Buta Singh told Mr Paswan: "We are old friends in politics and I will not do anything unconstitutional."

More Bihar, Jharkhand
reports on page 4

THE STATESMAN

04 MAR 2005

Cong against grabbing power at any cost in Bihar

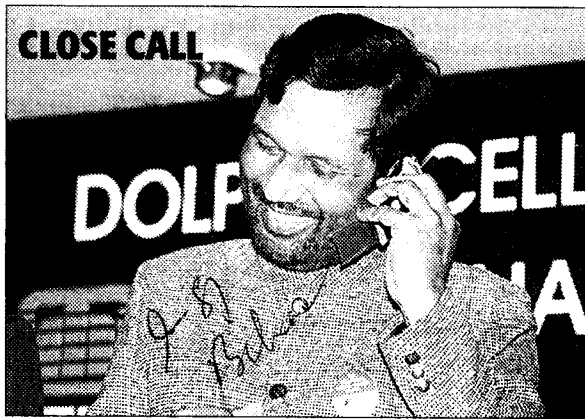
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 3 MARCH

THE Jharkhand crisis seems to be prompting the Congress to abandon its plans to repeat its Ranchi performance in Patna. With Ms Sonia Gandhi coming under heavy shelling for the crisis in Jharkhand, the Congress is learnt to have indicated its reluctance to back Lalu Prasad Yadav's "grab-power-at-any-cost" project. The development could lead to a brief spell of President's rule in Bihar.

The numbers, as of now, are clearly stacked against the RJD and the governor will be loathe to take a step which will spark off another political crisis. Lok Janshakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan hammered the message when he met Mr Buta Singh in the Patna Raj Bhavan on Thursday morning. Wary of the Jharkhand drama being re-enacted there, he warned the Bihar governor against facilitating a back-door entry of the Rabri Devi government as the numbers were hopelessly stacked against her.

With fears growing of a RJD-led government being sworn in — a feeling which gathered momentum after the Congress on Wednesday extended its support to Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav's efforts to muster the numbers — a worried Mr Paswan rushed to the Raj Bhavan in Patna to pre-empt any such move. Accompanying him were all 29 MLAs belonging to his party.

Mr Paswan, during the hour-long session with Mr Singh, forced him to take out the calculator to

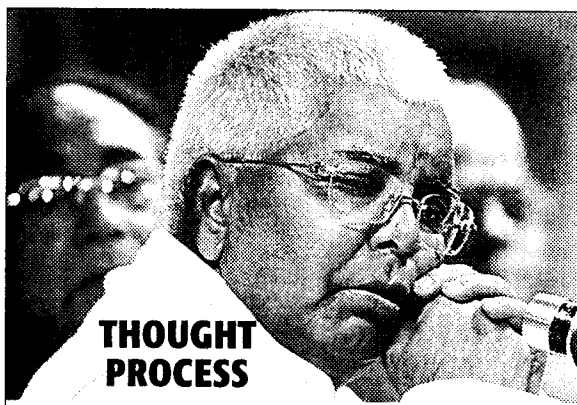


hammer the fact that as many as 135 MLAs—all of them belonging to various political parties—were arraigned against Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav. These included, besides his group of 29 legislators, seven belonging to the CPI (ML) (L), Samajwadi Party (4) and the CPI (3). "We're a solid block of 43 MLAs. Add to it the 92 belonging to the NDA. You get a figure of 135, which has already come out in the open against any move to install an RJD government. And this did not include any of the 17 Independents," the LJP chief told newsmen after emerging from the meeting. He claimed that the three BSP MLAs would defy their party leadership to vote against Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav's party.

Don't violate the Constitution by inviting a person who did not have the requisite numbers to form the next government — that was the stern message delivered by Mr Paswan to governor Buta Singh. President APJ Abdul Kalam's decision to summon Jharkhand governor Syed Sibtey

Razi to get to the bottom of the mess was also cited, as if to warn him against repeating the mistake. Even as Mr Paswan stuck to his "anti-RJD, anti-BJP" theme, political observers could detect a subtle shift in his stance. The BJP remained anathema to him, but that wasn't the case with the BJP's alliance partner, the JD (U). The LJP chief dropped enough hints to suggest that he was willing to seek the JD (U) in taking a shot at the government-formation exercise. But NDA is unlikely to give up Nitish Kumar's claim to lead the next government.

The issue was deliberated at length at the meeting of the LJP's national executive, which preceded the discussions with the governor. Majority of the leaders, including a host of newly-elected MLAs, were in favour of joining hands with the NDA, now that the Congress had expressed its preference for Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav over Mr Ram Vilas Paswan.



Rabri rule in Laluland still a distant dream

Ashok K. Mishra
PATNA 3 MARCH

SUDDENLY, things are going astray for Lalu Prasad Yadav who seemed determined in his bid to install the RJD-led government in Bihar. Events in quick succession ranging from the developments in Jharkhand to setbacks suffered by him at the home turf have put spanner in his efforts to cobble up the majority.

Only on Wednesday, Mr Yadav was exulting after the installation of the Shibu Soren government in Jharkhand. Perhaps Mr Yadav was getting the cue that the governor of Bihar, Mr Buta Singh, will also pave the path for him to form the RJD government. But the ruckus spawning over the government formation in Jharkhand and the role of the Jharkhand governor coming under close scrutiny, it is now widely assumed here that the Bihar governor will invite the RJD for the government formation only after he is satisfied about the numbers.

But in the number game, Mr Yadav is falling short of the magical number of 122 in a House of 243 numbers. The LJP which has a strength of 29 MLAs again called upon the governor on Thursday to reiterate his earlier stand that it would in no case support the RJD government.

Six Independents out of 17 met on Thursday and adopted a resolution to vote against the RJD

Even the CPI (ML) which has won seven seats this time has made it clear that it would oppose the RJD.

Mr Yadav was, however, banking on the support of CPI (ML). Worse still, the BSP with

2 MLAs had also decided to oppose the RJD government when it came to voting in the state Assembly. The BSP leader Mayawati had assured support to Mr Yadav but the two party MLAs have decided to defy the party diktat to oppose the RJD. Even six Independents out of 17 held a meeting here on Thursday and adopted a resolution to vote against the RJD. That apart, the Samajwadi Party with four MLAs had already written to the governor saying that they would not back the RJD in the government formation.

SP will vote against RJD in Bihar House

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 3 MARCH

AS its campaign to secure the ouster of Mr Shibu Soren as Jharkhand chief minister gains momentum, the NDA on Thursday received support from an unexpected quarter — the Samajwadi Party. The party, which has no love lost for either Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav or his principal backer — the Congress, tried to add salt to their wounds by terming the political developments in Jharkhand as "unhealthy" for both the country and the democracy.

On a day when RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav met Congress president Sonia Gandhi to discuss the Bihar logjam, Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh added to the RJD strongman's woes by declaring that his party will vote against the RJD in the state assembly. The Samajwadi Party won four seats in the just-concluded assembly polls in Bihar. These include its state unit chief Dadan Pahalwan (Dumraon), who has his own axe to grind against Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav. With the developments in Jharkhand, besides casting a shadow over Bihar, triggering a nationwide uproar, the Samajwadi Party couldn't conceal its glee over the embarrassment being caused to the Congress.

With the spotlight on the Congress' political reflexes in the wake of its actions in Goa and Jharkhand, the Samajwadi Party feels that the Centre will now think twice before striking in Uttar Pradesh — the politically-crucial state which is at the top of the Congress' organisational-revival roadmap. After taking a dig at the Goa BJP chief minister Manohar Parrikar, the Samajwadi Party leaders were gripped by fear of repeat performance in Uttar Pradesh, where the mother-son duo of Sonia-Rahul had opened a front against the Mulayam Singh Yadav government for its alleged failure in controlling the law and order situation.

MAR 2005

পাসোসায়ান অনড়, বুটা সতর্ক, এখনই শিকে ছিড়েছে না লালুর

সূত্রত বসু • পটনা

৩ মার্চ: বিহারে সরকার গড়ার ব্যাপারে অনিশ্চয়তা কাটল না। কাল কংগ্রেসের সমর্থনের চিঠি পেয়ে লালপ্রসাদ-রাবতী দেবী যথেষ্ট উজ্জীবিত হয়েছিলেন। তাঁরা আশা করেছিলেন, অঙ্কের জোর দেখালে রাজ্যপাল রাবতী দেবীকে সরকার গড়তে ডাকবেন। কিন্তু পরপর দু'টি ঘটনায় আজ পরিস্থিতি অনেকটাই ঠমকে গিয়েছে:

● রামবিলাস পাসোসায়ান ও সিপিআই (এমএল) নেতারা আজ রাজ্যপালের সঙ্গে দেখা করে ফের জানিয়েছেন, তাঁদের দলের অর্থস্বন পাঠায়নি। দু'দলের নেতাই তাঁদের বিধায়কদের নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা করতে অনুরোধ করেছেন রাজ্যপালকে।

● বাড়খণ্ডের ঘটনার পরে অনেকটাই সতর্ক বিহারের রাজ্যপাল বুটা সিংহ। তিনি চটজলদি কোনও সিদ্ধান্ত নেনেন না, তেমন ইঙ্গিতই আজ পাওয়া গিয়েছে।

আজ রামবিলাস পাসোসায়ান তাঁর দল লোক জনশক্তি পার্টির সব বিধায়ককে নিয়ে রাজ্যপালের সঙ্গে দেখা করেন। তিনি রাজ্যপালকে বলেন, তাঁর দল কোনওমতেই আরজেডি বা এনডিএ জোটকে সমর্থন করবে না। এর আগে তাঁর দলের পক্ষ থেকে লিখিত ভাবে এই কথা রাজ্যপালকে জানানো হয়েছিল। অন্য দিকে, সিপিআই (এমএল)-এর এক প্রতিনিধি দলও আজ রাজ্যপালের কাছে গিয়ে একই কথা জানিয়ে এসেছে। সিপিআই (এমএল) বিহারে ৭টি আসন পেয়েছে।

রামবিলাস এবং সিপিআই (এমএল) দু'পক্ষই অনমনীয় মনোভাব নেওয়ার বিহারে সরকার তৈরির বিষয়টি জটিলতর হল। ৭ মার্চের মধ্যে কোনও নতুন রাস্তা না বার হলে বিহারে রাষ্ট্রপতি শাসন জারি হবে। এ দিকে, আজই বিহারের ৬ জন পুরনো কংগ্রেস নেতা সনিয়া গান্ধীকে এক ফাঙ্গ-বার্তায় সিদ্ধান্ত পুনর্বিবেচনা করার অনুরোধ জানিয়েছেন।

রাজ্যপাল রাবতী দেবীকে সরকার গড়ার

জন্য ডাকলে বিধায়কদের নিরাপত্তা নিয়ে সমস্যা হতে পারে বলে মনে করছে সিপিআই (এমএল) ও লোক জনশক্তি পার্টি। সিপিআই (এমএল) জানিয়েছে, আস্থা ভোট হলে তাঁদের দলের বিধায়কেরা যাতে বিধানসভায় পৌঁছে তাঁদের রায় দিতে পারেন, তার ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে রাজ্যপালকে। পাসোসায়ান এবং সিপিআই (এমএল) সভাপতি দীপঙ্কর ভট্টাচার্যের আশঙ্কা, ভোটের দিন তাঁদের বিধায়কেরা যাতে উপস্থিত না হতে পারেন, তার ঠেঁই চালাবেন লালু। দীপঙ্করবাবু বলেছেন, “শাহবুদ্দিন যা বলেছিল, তাই করতে শুরু করেছে। আমাদের আশঙ্কা, এই পরিস্থিতিতে বিধায়কদের হত্যা বা অপহরণ করা হতে পারে। বিধায়কেরা যাতে বিধানসভায় পৌঁছে ভোট দিতে পারেন, সে জন্য শাহবুদ্দিনকে রাজ্য থেকে বার করে দেওয়া দরকার। আমরা সুপ্রিম কোর্টে শাহবুদ্দিনের জামিন বাতিল করার জন্য মামলা করব।”

সিপিআই (এমএল)-এর দুই বিধায়ক গোপালগঞ্জে জেলে রয়েছেন। সেখানে তাঁদের

বিপদের আশঙ্কা রয়েছে মনে করছেন দীপঙ্করবাবু। ওই দুই বিধায়ককে যাতে অহিলে পটনার বেউর জেলে সরিয়ে আনা যায় তার ব্যবস্থা করার জন্যও রাজ্যপালের কাছে আবেদন জানিয়েছে সিপিআই (এমএল)। পাসোসায়ানও একই সুরে বলেছেন, “নবনির্বাচিত বিধায়কদের উপরে হামলায় আশঙ্কা রয়েছে। আমি রাজ্যপালের কাছে তাঁদের নিরাপত্তার ব্যবস্থা করার আবেদন জানিয়েছি।” লালুর প্রতি কটাক্ষ করে রামবিলাস বলেছেন, “উনি হেরে যাওয়াতেই পটনায় হত্যা, অপহরণ বন্ধ হয়ে গিয়েছে। এর থেকেই বুঝে নিন, কারা এতদিন এই সব কাজ করছিল।”

আস্থা ভোটের সময়ে রামবিলাসের দলকে যাতে বিধানসভার বাইরে রাখা যায়, তার জন্য ঠেঁই চালাচ্ছেন লালু। কিন্তু রামবিলাসকে রাজ্য করতে পারেননি কংগ্রেস নেতারাও। আজ রামবিলাস সদলে রাজ্যপালকে যা বলেছেন, তাতে স্পষ্ট হয়েছে, তাঁরা বিধানসভা থেকে সরে থাকবেন না, সক্রিয় ভূমিকাই নিতে চান। যা

অবশ্যই লালুর মাথাব্যথার কারণ। শেষ ঠেঁই চালাতে লালু অবশ্য এখন দ্বিধিত।

রাজভবন থেকে বেরিয়ে রামবিলাস বলেন, তাঁর দলের ২৯ জন বিধায়ক ছাড়াও সমাজবাদী পার্টির ৪ জন এবং সিপিআই (এমএল)-এর ৭ জন বিধায়ক বিধানসভায় একই ভূমিকা নেনেন। মায়াবতী লালুকে সমর্থন করলেও বিহারে তাঁর দলের বিধায়কেরা লালুর বিরুদ্ধেই ভোট দিতে চান বলে রামবিলাস জানিয়েছেন।

এই অবস্থায় বিহারে যে কোনও জোটের পক্ষেই সরকার গঠন করা কঠিন হয়ে দাঁড়াল। পরিস্থিতি সেই রাষ্ট্রপতি-শাসনের দিকেই যাচ্ছে বলে মনে করছেন বিহারের রাজনৈতিক মহল। তবে রাষ্ট্রপতির শাসন জারি করার আগে রাজ্যপাল কোনও একটি জোটকে সরকার তৈরির জন্য ডাকবেন বলেই মনে করছেন অনেক রাজনৈতিক নেতা। তবে কোনও জোটকে সুযোগ দেওয়া নিয়ে রাজ্যপাল যথেষ্ট চিন্তাভাবনা করেই সিদ্ধান্ত নেনেন বলে রাজভবনের একটি সূত্র জানিয়েছে।

UPA-LEFT PANEL ON EC 'TRANSGRESSIONS'

Paswan offers Sonia options

2/3
5/1 9-8 Bihar

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 1. — Lok Janashakti Party leader Mr Ram Vilas Paswan today met UPA chairperson Mrs Sonia Gandhi and urged her to look for a government involving the JD-U, the Congress and other parties including the LJP but keeping out the RJD and the BJP or have President's Rule.

The Congress is hoping for a secular alliance involving both the RJD and the LJP. Congress spokesman Mr Anand Sharma said the move towards a secular government was still in place.

A meeting of the UPA leaders tonight saw near "universal unanimity" on the formation of secular, non-NDA governments in Bihar and Jharkhand. The UPA and the Left agreed to form a small committee to look at the "transgressions by the Election Commission" during the Bihar polls. Though Mr Lalu Prasad was away in Patna, his lieutenants were present and there was considerable criticism of the EC for not allowing certain RJD leaders to enter some constituencies. Apart from Mrs Gandhi and Dr Manmohan Singh, Mr Paswan too attended the UPA meeting.

Three days after the elections results, Mr Prasad spoke about sitting in the Opposition in the event of a failure to

prove his majority. He, however, said that it was the responsibility of the secular parties to work out a solution.

Asked whether any feelers were sent to the JD-U, Mr Sharma wondered why the Congress should contact a party that is part of the NDA. Asked if the JD-U was "untouchable", he said the Congress does not use such words, but would certainly not have a BJP ally as a partner. The BJP has floated the possibility of a JD(U)-LJP government with outside support from BJP.

Mr Paswan said the 132 MLAs who do not belong to either RJD or BJP together could form a government. But it would mean the JD-U breaking away from the BJP and the Congress and the LJP accepting it. Mr Paswan said the RJD is playing its last card — the secular one. He spoke of President's Rule for at least six months and seemed happy with a Congress chief minister, especially if he or she were a Muslim. He also met Mr Arjun Singh and Mr Ahmed Patel.

The BJP is confident that Mr Paswan may not be able to support the RJD without facing a revolt in his party. The BJP believes that most of the LJP MLAs who are from forward caste with money and muscle power are keen that a non-RJD government should be formed soon.

Rabri elected leader, NDA plea to Governor: page 4

THE STATESMAN

02 MAR 2005

Rabri elected leader, NDA plea to Governor

960 & 971

PATNA, March 1. — In an indirect message that the party in no way is going to succumb to Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's demand for the appointment of a Muslim to the post of the chief minister, Mrs Rabri Devi was elected as the leader of the RJD Legislature Party here today.

The RJD also staked its claim to form the next government even as the BJP and the SP urged the Governor, Mr Buta Singh, to not invite the RJD for government formation as that would tantamount to being an anti-democratic step.

The BSP today decided to extend its support to a "secular government" in Bihar, led either by the RJD or any other combi-

nation. BSP general secretary Mr Azad Gandhi said Ms Mayawati had written a letter to the Bihar Governor extending her party's support to a "secular government". Asked whether it meant that the party, with two MLAs, would support the RJD, Mr Gandhi said RJD was also one of the secular parties.

However, the CPI-ML Liberation, having seven MLAs, requested the Governor in a letter today not to invite either the RJD or the NDA to form a new government in the state.

Bihar SP president Mr Dadan Singh also met the Governor with a similar demand. "Our party will neither support the BJP nor the RJD," he said.

The LJP had already sent a missive to the Governor explaining its stand of not backing

either the RJD or the BJP to provide a new dispensation.

Emerging out of the RJD's meeting, Mr Prasad said his party being the single largest party would stake claim to form the next government. "I will rather prefer sitting in the Opposition in the event of failure to prove majority in the House than going to be cowed down by Mr Paswan's antics," the railway minister said. "Lalu *ghabranewala nahin hai; main patkania dunga...* (I am not worried. No can harm me, rather I will beat them at the opportune time), he said and added that he would move to the villages to apprise the masses as to how "some people conspired against him" to unseat his government.

Stating that he was not in favour of imposition of President's Rule just after the polls, he said: "The RJD was not made for supporting President's Rule. We will form the government." At the same time, he asserted that there would be no threat to the UPA government at the Centre.

Lambasting the Election Commission for "acting at the instance of the Opposition," he charged that the EC appointed tainted officials in some districts, making the poll process complex. Mr Prasad also accused the EC of targeting Md Shahabuddin, RJD MP from Siwan.

Earlier in the day, a delegation of NDA leaders, called on the Governor and submitted a list of their MLAs. The delegation urged the Governor not to invite the RJD since the mandate was totally against the ruling party.

In Delhi, JD-U parliamentary board chairman Mr Sharad Yadav today ruled out parting ways with the BJP-led NDA to break the logjam in government formation in Bihar.

Shahabuddin

As part of behind the scene manoeuvres, RJD MP Md Shahabuddin met Independent MLA Tarkeshwar Singh, lodged in Buxar Jail, yesterday.

The incident prompted the state home (prison) department to issue a notice to the jail authorities today. Sources said Shahabuddin went to the jail to meet the newly-elected Independent MLA from Masrakh in a bid to muster his support for the RJD. The MP was reportedly allowed to carry his cell phone inside the jail.

Rabri steps down, Paswan seals Bihar deadlock

HTC and Agencies
Patna/New Delhi, Feb 28

LJP CHIEF Ram Vilas Paswan on Monday wrote to Governor Buta Singh stating his party's decision not to be part of any exercise that involved the RJD or the BJP in forming a new dispensation.

The letter came even as the party diluted its stand on imposing central rule in Bihar, saying that it should be the last option.

Paswan's letter, party sources said, was an attempt to pre-empt possible RJD moves to claim support of the LJP in forming a government. The RJD is set to meet the Governor on Tuesday to stake its claim. Paswan later said he would explore the possibility of government formation with the JD(U) if it parted ways with the BJP.

However, secular parties saw in Paswan's letter — and his new spin on central rule — the first glimmer of hope of a possible later-day rapprochement between the LJP and the RJD.

They hoped the LJP's 28 MLAs could abstain — and reduce the effective strength of the House — if the RJD, as the single largest party, is asked to prove its majority. There is, however, some confusion about the LJP's exact numbers as all its MLAs did not contest on a common symbol, which

makes them easy prey for poaching. The hope of the LJP's indirect support is linked to the reasoning that Paswan cannot, without risking his Muslim base, allow the NDA to take over the reins of Bihar even though the saffron camp would have read a hope in Paswan's latest stance.

The picture is likely to become clear when Congress chief Sonia Gandhi meets Lalu and Paswan during the UPA's Coordination Committee meeting in Delhi on Tuesday. But backchannel efforts to broker peace have been on since Sunday, with Sonia's political secretary Ahmed Patel in touch with Paswan and the RJD leadership.

Earlier, chief minister Rabri Devi tendered her resignation to the Governor and was asked to continue till the new government was formed. She claimed a "secular" government would be formed.

BJP keeps options open

The BJP said it had kept all its options, including a post-poll alliance with the LJP, open to cobble together a majority in the Assembly. "The electorate has rejected the Lalu-Rabri regime", BJP MP Sushil Kumar Modi said, adding, "we are exploring ways to form an NDA government. We are in touch with several parties, including the LJP".



Lalu Prasad Yadav and Rabri Devi talk to reporters after Rabri submitted her resignation to the Bihar Governor in Patna.

Bhajan Lal virtually out of the race

Pankaj Vohra
New Delhi, February 28

PRESSURE IS mounting on the Congress high command to appoint a Jat as the next Haryana CM. Of the 67 successful candidates, over 25 are Jats. Many of them have won from the Jat heartland of Rohtak, Jind, Kaithal, Jhajjar and Sonapat, considered Om Prakash Chautala's strongholds.

The massive support extended by the Jats has virtually ensured that PCC chief Bhajan Lal is out of the race for the chief ministership. However, Bhajan Lal has not given up and is confident that the high command will decide on him.

Sonia Gandhi on Monday appointed two observers — Ashok Gehlot and P.M. Sayeed — for the Congress Legislature Party meeting in Chandigarh on Tuesday. Bhajan Lal and Bhupinder Singh Hooda, another chief ministerial contender, met the Congress president. Supporters of Rao Birender Singh, MLA and former minister, have also been lobbying for him with senior Congress leaders.

Bhajan Lal's claim would have been the strong had the Congress not done so well in the Jat heartland. But the results have upset his calculations and ambitions.

The Congress has never been popular among the Jats of western Uttar Pradesh and Haryana but enjoyed their support in Rajasthan till just before the last assembly polls.

No claim without MLAs' list, says Guv

Agencies
Ranchi, February 28

HECTIC ACTIVITY in both the NDA and UPA camps is on as both staked claim to form the new government. Jharkhand governor Syed Sibtey Razi said on Monday that, without the election of a Legislature Party leader supported by a list of MLAs, it was not possible to consider the claim.

When a delegation comprising chief minister Arjun Munda and JD(U) president Inder Singh Namdhari met the Governor and staked

their claim in the morning, Razi asked if they had chosen their leader and possessed a list of supporting MLAs, a Raj Bhawan release said.

BJP general secretary Rajnath Singh told reporters that the Governor had asked them to elect a "Legislature Party leader and then approach him with a formal request to form the government".

The BJP-JD(U) combine, which has bagged 36 seats between them, is also counting on the support of rebel leader Madhu Kora, who emerged a winner as an Independent. State JD(U) president

Darshan Singh Namdhari will meet BJP leaders on Monday, party sources said.

The Sonia bond

Asserting that the Congress was committed to forming secular governments in Bihar and Jharkhand, a party spokesman on Monday said Sonia Gandhi will hold talks with Lalu Prasad Yadav and Ramvilas Paswan.

"Sonia will hold talks with Prasad and Paswan since we're committed to progressive secular governments in the two states", party spo-

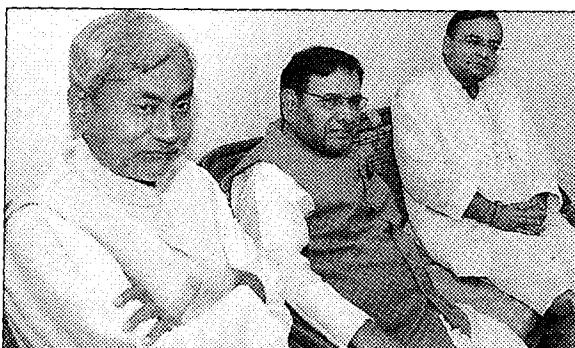
kesman Anand Sharma said. Announcing that the party would be staking its claim to form government in Jharkhand, Sharma said Sonia had appointed two senior party leaders — Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and former Chhattisgarh chief minister Ajit Jogi — as observers for the state to supervise the election of a CLP leader, as also firm up the strategy for government formation.

He said a Congress-JMM government in Jharkhand would be supported by the RJD, Nationalist Congress Party and Left parties.

Munda re-elected

AFTER A daylong drama, Arjun Munda was re-elected the BJP's Legislature Party leader on Monday, senior BJP leader Venkaiah Naidu said. Munda's name was proposed by senior MLA and former Union minister Karia Munda and state unit president and MLA Raghubar Das.

Agencies, Ranchi



JD(U) leaders Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav with BJP leader Arun Jaitley at an NDA meet in New Delhi on Sunday.

Deadlock continues in Bihar

By Our Special Correspondent

PATNA, FEB. 28. Just hours after the Bihar Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, put in her papers, the Lok Jan Shakti Party chief and Union Steel Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, initiated a move apparently seeking to pre-empt the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the National Democratic Alliance from forming the Government.

Ms. Rabri Devi called on the Governor, Buta Singh, and submitted her resignation letter after the RJD failed to obtain a majority on its own in the Assembly election. Mr. Singh asked her to continue in office till alternative arrangements were made. The RJD supremo and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, accompanied her to the Raj

Bhavan.

Mr. Singh said that he would follow the constitutional process in the formation of the government when asked about the fractured verdict.

In the evening, Mr. Paswan sent a party delegation to the Raj Bhavan submitting a memorandum that his party would not support the RJD or the NDA. He said his party would take a decision at its national executive meeting in New Delhi on March 3.

Mr. Paswan changed his stand on President's rule as the last option, saying he favoured a government excluding the RJD and the BJP but was unable to suggest any alternative.

Though he was not averse to joining hands with the Janata Dal (United), Mr. Paswan did

not consider it feasible till it parted company with the Bharatiya Janata Party. He put the ball in the JD(U)'s court hoping that it would take the initiative in the matter.

Samajwadi Party for new formation

The Samajwadi Party, which has four MLAs, also favours a new formation. The State unit chief, Daddan Pahelwan, said his party would not support the RJD or the BJP. He hoped that the JD(U) leader, Nitish Kumar, would come out of the NDA and join hands with Mr. Paswan.

RJD, NDA confident

Nevertheless, the RJD and the NDA today reasserted their resolve to form the government. The RJD legislature party will

meet tomorrow to elect its leader and chart its course of action. Mr. Lalu Prasad said that he would hold talks with all the secular forces before staking claim to form the government, stressing that the mandate was for the secular forces.

The BJP vice-president, S.K. Modi, asserted that the NDA would stake its claim saying that the mandate was against the Rabri Government. He hoped that the Governor would give the NDA a chance to form the government and prove its majority on the floor of the House.

The NDA was making all efforts to cobble together the numbers and Mr. Modi said that the NDA was keeping its option open about approaching Mr. Paswan as well.

Anti-Lalu mandate, says BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 27. For the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Janata Dal (United) the good showing in Bihar — together their tally was 90 plus — is far short of what they need for a serious attempt at government-formation.

In the run-up to the counting of ballots senior BJP leaders had said that the alliance would need to cross the 100 mark for it to try cobbling up a majority.

However, the BJP general secretary, Arun Jaitley, said that clearly it was an "anti-Rashtriya Janata Dal mandate" and that the people had voted to oust the Rabri Devi Government. However, it was also conceded that in the situation of a hung Assembly that has emerged in Bihar, the Governor would play a crucial role.

While the BJP-JD (U) insisted that they had emerged as the

"single largest pre-poll alliance" it was aware that this would not necessarily help it find the support it needed to reach the simple majority mark of 122 in a House of 243.

"For the moment our leadership has decided to adopt a wait-and-watch policy," Mr. Jaitley said.

Another senior party leader said the BJP and the JD (U) were not in a position to start talking seriously to the Lok Jan Shakti Party chief, Ram Vilas Paswan, to ask for support as there were "serious differences in the JD (U) on seeking his support."

Senior BJP and JD (U) leaders at a meeting expressed "satisfaction" with the Bihar results, pointing out that Mr. Paswan's party had also campaigned to oust the RJD Government and the people had therefore given their verdict against the RJD.

The meeting was attended by

senior BJP leaders — Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani, Venkaiah Naidu, Jaswant Singh, Murli Manohar Joshi, Arun Jaitley, Ananth Kumar, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Sushma Swaraj, V.K. Malhotra, Shivraj Singh Chauhan and Pyarelal Khandelwal — while George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav of the JD (U) were present.

Responding to Mr. Paswan's known stand that he could do business with the JD (U) if it were to leave the BJP, Mr. Jaitley said that the two parties had contested together, campaigned together and they had a "good experience."

There was no occasion, he said, to consider any other option but to remain together. As for Mr. Paswan's statement that he would prefer President's Rule to either supporting the RJD or the BJP-JD (U) formation, Mr. Jaitley said "Mr. Paswan is entitled to his views."

Paswan keeps NDA, RJD guessing

By Our Special Correspondent

PATNA, FEB. 27. With the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the National Democratic Alliance at his mercy, the Lok Janshakti Party chief and Union Steel Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan, is playing his cards close to his chest and engaging them in a guessing game on the formation of the next government in Bihar.

Well aware that he has emerged as a kingmaker, he has made it clear that he would support neither the NDA nor the RJD in forming a government nor form a government with their support. But his presence at the United Progressive Alli-

ance meeting in Delhi on Tuesday is likely to prove crucial. Mr. Paswan confirmed that he would go to Delhi later tomorrow to take part.

Mr. Paswan claimed that the Congress had not approached him with any offers. "They know my stand [his opposition to the RJD]. Why should they send any feelers to me?"

Stressing that the mandate was for him to sit in the Opposition, he underscored his unwillingness to push the State into ruin only to put a popular government in place. "When I'm not supporting anyone, Central rule is the only option. That is also one form of governance."

The LJP chief said he had accomplished yet another mission — ensuring the defeat of the RJD-led Government. He also took credit for the defeat of the NDA in the Lok Sabha elections last year. He attributed his success to the new Muslim-Dalit equation he had propped up to drive a wedge in the RJD's Muslim-Yadav combination.

Mr. Paswan said he had received both the anti-RJD and anti-BJP votes and said it was the reason why he could not court either of the two. He scotched the rumours that he had been offered the Railway Ministry and said that he was not fighting for any portfolio.

CONG SWEEPS HARYANA; HUNG HOUSE IN JHARKHAND

Lalu is down but who is in?

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 27. — With the RJD leader, Mr Lalu Prasad's lantern sputtering, Assembly elections in the three states have delivered a mixed mandate. The Congress has expectedly swept Haryana, perhaps unexpectedly is very shaky in Jharkhand and the only certainty in Bihar is the uncertainty about what Mr Ram Vilas Paswan of the LJP will eventually do as the kingmaker.

Clutching a straw, Mr Prasad today claimed that the RJD as the single largest party will stake claim to form the government. It still needs Mr Paswan, who doesn't seem keen to oblige.

Given the arithmetic, much could depend on the Governor, Mr Buta Singh. The Congress is now hoping that its fall-back option — LJP support if Mrs Rabri Devi steps down as another RJD leader like Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Yadav steps in — works out.

The NDA too needs Mr Paswan's support to stake its claim to form the government, but he hasn't agreed. The LJP, the JD-U (without the BJP) and the Congress do not have the numbers. Another alternative is President's Rule with the Assembly in suspended animation.

In Bihar, both the secular vote and the anti-Lalu vote split, partly neutralising each other. Some of the anti-Lalu votes that went to Mr Paswan could have gone to Mr Nitish Kumar. There are angry leaders in



SWEET SUCCESS: Mr Paswan being fed sweets by his wife in Patna on Sunday. — PTI

the Congress who see Mr Arjun Singh and Mr ML Fotedar as the strategists who wanted to teach Mr Prasad a lesson in Bihar and also, go without him in Jharkhand. This was because the AICC leader in-charge of Bihar, Mr Harikesh Bahadur, had spoken of a chance of a revival of the Congress with part of the Muslim vote coming back.

NDA to stake claim in Jharkhand

In Jharkhand the BJP-JD(U) combine will stake claim to form the government though the results threw up a fractured verdict. The Congress-JMM alliance didn't really work out

with Congressmen fighting them in some constituencies. The JMM was a house divided after the rebellion of Mr Stephen Marandi.

Jats for Haryana CM post

In Haryana where the Congress wrested power after nine years, all the party now has to do is elect a leader. The Jats believe they have ensured the victory and want their pound of flesh. There is Mr Bhajan Lal and Ms Shelja, a Dalit. If either becomes CM, a Jat, possibly Mr R Surjewala or Mr Bhopinder Hooda could be the deputy chief minister.

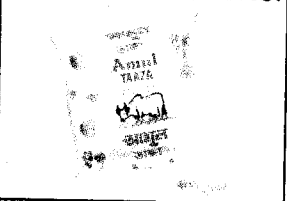
More reports on page 4

Caught in the act

NEW DELHI, Feb. 27. — Politicians' private lives entered the public domain when a TV channel today telecast video tapes purportedly of two MLAs from Bihar, Mr Nawal Kishore Rai and Mr Anwaraul Haque, caught in compromising positions with call girls. — PTI

Details on page 5

SEE PAGE V & VI OF KOLKATA PLUS FOR AMUL MILK DISCOUNT COUPONS.



www.thestatesman.net
e-mail: thestatesman@vsnl.com

Paswan sticks to his guns

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Feb. 27. — In an apparent volte-face to cope with the emerging political scenario following the election results, Mr Lalu Prasad, who till yesterday described his "enemy No 1" Mr Ram Vilas Paswan as *goon-don ka sardar* today called him *Paswanji*. The Lok Janashakti Party leader, however, seemed to be in no mood to compromise and has rejected any truck with the RJD.

The BJP has begun wooing Mr Paswan through the Janata Dal-United despite having declared its opposition to his LJP for giving tickets to anti-social elements.

Mr Prasad parried questions on who will be the next chief minister. Mrs Rabri Devi said she would urge the Governor to first invite the RJD to form a government.

The RJD chief said: "*Hum aapna dawa chhodnewale nahin hain* (I am not going to leave claims for the CM's post)" and added, "*NDA ka sapna sapna hi rah jayega*". He claimed that he would get the support of the Congress apart from the SP, BSP and Independents, a majority of whom were RJD rebels, in government formation. Mr Prasad blamed his "own men" for his party's poor performance.



How they fared

Bihar

RJD+	78
Cong/LJP	39
Total seats	BJP/JD-U 92
243	Others 34

Jharkhand

BJP/JD-U	36
Cong/JMM	26
Total seats	RJD 7
81	Others 12

Haryana

Cong	67
INLD	9
Total seats	BJP 2
90	Others 12

Bus charts way to sports ties

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD, Feb. 27. — Buoyed by the agreement to run a bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, the government in PoK wants to conduct a friendly soccer match between the youth on both sides of the LoC, followed with games in hockey and cricket.

Following the decision to start the Kashmir bus service, doors have opened for carrying out other activities, including a friendly soccer match between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar in May this year. Mr Dewan Ali Khan Chughtai, PoK minister for sports, youth affairs and culture told reporters here.

"Now, when it's all set for the start of the bus service between the two cities, the doors have opened for other ventures and I think we would not find a better time for the start of sports relations," Mr Khan was quoted

PCB reservations over Dalai Lama



"BCCI conveyed to Mr Khan that it was not their decision to invite the Dalai Lama to inaugurate the match and that this was done by the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association," the source said. — PTI

KARACHI, Feb. 27. — The Pakistan Cricket Board has expressed its reservation over the Dalai Lama inaugurating the team's tour opener against the Board President XI at Dharamshala. "The PCB chairman, Mr Shaharyar Khan, spoke to the Indian Board officials yesterday insisting that Pakistan should not be put in an embarrassing position as it enjoyed very good relations with China," a PCB source was quoted as saying by *The News* here today. The Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association, which is the host for the three-day tour opener, had announced a couple of days ago that the Dalai Lama would inaugurate the 3-5 March match.

ed as saying by local daily *The News*. "We have already taken up the matter with the Pakistan government and are waiting for a green signal from Islamabad," he said adding that an invitation would be sent to the J&K government soon.

Mr Khan said other sports like hockey and cricket would be next in line. "We want to start with football and other sports would follow. We definitely would be looking forward to hold the first-ever match of soccer between the two cities," he said.

Kingmaker looks for Muslim ice-breaker

Delhi rule call to 'save' state

ASHISH SINHA

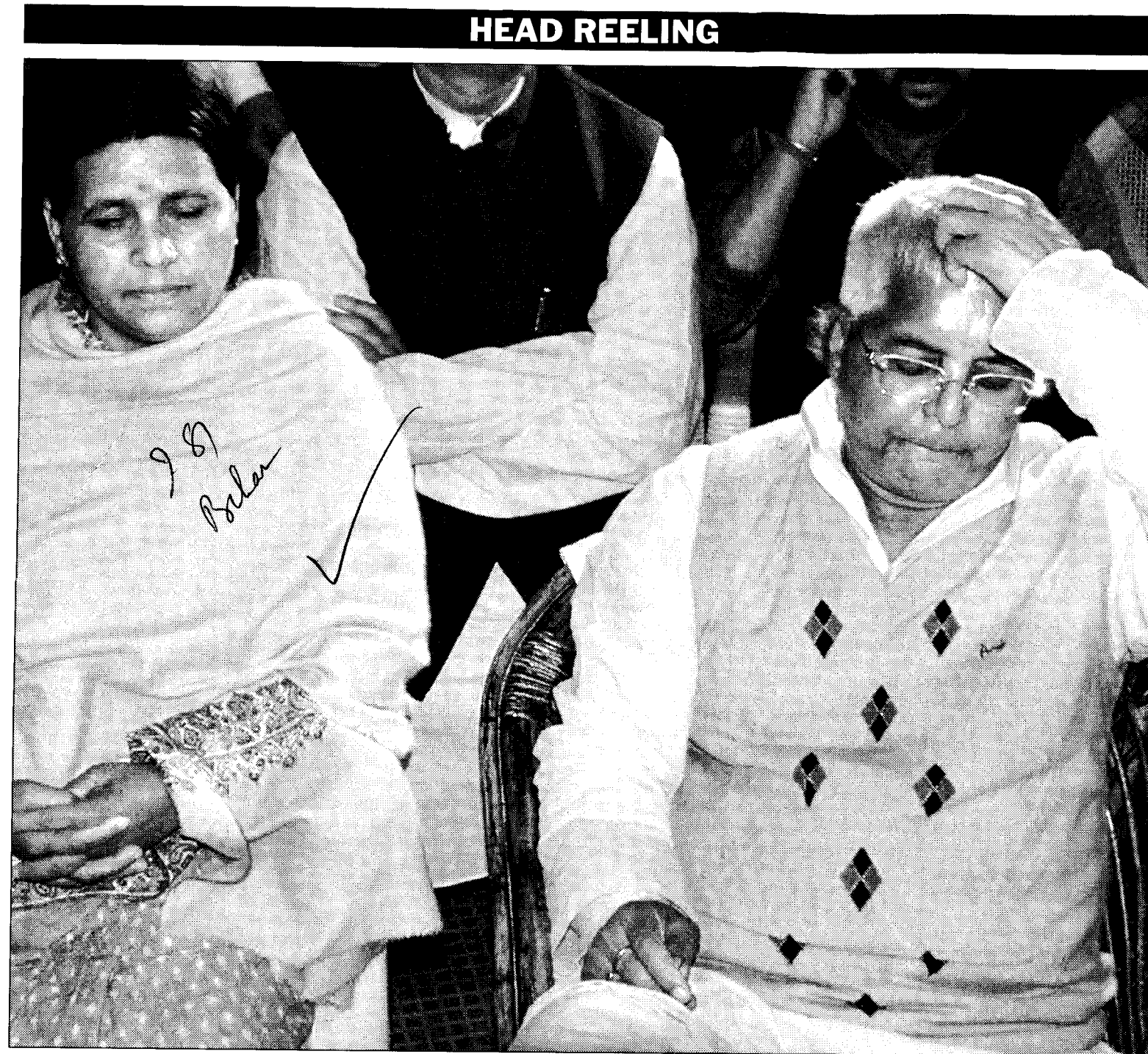
Patna, Feb. 27: Ram Vilas Paswan, who has emerged as the biggest star of the Bihar election, wants President's rule for now.

"It could be for any period. Uttar Pradesh saw central rule for a year when a hung Assembly was returned. Manmohan Singh is an honest Prime Minister; he will do no wrong in Bihar. The governor is the Centre's emissary. Let such a rule cleanse this state of the filth that has gathered in 15 years," Paswan told The Telegraph in his hotel suite today.

The strategy for "salvaging" Bihar, he explained, should focus on three things — better law and order, stress on development and protecting social harmony. A Rashtriya Janata Dal-led government cannot do the first two ("we have seen that in 15 years"), and the third is way off the policies of the "communal" National Democratic Alliance, he said.

"I refuse to see the Janata Dal (United) and the BJP as separate entities. The results are overwhelmingly against the RJD, but for me the mandate is also against the NDA. I cannot forget that Muslims sided with the LJP, dumping the appeals of Laloo Prasad Yadav. Nurse no confusion; I will support neither. I do not want to be chief minister and regret when things start falling apart," Paswan added.

Government formation or its urgency is not a priority with Paswan, the seniormost in the group that calls the shots in Bihar politics. He has been in politics since 1969 when Laloo Prasad and Nitish Kumar were still learning their lessons.



Laloo Prasad Yadav with Rabri Devi in Patna after the results were declared. (PTI)

For the "long run", Paswan has a clear road map. "Fifteen years was a long run. The biggest achievement of these elections is that a reluctant electorate now believes that change is possible. The trend can only get stronger. Laloo Prasad's Muslim-Yadav formula is shattered. The time is ripe for an all-inclusive appeal in which no social

group feels alienated. Herein lies the future of Bihar and I alone stand for this politics," he said.

Paswan said he was not interested in a more important portfolio in the Manmohan Singh government, not even the railway ministry that Laloo Prasad had beaten him to. "I am not interested. The Congress and its presi-

dent are well aware of my stand. I am sure they will not pressure me into anything. Laloo Prasad calls me a mobile party. Well said, I got mobile phones for everyone as the Union communications minister," he said.

The LJP leader's attacks on the RJD have only become more stinging. "Kahan hai Laloo lehar jiski woh baat

karte the? (Where is the Laloo wave he used to talk about?) The RJD did well in the Lok Sabha elections only because I supported the alliance. I do not want to pour old wine in a new bottle by supporting the RJD, a party that worked against the Congress and now presents it as a partner," he said.

Paswan stressed that

NDA was the only pre-poll alliance in Bihar. "The UPA was hardly a pre-election combination. I went on an almost 'ekla chalo' (walk alone) path. My mission was to remove the RJD and I am happy that goal has been now accomplished. I am satisfied with the results but in the normal course, I would have won 60 seats," he said.

HEAD REELING

Sonia, clerics in focus

KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Feb. 27: Ram Vilas Paswan might not be averse to supporting a Muslim chief minister from the Rashtriya Janata Dal, with a deputy from his party.

The Lok Janshakti Party chief, who has insisted on keeping equal distance from Laloo Prasad Yadav's RJD and the National Democratic Alliance and called for President's rule, could climb down under pressure from Sonia Gandhi and senior Muslim clerics.

Besides, the "kingmaker" would be worried about some of his MLAs being susceptible to poaching by both camps.

The newly-formed LJP's election symbol is a "house", but some of his nominees could not get the symbol and had to contest on others, turning them into Independents, who are easier to wean away.

LJP sources said with a large section of Muslims, especially the backwards and the Dalits, drifting away from Laloo Prasad's "MY" (Muslim-Yadav) combination, and with Paswan crafting a "DM" (Dalit-Muslim) alliance with upper castes, it would be politically suicidal for him to have any truck with the saffron camp.

With cracks in the RJD's "Muslim-Yadav" combination, either Paswan or Nitish Kumar could emerge as a future alternative to Laloo Prasad in the state.

In the run-up to the elections, Paswan had said he would like to have a Muslim chief minister but he did not specify the party.

Sources in the LJP said RJD's state president and former minister Abdul Bahri Siddiqui could emerge as a consensus candidate for the top slot while Paswan's brother Pasupati Paras could be the deputy chief minister. "As of now, this option is the only alternative to President's rule," a source said.

RJD sources said though

Laloo Prasad will insist on Rabri Devi continuing as chief minister; he could also back a Muslim candidate to placate the minority community.

Assessing the initial reports, they said between 20 and 40 per cent Muslims seem to have split away from the RJD in different regions, and rebel Yadavs ruined the party's prospects in two dozen seats.

Discounting the possibility of the NDA cobbling a majority, a senior RJD leader said that in 2000, Nitish Kumar's government fell after seven days as he could not muster support from Independents even though the NDA was in power at the Centre.

"If the BJP-JD (U) make a similar attempt, they are bound to fail. Not only is there a UPA government at the Centre, governor Buta Singh, a former Congress leader, is also no pushover," he said.

Both Laloo Prasad and Siwan MP and muscleman Mohammad Shahabuddin are adept at "managing" Independent legislators.

In the first two phases, LJP gained at the cost of the RJD and in the third phase, it damaged the NDA more. Though Laloo Prasad tried his best to create a BJP phobia in the third phase, analysts said it was too late as the damage was already done in the second phase, which had the maximum Muslim presence.

Most constituencies in the second phase had a high concentration of minority voters, who appeared to have divided their loyalty between the LJP-Congress and the RJD.

Kishanganj has a 67.6 per cent Muslim population, Katiar 42.5 per cent, Araria 41.1 per cent, Purnea 36.8 per cent, Darbhanga 22.7 per cent, Madhubani 17.9 per cent and Supaul 17.4 per cent. Another half-a-dozen constituencies in the second phase had 4.4 per cent to 14.4 per cent minority voters.

Shadow on Laloo 15-yr monopoly

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Feb. 23: Bihar may have voted to elect a complex hung Assembly which may necessitate a post-poll political realignment for government formation, according to **The Telegraph-STAR News** exit poll.

Conducted by AC Nielsen through the three phases of polling in Bihar and Jharkhand on February 3, 15 and 23, the exit poll reckons that Laloo Prasad Yadav's 15-year-long monopoly over Bihar will end.

The BJP-Janata Dal (United) combine, benefiting from the disunity among the United Progressive Alliance partners, is projected to emerge as the single largest pre-poll alliance in both states, the exit poll predicted.

In Jharkhand, the combine may be within striking range of the simple majority mark of 41 seats in the 81-member Assembly. In Bihar, it may find itself in a situation almost similar to that after the 2000 Assembly polls.

The exit poll projected the two National Democratic Al-

The Telegraph

STAR NEWS

EXIT POLL

JHARKHAND

• Total: 81 • Majority: 41

BJP+	37	RJD+	5
JMM+	28	Others	11

liance partners as winning 96 of 239 Bihar seats — 24 short of the revised majority mark, as elections were deferred in the remaining four seats of the 243-member Assembly.

After the 2000 polls, the BJP-Dal (U) was unsuccessful in cobbling together a majority though it had emerged the single largest pre-poll alliance.

Dal (U)'s Nitish Kumar was sworn in chief minister but had to quit within a week as he could not take the mandatory confidence vote for want of the requisite numbers.

Laloo Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal and its Left partners are projected to end up with 82 seats.

Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok

Janshakti Party and the Congress — Laloo Prasad's estranged UPA allies in Bihar — may win 26 and eight seats. The three parties' combined tally of 116 is four short of majority.

Both UPA camps would be closely looking at smaller parties and Independents, who together are projected to account for 28 seats. But after their bitter campaign against each other, Laloo Prasad would have to get Paswan on his side to stand any chance of retaining power.

The exit poll conducted today, during the final round of polling involving 93 Bihar seats, has not shown any change in Laloo Prasad's dwindling fortunes as seen during the first two rounds. The RJD and allies are expected to win 33 of the 93 seats and the NDA partners could get 42 seats. The Congress, which fought 33 seats today, is likely to get two seats.

In Jharkhand, the BJP-Dal (U) is projected to win 37 seats, four short of the majority mark, and the Congress-Jharkhand Mukti Morcha combine 28.

The votes will be counted on Sunday.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 FEB 2005

52 per cent polling in Bihar

● Third and final phase ends ● Focus now on counting of votes

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. An estimated 55 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise today in the final phase of polling for 93 Assembly seats in Bihar and 28 seats in Jharkhand.

The Deputy Election Commissioner, A.N. Jha, told reporters here that while the voter turnout was around 55 per cent in Jharkhand, it was around 50-52 per cent in Bihar. The overall voter turnout in Bihar and Jharkhand would be around 55 per cent, he said adding that the polling today was by and large peaceful.

STF jawan killed

In Jharkhand, he said, one Special Task Force jawan was killed in Bokaro and polling had to be stopped for some time in a polling station due to group clashes. In Bihar, one person was killed in police firing and another person died

Hung House predicted

NEW DELHI, FEB. 23. Exit polls have predicted a fractured mandate in Bihar. A photo-finish is on the cards between the ruling RJD and BJP-JD(U) combine while the LJP leader, Ram Vilas Paswan, is likely to emerge as "king-maker."

In Jharkhand, the BJP-JD combine has been given a slight edge over the JMM-Congress alliance. — UNI

Details on Page 11



WILL BE IT LALUDOM AGAIN? RJD leader Lalu Prasad takes his identity card from his wife and Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi before casting his vote in Patna on Wednesday. — AFP

when a bomb he was making exploded. There were also reports of inter-party clashes from Muzzarfarpur, Saran and Bettiah. In all, 238 people were arrested from Bihar today during the course of polling from various constituencies, he said.

Mr. Jha said that in the by-election to Ajnala assembly constituency in Punjab, the voter turnout was around 65 per cent. In the byelections to

the three Assembly constituencies in Meghalaya, nearly 50-65 per cent polling was recorded. In the re-poll in six Haryana polling stations, about 77 per cent polling was recorded.

Asked whether the Commission had taken any decision on the reply sent by the Cabinet Secretary on the issue of the Government announcing increasing the EPF interest rates on the eve of the polls, Mr. Jha

said the Commission was examining the reply and would take an appropriate decision.

On the ban imposed on some political leaders from entering their constituencies, he said the District Magistrate must have taken the decision on some legal aspect. Mr. Jha said the counting of votes in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana would begin at 8 a.m. on February 27 and bulk of the results

would be available around 2 p.m. Most of the data would be put on the Election Commission's website — www.eci.gov.in — in the evening. The results would be available live on the website during the counting.

"The results and updates will be provided on real time basis" on the website, linked online with the counting centres, he said.

STRAY INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE

Over 50 p.c. polling in Bihar, Jharkhand

By J. Venkatesan

*G. Biceel
Bihar*

NEW DELHI, FEB. 15. The Election Commission said today that an estimated 50 to 52 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise in the second phase of the Assembly elections in Bihar, and in Jharkhand the turnout was around 55 to 60 per cent.

Briefing reporters, the Deputy Election Commissioner, A.N. Jha, said here that the polling was by and large peaceful and that there was no major incident in Jharkhand. Stray incidents were reported from Bihar. A Rashtriya Janata Dal candidate was detained for intimidating voters and there were reports of malfunctioning of electronic voting machines in three polling stations, he said.

In Bihar, Mr. Jha said, some violence was reported relating to police firing in Munger, Saharsa and Barauni. He said there were reports of voters boycotting the polls in three places complaining of lack of power, water and proper roads and some people complained that they did not have the voter identity card.

On the question of repoll, he said the Commission would scrutinise the registers from places where more than 68 per cent polling was registered and then take a decision, Mr. Jha said. The Commission would also seek reports from the returning officers and observers regarding the large turnout in certain booths, he said.

RJD reply to notice

Mr. Jha said the RJD had replied to the Commission that it had no role in the distribution of compact discs on the post-Godhra riots shown in various places. The Commission would undertake an independent inquiry on how the discs made their way into the State when the election process was under way. A First Information Report had already been filed against unknown persons for the incident. To a question on the Commis-

sion's views to the Cabinet Secretary's reply on the hike in the interest rates of Employees Provident Fund on the eve of the elections, Mr. Jha said the Commission was looking into the reply and would soon take a decision. On appointments and transfers in Haryana, he said the State Government had been asked to send the complete facts by 4 pm tomorrow.

Three killed in Bihar

Our Patna Special Correspondent reports:

Two persons were killed and five others were injured when police fired at anti-social elements at a booth in Saharsa. One of the deceased was identified as a relative of the RJD candidate. One person was killed in a clash between two groups in Pratapur village of Sheikhpura constituency in Lakhisarai district. The Chief Secretary, K.A.H. Subramanian, however, denied that the clash had any electoral overtones.

In another incident of police firing, four persons were injured in Munger district. About three dozen incidents of violence and malpractices were reported besides a dozen cases where the voters boycotted the election process protesting against the non-existence of basic amenities or non-issuance of photo identity cards.

Significantly, two incidents related to journalists. In one case, an ETV reporter, Santosh Singh, lodged a complaint in Darbhanga against the RJD MLA, Lalit Yadav, accusing him of keeping him in illegal confinement.

In the second case, the district officials of Samastipur arrested the Sahara Samay cameraman, Ramesh Shanker, for entering a polling booth and filed a case against him under the Representation of the People Act, 1951. Polling in four constituencies was rescheduled to February 18 and 26 for security reasons.

Exit Polls differ: Page 11

The battle for Bihar

In Bihar, Election 2004 was a straight, clearly defined ideological contest — between the RJD-led grand alliance and a much-depleted National Democratic Alliance. Election 2005 by contrast is a story of confusion, disarray and bitterness — on both sides. Vidya Subrahmaniam, who is touring the State, reports on the situation.

THE SUMMER of 2004 saw one of the most one-sided elections ever fought and won in Bihar with the Lalu Prasad-led Rashtriya Janata Dal alliance coasting to a superlative victory with 29 of 40 seats and a vote share of 44.4 per cent. The verdict was a tribute as much to the political acumen of the prime movers of the alliance, Mr. Prasad, and Congress president Sonia Gandhi, as to the chemistry among the constituents — the RJD, the Congress, the Lok Jan Shakti Party and the Left. The social coalition they represented — the bulk of Dalits, Muslims and Other Backward Classes — was unbeatable by any other combination.

Eight months on, there is not much sign of the unity that made that triumph possible. Election 2004 was a straight, clearly defined ideological contest — between the RJD-led grand alliance, on the one side, and a much-depleted National Democratic Alliance, on the other. Election 2005 by contrast is a story of confusion, disarray and bitterness — on both sides.

To quote the RJD chief, it is a "free-for-all" where friendships have turned sour, political boundaries have blurred and parties are engaged in a futile chase of one another's so-called "vote banks."

NDA's dilemma

So is this an opportunity handed on a platter to the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal (United) combination? Not by a long stretch. Far from exploiting the rifts in the enemy camp, the NDA seems as foxed by the multiplicity of contests as its rivals, and consequently at a loss to figure out its strategy.

Should the NDA go to town on the differences among its opponents, and imply thereby that the United Progressive Alliance at the Centre was doomed? Or should it portray them as "friends pretending to be foes"? The former strategy would mean positioning Mr. Prasad as a lone fighter ranged against a host of enemies. This would cater the anti-Lalu votes, a situation the RJD chief in fact revels in. "Lalu versus others" is not just Mr. Prasad's greatest unc, it is the surest bet for consolidating his constituency.

If, on the other hand, the DA projected Mr. Prasad, Ms.

Gandhi and Mr. Paswan as temporary foes who will eventually patch up, then it would in effect be admitting that the UPA is in sound health.

Congress calculations

The UPA first. When the friendship between Mr. Prasad and Mr. Paswan suddenly ruptured, it seemed like a typical clash between two egoistical satraps. At that point, the estrangement did not appear a threat to the UPA's prospects in Bihar, let alone to the alliance at the Centre. This was primarily because of the excellent understanding between Mr. Prasad and Ms. Gandhi. Yet in Congress offices, both at the Centre and in Bihar, a different drama was being enacted. Obviously on a high after their Lok Sabha performance, Congress leaders impressed on Ms. Gandhi that the environment in Bihar was just right for a grand Congress comeback.

According to a senior leader, their reasoning went as follows: With the Lok Sabha victory, the Congress had gained in stature, leading to a groundswell of support for the party in the State. Secondly, the Bihar electorate wanted a change and this change could not come via the NDA, which had lost to Mr. Prasad in election after election. Mr. Prasad's unwillingness to accommodate their interests only added to the clamour in the Congress ranks. As Ramesh Chennithala, general secretary, All-India Congress Committee explained, "How could the Congress agree to contest only 12 seats?"

For Ms. Gandhi, it was a dilemma that was not easily resolved. She could afford to alienate neither the Congress cadre nor Mr. Prasad, who had stood by her through her days of struggle and backed her to the hilt for Prime Ministership. He had also shown a rock-like firmness in dealing with the *Sangh Parivar*.

Thus was born the idea of partial seat adjustments — with the RJD as well as the LJSP. The Congress, it was decided, would be ambitious but not overly so. It would field its candidates in a total of 83 seats, leaving out those seats that were won by the RJD and the LJSP (more accurately, the Paswan component in the NDA) in the 2000 Assembly election. It was to be a

limited two-way agreement.

However, for Mr. Paswan, this was just the opportunity he was waiting for. Having spurned the NDA's repeated overtures, he needed to find an alternative partner who would help him in his effort to build a lasting Dalit-Muslim constituency. The Dalit leader promptly announced an alliance between the Congress and the LJSP, ignoring the fact that the Congress was in an indirect alliance with the RJD as well. After all, the Congress had decided not to fight the RJD in its strongholds. The Congress had meant to send this as a signal to the RJD but the damage was already done.

The UPA's arrangement

Today the arrangement among the UPA constituents is on the following lines: The RJD and the Left are one bloc. The RJD and the LJSP fight each other everywhere. The Congress is in "friendly fights" with the RJD in 83 seats.

But the big question remains. Is the Congress a friend of Mr. Prasad or his enemy? Foe, if you go by the party's association with Mr. Paswan; the Dalit leader has sworn never to align with Mr. Prasad ("not for seven *janams*" is his much-quoted promise at election rallies). Friend, if the criterion is secularism.

Not surprisingly, Congress leaders have adopted a minimalist language where they attack the BJP and defend secularism but offer no opinion on Mr. Prasad or Mr. Paswan. Said Mr. Chennithala: "Our enemy is the BJP. We are a unifier of secular forces." How? Hasn't the Congress divided the secular forces? "No, after the election we will apply the necessary corrective force."

At her election meetings Ms. Gandhi reads out what sounds like a litany of complaints against the RJD Government but almost always winds up by defending the cause of secularism and asking voters to support "the next *milli-jhuli sarkar* (coalition government)".

The NDA reads a coded message in all this. Put simply, the divided house of the UPA will unite after the election. Indeed, there is a nagging suspicion within the NDA that the UPA constituents are in a proxy fight to divide the anti-Lalu votes. So, party strategists who



CONNECTING WITH THE PEOPLE: Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad addresses an election rally in Darbhanga on Thursday. — PTI

were initially overjoyed at the prospect of a division in the secular vote (more importantly in Mr. Prasad's famous Muslim-Yadav votebank) are no longer sure they can reap a windfall from this split.

Arun Jaitley, who argues that the UPA has damaged itself beyond redemption ("the UPA is a cracked mirror and a cracked mirror can never be joined"), nonetheless admits that the constituents will reunite to place the RJD in power.

So how does the BJP propose to deal with this "duplicitous" Says Mr. Jaitley: "We will exploit the infighting in the UPA to our advantage even as we warn voters that they are one and the same." "This is a sham, proxy war," fumes Amitabh Sinha, the BJP's media manager in Patna, referring to the infighting in the UPA. Mr. Sinha also feels the

campaign is visible in the upper caste-dominated villages of Bihar. The repeated refrain here is: "We would vote for the Congress if it had made it clear that it would have nothing to do with the RJD."

Another senior BJP strategist admits off-the-record that the UPA's current problems and the fatigue factor associated with the RJD notwithstanding, there is little hope for the NDA.

For the simple reason that it is a tall order for the BJP and the JD (U) to muster a tally of 100 seats — the minimum required for any party or a combination of parties to take a crack at government formation. As against this, the RJD can count on the certain support of the Left, the Congress and the independents, not to mention the "likely" support of the LJSP. Should the LJSP emerge as a balancing force, which

much-talked about scenario across Bihar, would Mr. Paswan defect to the NDA?

This is the BJP's fondest hope, although the party knows that having worked hard to shake off the Hindutva tag, the Dalit leader can scarcely afford

to go back to it — at least not if he wants to emerge as a messiah of Muslims, Dalits and the poor.

Whether Bihar's voters can make sense of this classic wheels-within-wheels situation can at best be speculated on.

The race to be Chief Minister

"K aun Banega Mukhya Mantri (who will become the Chief Minister)? It is a question that pops up again and again in Patna's overactive political circles."

The National Democratic Alliance grandly offered the post to Mr. Paswan only to be rebuffed by the Dalit leader. The new buzz around Mr. Paswan has unsettled the alliance which fears that the Dalit leader might have become the focus of the anti-Lalu vote.

This is precisely why the BJP hurriedly announced Nitish Kumar as its Chief Ministerial candidate. Unfortunately for the party, the move has backfired with first Shatrughan Sinha, and now George Fernandes insisting that the post remain open till the declaration of results.

If Mr. Sinha argued that the Chief Minister's choice was a prerogative of elected legislators, Mr. Fernandes thought the move was calculated to cause confusion.

Mr. Fernandes' sharp comments on the subject: "Questions like *kaun banega mukhya mantri* (who will become Chief Minister) should be answered only after the results. This is not the time to project Nitish Kumar." — V.S.

a clear signal that they — certainly the Congress — would like to keep the options open for a future realignment with the RJD.

This is also an admission that between them the two parties have no realistic chance of getting anywhere near the majority mark.

The National Democratic Alliance grandly offered the post to Mr. Paswan only to be rebuffed by the Dalit leader. The new buzz around Mr. Paswan has unsettled the alliance which fears that the Dalit leader might have become the focus of the anti-Lalu vote.

This is precisely why the BJP hurriedly announced Nitish Kumar as its Chief Ministerial candidate. Unfortunately for the party, the move has backfired with first Shatrughan Sinha, and now George Fernandes insisting that the post remain open till the declaration of results.

If Mr. Sinha argued that the Chief Minister's choice was a prerogative of elected legislators, Mr. Fernandes thought the move was calculated to cause confusion.

Mr. Fernandes' sharp comments on the subject: "Questions like *kaun banega mukhya mantri* (who will become Chief Minister) should be answered only after the results. This is not the time to project Nitish Kumar." — V.S.



OSE WHO WOULD BE CHIEF MINISTER: Ram Vilas Paswan of the Lok Jan Shakti Party, Rabri Devi of the Rashtriya Janata Dal, Nitish Kumar of the Janata Dal (United).

Bihar has captured Delhi, says Lalu

THE UNITED Progressive Alliance that swept the 14th general election is nowhere to be seen in Bihar, much to the delight of Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad's legion of enemies. Popular wisdom in Patna in fact has it that the Prasads are living out their last days in the sprawling Chief Ministerial bungalow on 1 Anne Marg.

For Mr. Prasad, all this is evidently just action replay. "Lalu", the only issue in Bihar, has been written off again and again in the last 15 years. It is perhaps because of this confidence — or overconfidence as his opponents would surely say — that today he seems without a worry.

Far from it, he is in his element. In a conversation with Vidya Subrahmaniam for *The Hindu*, Mr. Prasad lunges at his critics with gusto, sparing no one, not the Bharatiya Janata Party, not Ram Vilas Paswan,

not the Election Commission. At the same time, he is emphatic that he will not rock the UPA boat at the Centre.

After all, as he gleefully points out, Bihar now has a stake in the Manmohan Singh Government. "Bihar ka kabja ho gaya hai Delhi mein" (Bihar has captured Delhi) he says. Excerpts:

Question: Suddenly you have another alliance to fight apart from the NDA. Ram Vilas Paswan appears to have emerged as a leader in his own right.

Lalu Prasad: Says who? Let me make this clear. The Congress is trying to rebuild its organisation in Bihar. But they have no base vote here. Mr. Paswan also has no base vote. So where are they getting their support from? The NDA alliance is a bigger mess.

They first offered the Chief Ministership to Mr. Paswan and

now they have announced Nitish Kumar's name.

But barely did they start to project him when George Fernandes objected to it. Shatrughan Sinha has already declined to accept Mr. Kumar's leadership.

Tell me, where is the vacancy for Bihar's Chief Ministership? Let the results come and they will see it for themselves.

As far as the RJD is concerned, the more confusion there is, the better it is for us.

Surely the split in the UPA votes is going to affect the RJD's prospects?

Where is the UPA in Bihar? There was and is Lalu Prasad and no one else here. Everybody is fighting me.

The Congress and the Lok Jan Shakti Party claimed they did well in the Lok Sabha elections but their seats came from me. They are all Lalu Yadav's seats.

Funnily, the media has got into the act, predicting that Mr. Paswan will get Muslim votes, Dalit votes and so on.

But take it from me. The voters of Bihar know what they want. They may be poor but they are not fools. They are not going to be misled by this "Lalu is going, Lalu is going" chorus.

My opponents, including the media, attacked me on the kidnapping incidents.

They organised protests by school children, they lined them up at the helipad when I was out of town and made out as if I was indifferent to the plight of small children.

Today, the State Government has recovered the missing children, and in one instance killed the kidnapper.

What went wrong between you and the Congress? You have been quoted as saying So-

nia Gandhi was misled by her partymen.

That is very true. Sonjaji was misled by local Congressmen. These men are not well-wishers of Sonjaji.

There is a pattern to be followed in seat distribution, which is that you take the seats you won in the last elections and arrive at a mutually satisfying agreement for the rest of the seats. The Congress wanted 150 seats, which was crazy. The reality is nowhere near this.

I had 129 seats in the outgoing assembly [with defections] as against 12 in the case of the Congress. I'm not a fool that I can agree to this. Once the results come you will find that the Congress cannot even hold its 12 seats.

Moreover in Jharkhand, the Congress and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha excluded us. They did not even ask me for my

opinion. You have to take grassroots experience into account. They are going to have to pay for this. There is already a split in the JMM. And the BJP, which had no hope in that State, has started to make gains.

Will all this not affect the future of the UPA at the Centre?

This will have no effect on the Central Government. I'm not a foolish politician. Bihar is a land of experimentation and elections here have always been something of a free-for-all, so I'm not unduly bothered by the multiple contests.

At the same time, I know there is somebody behind all this. Believe me, their aim is to disturb the UPA Government at the Centre.

Who is behind this?

Many people, including sections of the right-wing media which keeps on and on about how I'm finished. They are

building up Mr. Paswan just as they built up Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal.

The Election Commission has asked for RJD MP Mohammad Shahabuddin to be shifted out of the jail in Siwan.

I fail to understand this. The E.C. nearly had me grounded on the Banerjee committee report on the Godhra incidents. I was saved in part by *The Hindu*'s strong editorial urging the right to free political speech.

There are many more criminals in other parties. [He reels off names concentrating especially on those fielded by the Lok Jan Shakti Party.]

The BJP says you and Mr. Paswan will get together after the elections. That you are fighting a sham war.

Mr. Paswan is on record saying that for the next seven *janams* (births) he will not work with me.

The RJD has been in government for 15 years. Yet Bihar looks more backward than before.

Who says? In all the development indices we have made progress. When you talk of development you have to judge us against the situation in our State.

The highest improvement in poverty and literacy levels was recorded by Bihar in the last decade. Besides you have to understand that successive Central Governments have not played fair with us.

The situation has changed with the formation of the UPA Government at the Centre.

So what is your slogan for this election?

Bihar ka kabja ho gaya hai Delhi mein. Ab Bihar badlega (Bihar has captured Delhi. Now Bihar will change.)

'RJD losing one-third Muslim vote'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 12

RJD CHIEF Lalu Prasad Yadav is in deep trouble, according to a poll survey conducted for the second phase of assembly polls in Bihar. His party is predicted to lose at least a third of the Muslim votes it has been getting in the last 15 years.

According to the Zee TV-C-Voter survey, the RJD's Muslim vote percentage in phase two is likely to fall to 49 from 75-85 in past elections. The Congress is expected to get 33 per cent of this crucial vote bank with seven per cent going to Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (LJP), the survey predicts.

In fact, wherever the upper caste vote is shifting to the Congress-Paswan combine, the Muslims are joining this shift. Their fear that if they didn't vote for Lalu the BJP would come to power is slowly fading as chances of the Congress-Paswan combine cutting votes and winning seats are becoming brighter with each passing day, states a C-Voter press release.

In terms of seats, the RJD plus the Left are tipped to bag 31 of the 100 seats that are at stake in the second phase of the polls. The survey gives the Congress 21 seats, Paswan 16 and the BJP alliance 32.

The survey total for both phases is pegged at between 74 and 86 seats for the RJD and Left, 42-55 for the Congress, 69-81 for the BJP and allies, and 33-45 for others.

"The situation, therefore is very, very tricky and leads for Lalu are wafer-thin. In each phase, he is losing 10-14 seats from his previous tally. If the trend continues, he could end up losing 35-40 seats from the last election, making the task of government formation very difficult for him," the survey concludes.

However, in Jharkhand, Lalu is expected to exact revenge by playing the spoiler. According to the survey, he is likely to get at least eight seats in the phase two polls.

The Congress alliance is expected to get around 40 seats while the BJP combine could get 38. Even if the RJD manages to get 5-7 seats, Lalu could emerge as kingmaker in Jharkhand which, like Bihar, appears to be heading for a hung assembly, it was stated.

Crumbling fort

■ Survey says RJD's Muslim vote percentage in Phase II may fall to 49 from 75-85 in past elections. It gives RJD-Left 31 out of 100 seats

■ Cong expected to get 33% Muslim votes with 7% going to LJP. Survey gives Cong 21 seats, LJP gets 16

■ BJP alliance expected to get 32 seats

SOME COMFORT

However, Lalu is expected to exact revenge by playing spoiler in Jharkhand



Congress chief Sonia Gandhi at a rally in Ranchi on Friday.

Sonia voices concern over law and order in Bihar

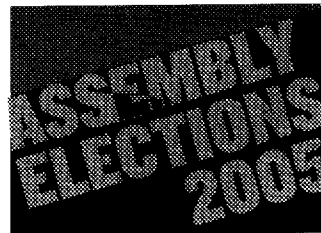
Agencies
Madhubani/Katihar, Feb 12

IN AN apparent reflection of her party's uneasy relations with Bihar's ruling RJD, Congress president Sonia Gandhi voiced her concern over the law and order situation in the state on Saturday and said her party would work for forming an effective secular government after the Assembly polls.

"Development has not taken place as much as it should have. The youth are disturbed due to unemployment and criminals are raising their ugly heads which is a matter of concern," she said, addressing an election rally at Madhubani.

The Congress has entered into friendly fights with the RJD in many of the 243 Assembly constituencies in the state where it is having an alliance with Ramvilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party.

"In the event of the Congress coming to power, it will strive for



improving law and order in the state as also in other fields of life," she said without directly attacking the RJD government.

While cautioning the electorate against "divisive and communal elements," she said her party would work for the formation of an "effective secular government."

Sonia said the people of the state had defeated those who "threw Gujarat into the flames of communalism" in the Lok Sabha elections and expressed confidence that the voters would do so again. Sonia said nothing is more important than social harmony "to which my party is ir-

revocably committed. But there are some elements which want to divide the society in the name of religion for political gains."

Political parties raised the issue of law and order only during the elections and forgot as soon as it was over, she said. "If Congress shares power with secular parties in Bihar after the polls, it will make concerted efforts for creating an atmosphere of peace and harmony."

On her party's decision of sharing power with RJD in Bihar, she said: "Our decision was a natural corollary to our commitment to secularism. We wanted to prevent the communal forces from coming to power."

Voicing concern over the tardy pace of development in Bihar, Sonia said an environment conducive to industrial growth needed to be created. "We'll have to speed up development for economic, social and moral improvement of the society," she said earlier, addressing an election rally at Korha in Katihar.

EC notice to RJD over Godhra CDs

Agencies
New Delhi/Patna, Feb 12

RJD CHIEF Lalu Prasad Yadav appears to be in trouble ahead of the second round of polls in Bihar, with the Election Commission serving notice on his party on Saturday over the screening of CDs allegedly showing the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat and postponing polls in three seats in view of "inadequate" security arrangements.

Bihar chief electoral officer K.C. Saha issued notice to state RJD president Abdul Bari Siddiqui, seeking to know the "factual position", by Saturday evening about the use of the CDs in Purnea and Kishanganj districts.

"The RJD has been asked by Saha to explain if the CDs are being shown for electoral publicity and if the party has taken prior permission from the EC for it", deputy chief electoral officer S.H. Mintoo said in Patna.

RJD can't keep EC date

But, even with the EC asking the RJD to explain the factual position by 7 pm on Saturday, the RJD has expressed its inability to do so before the deadline, saying both its national and state presidents were campaigning. Alarmed by the EC notice on the CD issue, Lalu distanced his party from it. "The RJD has nothing to do with such CDs. We sent CDs containing qawalis for canvassing".

Polls postponed

Citing "inadequate" law and order arrangements, the EC postponed till February 18 polls in Bahera, Ghanshyampur and Jale seats in Darbhanga, where polls were originally scheduled for Feb 15.



Film star and BJP leader Shatrughan Sinha at Patna airport on Saturday. He said the NDA should have projected its CM candidate in the run-up to the Assembly polls but said he, himself, wasn't interested in the post.

BJP distances itself from LJP

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, February 12

A DAY after it declared JD (U) leader Nitish Kumar as the NDA's choice for chief minister if the JD (U)-BJP won the Bihar polls, the BJP has decided to drop its kid-glove approach towards Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP.

The move follows apprehension among BJP leaders that Paswan can swing anti-Lalu votes in areas where the RJD's popularity is on the wane. Inputs from Bihar, following the first phase of the assembly polls, have indicated that Paswan gained the anti-Lalu votes at the cost of the NDA. He was benefited by the impression that the JD (U) would back him, even as the Congress already has a tie-up with his party.

"Our intention is to clear the air in Bihar once

and for all," said BJP vice-president Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi. "We are the real alternative to Lalu, as both Paswan and the Congress are bound to shake hands with Lalu's RJD once the elections are over." He held that the BJP wished to convey to the voters that "if they wished change, they should prefer the Janata Dal (U)-led NDA of which Nitish is CM candidate."

Naqvi disagree with the view that BJP named Nitish Kumar to quell internal differences over the leadership issue caused by former Union minister Shatrughan Sinha's open displeasure over the party not projecting him.

A month back, BJP leaders had themselves not ruled out the possibility of backing Paswan for the CM's post, if he was willing to join hands with the JD (U).

Repoll today in 660 Bihar booths

By J. Venkatesan

40-1
912

NEW DELHI, FEB. 6. The Election Commission today ordered repolling in 660 polling stations of Gaya, Jehanabad, Bhojpur and Newada districts of Bihar and nine polling booths in Girdhia district of Jharkhand tomorrow, where elections were held on February 3. However, repolling in six booths in three Assembly constituencies of Haryana will be held on February 23.

Complaints of irregularities

On Sunday, reelection was held in 347 stations spread over eight districts in Bihar and 21 stations in Jharkhand. In all these cases, repolling was ordered after complaints of large-scale irregularities, including

booth-capturing and defects in voting machines, were reported on Thursday.

The Commission has so far ordered repolling in 1,098 booths of Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana. Polling in the first phase was held on February 3 for all the 90 Assembly seats in Haryana, 64 in Bihar and 24 in Jharkhand. Elections to the remaining Assembly seats in Bihar and Jharkhand will be held on February 15 and 23.

Security to be reviewed

Taking into consideration the violence in Bihar and Jharkhand on February 3, the Commission has decided to review the security arrangements for the last two phases of the elections in the two States.

See also Page 11

THE HINDU

07 FEB 2000

Exit polls bring bad news for Lalu Yadav

Nearly 55% Of Electorate Vote In First Phase Of Polls

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 3 FEBRUARY

RJD strongman Lalu Prasad Yadav, who's fond of boasting that there was no vacancy for the chief minister's post in Bihar, may well have to eat his words, if the exit poll results for the first phase of Assembly elections are anything to go by.

The exit polls, commissioned by three news channels — Aaj Tak, STAR News and Zee News, pointed towards the possibility of hung Assemblies in Bihar and Jharkhand, but predicted a clear majority for the Congress in Haryana.

All the three exit polls predicted losses for Mr Yadav's RJD in Bihar. The major gamer in all these cases was Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party. This should be a cause of worry for the RJD strongman as it indicated that Mr Paswan had managed to wean away a section of the Muslims.

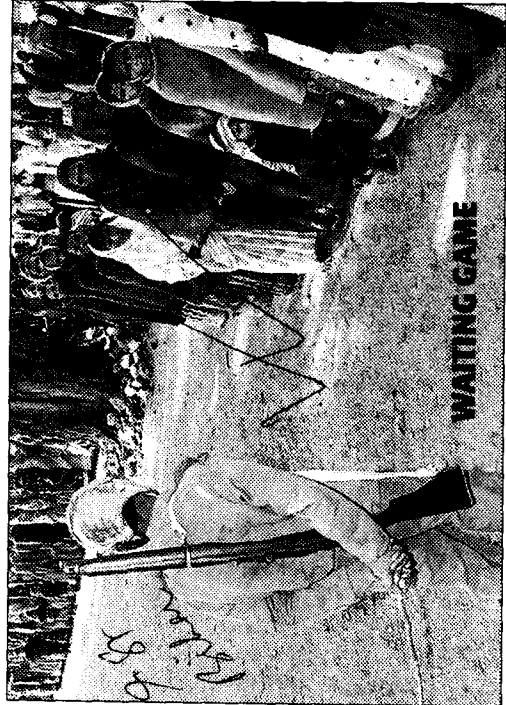
In all the three polls, the NDA was shown as making marginal gains in the state and was seen closing in on the RJD. While STAR News and Aaj Tak

predicted that the JD(U)-BJP alliance would win 21 of the 64 seats that went to polls in the first phase, they showed the RJD ahead in 28 and 26 seats respectively. The party has 33 seats in this phase in the outgoing Assembly.

Zee News, however, showed the NDA marching ahead of the RJD, and was expected to bag three seats more than the latter. It showed the LJP putting up an impressive show by winning 16 seats. In Haryana, while Zee News and Aaj Tak predicted that the Congress would secure absolute majority, STAR News showed the party slipping up a bit when compared to the outcome of the Lok Sabha polls.

Meanwhile, an overall 55% of the electorate in Haryana, Bihar and Jharkhand turned out to vote in the first phase of Assembly polls on Thursday. While preliminary estimates of the Election Commission put the turnout highest in Haryana at 65%, followed by Bihar, which polled 52-55% votes, Jharkhand saw a comparatively lower turnout at 45%. All these figures are subject to revision once full and final reports from the respective states reach Nirvachan Sadan.

Although most of the constituencies in Bihar and Jharkhand that went to polls on Thursday fell in Naxalite-infested areas, some poll violence was recorded. Six persons were



WAITING GAME

in Bihar, while seven died in a landmine blast triggered by Naxalites in Jharkhand. Two presiding officers, one each in Haryana and Jharkhand, died natural deaths after suffering heart attack, deputy election commissioner A.N. Jha informed newsmen at the end of polls.

While polling in Haryana passed off peacefully, barring damaging of an EVM in a Jhajjar polling station, violence was reported in Bihar and Jharkhand, where 64 and 24 seats respectively went to the polls in the ini-

tial phase. Seven police personnel including the officer-in-charge of a police station were killed in a blast in Palamu district of Jharkhand on Wednesday night. There were reports of group clashes in some other places, besides complaints of polling closing ahead of the scheduled time at a polling booth in Hazaribagh.

In Bihar, two women were killed in police firing in Rohtas; two home guards and a woman gunned down in a clash between extremists and the police in Gaya.

EC questions govt decision to hike EPF rate

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 3 FEBRUARY

THE government's EPF announcement has come under the EC scanner. The poll watchdog, on Thursday, sought a factual report on the circumstances behind the poll-eve decision to hike the EPF interest rate to 9.5% to help it ascertain whether the same violated the model code of conduct in force in three states.

"We have sought facts from the government (on the Cabinet decision to raise the EPF rate). It has been asked to give a detailed factual position and the circumstances that may have led the government to take such a decision," deputy election commissioner and EC spokesperson A.N. Jha confirmed.

The Union Cabinet had on Wednesday cleared a higher interest rate on EPF for 2004-05, sparking allegations that the step was only a vote-catching tactic.

2 abducted Bihar boys come home

Patna: Kislav Komal, a school student whose abduction a fortnight ago here had become a major election issue in Bihar, and another kidnapped student in Bhagalpur, Dipak Bharti, were freed and united with their families on Wednesday, a day before the first phase of state assembly polls.

Kidnapped by armed men on January 19, Kislav, a class IX student of Delhi Public School, was released by his captors in Separa locality here Wednesday morning, while Dipak, a standard IX student of DAV Public School at Bhagalpur, abducted on January 25, walked to freedom at Kantainthi village in Bhagalpur, officials said.

The two boys returned to their parents.

Another DAV student Ravikant, who went missing on January 24 in Biharsharif is still to be traced and the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad and Bihar Public School Association observed a bandh in the town on Wednesday to protest his abduction.

Giving details on the release of 14-year-old Kislav, Pat-



Kislav with his mother (left) after his release on Wednesday

na senior superintendent of police N H Khan said acting on information provided by two persons arrested on Tuesday night, the police had cordoned off the entire Separa area forcing his abductors to free him.

The boy surfaced on the road this morning and policemen soon traced him, he said, adding that the Chunnu Thakur gang was involved in

the incident.

Ten people, including Kiran, wife of Chunnu Thakur, who is lodged in Hajipur jail in connection with several cases, were arrested in connection with the kidnapping of Kislav, son of an assistant commissioner of sales tax K K Gupta.

DIG (Bhagalpur Range) Kumar Rajesh Chandra said Dipak was freed by his abduc-

tors when the police raided Kankaithi village under Jagdishpur police station.

Kislav's kidnapping from Patel Nagar here while on way to school had triggered widespread protests by school children and their guardians.

The children had staged a demonstration in front of Raj Bhavan, gone on a relay fast and even stopped taking their tiffins. Thousands of e-mails had flooded Rashtrapati Bhavan as children sought President A P J Abdul Kalam's intervention to secure the safe release of the abducted students.

Kislav's release, like his kidnapping, got embroiled in politics. RJD president Lalu Prasad mounted an offensive on the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) of Ramvilas Paswan saying jailed gangster Chunnu Thakur, who wanted an LJP ticket for his wife Kiran, also arrested in the case, was behind the incident. Reacting strongly to the charge, Paswan threatened to sue Prasad and denied that Chunnu Thakur was in any way linked to his party. PTI

Bihar's lost way

9/1/08 This kidnap polity needs rescuing 9/6/08 2/2

Bihar is where people are orphaned. Six abductions in about a week and no breakthrough or letup, with every passing day adding to the list of missing children. The adult citizenry is benumbed by proliferating crimes in 15 years of thuggery that passes for democracy. Which is why schoolchildren have come to the fore, agitating for redress, joined later by mothers.

The agitation is a grim commentary on today's situation in Bihar as it prepares to elect its popular representatives for governance. The Patna High Court has asked the state government to provide police protection to candidates in Naxal-infested areas. This suo motu court directive is a damning verdict too. Since it comes against the backdrop of so many kidnappings, one expected a similar concern from the state judiciary when the other repositories of state authority have no clue to reversing the deepening crisis.

Election-time abductions are not new to this underbelly of Indian democracy. The patriarch of Bihar is expectedly busy reading electoral conspiracy into vanishing schoolchildren. Lalu Prasad, a past master of political red herrings, has his worries cut out for foe Paswan and ally Congress.

What else can be expected from him? Is he not a party to the making of such a polity, where his contribution is tall and strong? His lame duck CM will remain a weepy political mother for the next 72 hours or even seven days as child after child on their way to school go missing. She cannot do a thing, no matter how far her heart goes out for their distraught mothers. Nor can any institutional power in the state as long as Bihar's cottage industry of kidnapping and other crimes remains politically imbued; as long as the industry stakeholders keep getting elected as MLAs and MPs.

Bihar's adult citizenry has lost its will to act and the power to rise. So their children and wives have risen to the occasion, and have decided to write to the President of India. By the time the enforcement swings into action from that distant height, there could well be fewer lives left to be rescued.

This is the time for those in Bihar who can act to do so locally. Social organisations and pressure groups, for example; there must be more organisations like "Oxygen". This is also the time for the Centre — the ruling combine — to rethink Bihar beyond elections, given the rapid subsidence of the basics of civic society there. Civilised forces must find their voice and elect governments that can protect. Kidnapping is not a means to power.

THE STATESMAN

02 FEB 2005

Switching of loyalties plagues Bihar political parties

By Vinay Kumar

PATNA, FEB. 1. Ambuj Kishore Jha, a middle-ranking Congress office-bearer in the Bihar unit of the party, belongs to that fast vanishing breed of politicians who keep the party interest uppermost in their scheme of things, sacrificing self-interest and political career without thinking twice. And that is what precisely Mr. Jha did only 10 days ago.

A lecturer of history in the local Guru Gobind Singh College, Mr. Jha was almost certain to get the party nomination to contest the polls from Banka, but was told by the central party leaders, Harikesh Bahadur and Mohsina Kidwai, that the Congress has decided to leave the seat to its ally, the Ram Vilas Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party (LJP). "Like a true party soldier I did not even think again about withdrawing my claim," Mr. Jha said.

Limited success

However, the Congress was unsuccessful in persuading other candidates from the Dinara, Rafiganj and Imamganj Assembly segments who remained adamant on letting their candidature stay even if it meant facing the "friendly" LJP candidate and cutting into each other's vote share.

"Only I withdrew my candidature but I do not regret it. Whatever the party high command decides, I shall abide by that. After all, the trend was set by our party president, Sonia Gandhi, who rejected the offer of becoming the Prime Minister last year," said Mr. Jha, who

was the Bihar State NSUI president in the late 80s.

Yet another case was in the Gaya mofussil seat, where Awadhesh Kumar Singh, a three-time Congress MLA, was sought to be shifted to Gaya town and he filed his nomination as an independent.

The phenomenon of last-minute switching of loyalties has plagued all parties. Rebels of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Janata Dal (United) and the Bharatiya Janata Party are among those who have filed their nominations as independents.

Ghosi: incumbent rules

Another interesting battle of the ballot during the first phase of polling on Thursday will be seen in the Ghosi Assembly segment in Jehanabad district, from where a key accused in the Rs. 900-crore fodder scam, Dr. Jagdish Sharma, the sitting MLA, is contesting as an independent.

Dr. Sharma has won six times from Ghosi since 1977, starting out as the Janata Party nominee and later shifting to the Congress in 1980, 1985, 1990 and 1995. The last polls in 2000 saw him winning as an independent, as the Congress denied him ticket on the ground of his alleged involvement in the fodder scam.

Locals credit him with devoting time to implementing development projects such as roads, irrigation canals, health centres, high schools and veterinary hospitals.

Dr. Sharma, a veterinarian, has remained firmly en-

trenched in his constituency for the past 27 years. Political analysts say Dr. Sharma, a Bhumi-har, has never tried to impose his leadership on his community and always remained a "low-profile" politician.

The RJD has also put up a Bhumi-har candidate, Ajay Singh, a former Zilla Parishad chairman, to take on Dr. Sharma who is being supported by the JD(U), BJP and LJP.

In the neighbouring Arwal

Assembly segment, an interesting electoral tussle is on the cards from where Veena Devi, wife of Union Minister of State for Agriculture, Dr. Akhilesh Singh, is the RJD nominee.

The RJD chief, Lalu Prasad, the Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, as well as Dr. Akhilesh Singh have addressed election meetings in Arwal to drum up support for the party candidate.

She is pitted against the CPI (M-L) candidate, Anwar Hus-

sain, the JD(U)'s Ranjit Kumar, the LJP's Dularchand Yadav, the Bahujan Samaj Party's Dhananjay Mistry and the RJD rebel candidate, Ravindra Singh.

The focus of electioneering is on the villages, and here again, the "caste equation" may well turn the RJD-held seat into a multi-cornered contest. Rabri Devi lost no time in reminding the voters that Bihar received "step-motherly" treatment from the Centre in the past.

"Now we have the same Government at the Centre and in Bihar, the development projects will be speeded up in the next five years," she has said at election meetings.

"*Laltenia maa roshni hoi, tabe Bihar ke vikas hoi,*" (When the RJD's symbol, the lantern, gets illuminated, only then there will be development in Bihar) is her punch line.

She also makes a mention of railway sleeper factories at Sita-

marhi and Hajipur in the pipeline and the plan to construct 42 railway bridges in the State.

Incidentally, the Railway Ministry has been an "engine for development" in Bihar. For the State has managed to get the plum Ministry at the Centre for its leaders in the recent past, be it Ram Vilas Paswan or Nitish Kumar and now Lalu Prasad.

Both Mr. Paswan and Mr. Kumar never fail to take delight

when described as "Vikas Purush" (Man of Development) by their supporters in Bihar.

Both have been "Bihar-centric" in their railway budgets and announced new trains, computerised terminals and several projects to the State, said Ghanshyam Prasad, a travel agent.

However, he regretted that the two failed to forge an alliance to give a tough fight to Mr. Lalu Prasad's RJD.

Making sense of Sonia's Bihar campaign

By Venkitesh Ramakrishnan

BHAGALPUR/ARRSAH, FEB. 1. The Congress president Sonia Gandhi's two-day campaign in Bihar in the constituencies going to the polls on February 1 was indeed impressive in terms of mass participation and popular enthusiasm but questions about the real import of the campaign remain.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Throughout her campaign Ms. Gandhi desisted from naming any political force except the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the National Democratic Alliance. While she criticised these organisations directly the references to the deficiencies of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and its 15-year-long governance were indirect.

These references came in the form of statements such as "Bihar needs to improve its law

and order situation" or "This land of learning and wisdom has been taken over by anarchy and degenerate political actions." However, all her speeches were concluded with the pronouncement that "The Congress will create a situation in this election through which it will be able to put pressure on a new secular government to make it more productive and accountable to the people."

These statements have become a matter for intense debate among the electorate. While one section of Congress supporters and sympathisers claim to have understood what Ms. Gandhi meant, another section says it can make no sense of it at all.

'Not clear'

"It is not clear what Soniaji wants the people to do, or whether she is really opposed to the RJD and its Government," said Alok Nath Singh, a first-time voter who had come



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, being greeted by a party candidate in Bhagalpur in Bihar on Tuesday. — PTI

to hear her at the massive Congress rally in Bhagalpur on Saturday. "Because of this lack of clarity," added Alok, "we will not be taking a definitive pro-

Congress position this time." Alok and his upper caste Bhumi-har friends would rather opt for a BJP-Janata Dal(U) combine, the principal opposition

to the RJD.

Some confusion

A couple of Congress workers, who got into a fairly animated and public discussion with an AICC secretary on Friday after Ms. Gandhi's Arrah meeting, also spoke in a similar vein. "We should oppose the RJD and its Government the whole hog, if we need to make gains," the workers tried to impress upon the leader.

However, another section of the electorate, especially a large segment belonging to the Muslim minority says it can clearly make out what the Congress president is trying to say. "Soniaji has told the voters," said Mohammed Nisar of Narga in Bhagalpur, "that the Congress should get enough seats that it is able to exert positive pressure on the new government, whether it is led by the RJD or Ramvilas Paswan's LJP."

But Nisar and many other residents of Narga also told

The Hindu that the minorities would vote for the Congress only if it gets sufficient votes from other communities to defeat the BJP. Nisar and his friends are not yet sure whether the Congress is capable of garnering that kind of support.

Interestingly, when the Congress had decided to contest independent of the RJD-led alliance, the BJP and its ally the Janata Dal(U) had branded it as a ploy to split Hindu upper caste votes from their combine to benefit the ruling party. But if the popular reaction from the areas where Sonia Gandhi campaigned is anything to go by, the depletion of votes seems to be from the traditional RJD vote base such as the minority community. And sections of the Congress, including some middle-level leaders, believe that the election plan of the Congress is indeed to weaken the RJD and its Government, albeit through indirect opposition.

Sonia promises to improve law and order situation in Bihar

By K. Balchand

ARRAH, JAN. 31. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today launched her party's campaign in Bihar by promising the people that the next government would be run on the basis of an agreed agenda and would address the pressing issues of the State.

Campaigning closes tomorrow for the first phase of polling. The Bharatiya Janata Party chief, L.K. Advani, and the National Democratic Alliance con- vener, George Fernandes, also campaigned in the State today.

Ms. Gandhi started her campaign at Buxar and followed it up with a public meeting here. In the 2000 elections, both constituencies were won by the BJP.

The Congress chief had not

campaigned in the State during the Lok Sabha elections. Despite the intermittent drizzle, both her meetings today were well attended.

Ms. Gandhi did not speak in favour or against the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, and the Lok Janshakti Party chief and Union Steel Minister, Ram Vilas Paswan. She only sought votes for her candidates.

Abduction issue

While she skirted the controversy relating to the abduction of school children, she blamed it on the deteriorating quality of politics, where self-interest and a quest for power had pushed aside ideals like service to the people. She was emphatic that her party was committed to

strengthening of the law and order situation and the uplift of the women, the poor and the weaker sections, besides ensuring employment and power and water supply. She underlined her party's commitment to get rid of the problems of floods and drought plaguing the State.

Ms. Gandhi told her audience that a secular government would be formed in the State only after the ratification of a joint programme as done at the Centre. She underlined her awareness of the problems of the minorities and assured remedial action. She also delved on the threat posed by communal forces, which were apparent during the BJP-led Government's tenure at the Centre.

**Assails Jharkhand
Government: Page 11**

THE HINDU

0 1 FEB 2000

Bihar abductions worry Sonia

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Buxar: Addressing her first election rally in Bihar ahead of the assembly polls, Congress president and UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Monday refrained from directly attacking the law and order situation in the state but said that strict action should be taken to check crime.

Branding the incidents of kidnapping of schoolchildren as shameful, Sonia said the government must take strict measures to arrest the criminals. She assured that the next government in the state would improve the law and order situation.

Stating that the Congress is determined to bring prosperity to the state, she said the UPA government is committed to provide 100 days employment to members of poor families in 300 districts, including several districts of Bihar.

She also took a dig at the saffron brigade's inclination for practising religion based



Sonia Gandhi at an election campaign in Buxar, Bihar, on Monday

politics.

The meeting was presided over by Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee (BPCC) chief Ramjatan Sinha. Others present on the occasion were K K Tiwary, Jagdish Tytler, Ambika Soni, Harikesh Bahadur and Anirudh Pandey.

ANDHRA PRADESH'S CULT OF VIOLENCE

THE GRISLY KILLING, in broad daylight and in the party office, of the Telugu Desam Party MLA, Paritala Ravi, by a yet-to-be identified gang calls attention yet again to the cult of violence and faction-ridden politics in Andhra Pradesh. The Anantapur legislator, who broke away from the Naxalite movement in 1992 to join the TDP, was no stranger to violence — at both ends, administering and receiving — in the theatre of Rayalaseema politics. There were approximately 40 criminal cases pending against him. There were several attempts on his life — his closest brush with death was in 1997 when a car bomb exploding in Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad took 26 lives. Maddelacheruvu Suryanarayana Reddy, whose relative's family was wiped out in a television set explosion, was sentenced last year to life imprisonment for his role in the 1997 carnage. That incident seemed to typify the brutal factional-political feuding that, over the years, has taken a heavy toll of life and well-being in several parts of Andhra Pradesh. Paritala Ravi, who lived and died by the gun, was a key actor in the Rayalaseema edition of this sordid and continuing drama.

The violence that has rocked the State and the damage to public property in the ensuing protest have cost not just the State Government dear; ordinary people too have been put to great hardship. The fact that the TDP was holding its district-level meetings on Monday for its membership drive added strength to the spontaneous reaction. On Tuesday, Andhra Pradesh observed yet another bandh that disrupted public life. It is high time political parties in the State got together and evolved a consensus to end the culture of settling personal, political, land, and all other disputes through the instrumentality of the gun and the bomb. Telugu Desam as well as Con-

gress functionaries have fallen victim in the process. Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, who hails from Cuddapah district, lost his father to this benighted culture. Several speculative theories are being advanced for Ravi's murder — it could be a sequel to the 1997 assassination attempt, it could be a settling of personal scores in the region, or it could just be internal rivalry. What has been established so far is that the job was carried out by contract killers.

Not surprisingly, the TDP has asked for the resignation of the Chief Minister and for entrusting the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation. For his part, Dr. Rajasekhara Reddy has done well to respond positively and quickly to the demand for handing over the case to the CBI — the name of his son, Jaganmohan Reddy, figures in the First Information Report related to the murder. However, the TDP chief and former Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, and Dr. Reddy owe it to the people of Andhra Pradesh to earnestly strive, along with other political leaders, to stop the murderous politics of revenge. Among other things, a code should be evolved to bar persons with a gangster background from getting the party ticket to contest elections. In addition, the Centre and the States must work concertedly to detect and put out of action gangs of hired killers, including those effortlessly crossing State borders to escape the law. The moment major crimes take place district and State borders must be sealed to make sure that the hired killers do not slip out. At a time when the uneasy truce with the Maoists is breaking down and encounters with the police are on the increase, the Andhra Pradesh political arena is getting overheated. The trend needs to be reversed urgently in the interest of the people and the development of South India's largest State.

Naxal-AP tangle: ^{HT-4} Patil for ^{19/1} dialogue

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 18

THE CENTRE on Tuesday stated that a "dialogue was a better option to handle problems" in the Naxal-affected states. While reacting to the PWG's unilateral decision to pull out of talks with the Andhra Pradesh government, Home Minister Shivraj Patil said the policy of the UPA government is to hold dialogue.

"Dialogues have succeeded in the past. One should try to make it successful," he said, adding "if talks can be held with those seeking sovereignty, then why not with Naxalites? Our conclusion is the situation will improve by talking to them."

"However, if dialogue fails, the state has to do its duty," Patil said.

Patil also said that the Centre will endorse the decisions taken by the state governments to tackle the Naxalite problem. "We have told them that if you want to talk, you talk and if you want to take action, you take action," Patil added.

Stressing that the problem was a "national issue", Patil said the Centre has asked the states to assess the situation and decide on the future course of action as they were in the field. Dispelling fears that the ceasefire between the Andhra government and the Naxals had given the outfits time for regrouping Patil said, "If the Naxalites got time, the State government has also got time to prepare". The Home Minister dismissed reports indicating that the breakdown of talks in Andhra will have an impact on polls in Bihar and Jharkhand. The AP government on Tuesday sent out conciliatory signals after the Naxalites pulled out of the talks.

TERRORISING BIHAR

Children catch ^{20/1} ⁵⁷⁻⁸ ~~Lalu~~ on the wrong foot

ATAL Behari Vajpayee could not have asked for a better campaign issue while kicking off the NDA's effort to unseat Lalu Prasad in Bihar. But that is not exactly what common citizens are worried about at the moment. The main concern is that administration and police are clueless about the spate of kidnappings now extended to schoolchildren. Private schools have been compelled to join hands to launch a massive protest pulling down shutters of their institutions and children marching down the streets to demonstrate, most effectively, the incompetence of the police.

Lalu has been a rabble rouser even on the defensive. This time he is caught on the wrong foot by children against whom he cannot raise his voice. It is clear that people at large are disgusted with the RJD's miserable record of misgovernance, extortions and the excesses of Lalu and his henchmen like Pappu Yadav who holds *durbars* in jail.

And now come the kidnappings. All this could well be reflected in the elections a few weeks away. Lalu like his Marxist friends in Bengal could, at best, have relied on a partisan administration and musclemen protected by his party. But this time adversaries like Ram Vilas Paswan have forged a loose alliance with his ally the Congress to bring him down — something that must be giving him sleepless nights.

The pre-poll scenario is confusing. Lalu's outburst against the Congress, which has refused to play second fiddle to the RJD, is proof of his nervousness. But the last thing he wants is a spontaneous protest from innocent citizens marching down streets and threatening to boycott all official functions. Lalu, in his wildest dreams, could not have depicted this as engineered by his political enemies.

The first schoolboy was kidnapped more than a week ago and before the police could provide a clue, there come reports of at least two more kidnappings of schoolboys. It seems part of a climate of terror generated by criminals moving around with political tags. That could also be the reason why police are helpless and there is no answer to criminalisation of politics which is entrenched in Bihar.

It does not help the Congress to pay hide and seek with Lalu in order to recover its presence in his state while relying on Lalu's continued support to the UPA at the Centre. At some point, the sooner the better, it has to decide that the interest and safety of the citizens come first — and that Lalu must be put in his place.

30 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Naidu copter set ablaze in lawless Bihar

HT Correspondent
Gaya, January 29

ANOTHER CHAPTER was added to Bihar's continuing lawlessness today when the campaign helicopter of Venkaiah Naidu was bombed and set ablaze by Naxalites after it made an emergency landing on a desolate village field.

The CPI (Maoist) attack, however, came after Naidu had left the landing site near the village of Pararia, Gaya district, hitching a hike on a two-wheeler. The former BJP president was taken to the Barachatti police station 13 km away, and from there proceeded to Champaran by car.

The BJP, looking desperately for a stick to beat the RJD with, played the attack up as further proof that the rule of law had collapsed in Bihar. It alleged that party leaders had repeatedly requested the district administration to arrange security for Naidu and the helicopter as soon as they came to know about the emergency landing, but their appeals were ignored.

"It is a great security lapse on the part of the district administration," said the BJP's Bihar unit spokesperson, Kiran Ghai. "Had Naidu not left the scene, he too would have been attacked along with the helicopter."

Naidu was flying to Barhi from Ranchi to attend an election meeting when, around 3 pm, his flight had to be cut short due to shortage of fuel. He later told reporters that local villagers, who had gathered round the chopper as soon as it landed, had warned him that the area was a Maoist stronghold and therefore unsafe for him.

"They told me I should leave immediately," Naidu said. "There was no arrangement for transport and one local gave me



Lalu booked

RJD PRESIDENT Lahu Prasad Yadav was booked on Saturday by the Garwah district administration in Jharkhand under the Representation of People Act and the model code of conduct. Yadav was in Garwah to address an election meeting.

PTI, Garwah

a lift to the police station on his two-wheeler."

As his pilot waited at Pararia for fuel, a Maoist squad appeared on the scene. They threw petrol bombs at the twin-engine Deccan Aviation chopper, setting it on fire and badly damaging it, beat the pilot up and left.

The pilot managed to reach Barachatti police station with the news of the attack at around 5.30 pm. It brought senior civil and police officials to the spot, which falls within the Barachatti Assembly constituency.

Just a week ago, Maoist militants had gunned down former Gaya MP and Lok Janshakti Party candidate from Imamganj, Rajesh Kumar, and three others in the region. The Naxalites had also killed the Munger superintendent of police, K.C. Surendra Babu, and five policemen by triggering a landmine blast at nearby Bhimbandh on January 5.

✱ Poll reports on Page 2

30 JAN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Desperate measures

Bihar's schoolchildren are holding a mirror to the state

9.6.05 Bihar 9.6.05

THEY are skipping lunch. They are giving chase to top politicians. They boycotted Republic Day celebrations. Their parents have been inducted for sit-ins. Bihar's students have put the state on notice. It began with a protest against the kidnapping of 14-year-old Kishlay Kaushal of Patna's Delhi Public School. And as an agitation after impromptu agitation sets off chain reactions, it has expanded to amplify outrage over news of every subsequent kidnapping. By last count, four schoolchildren had gone missing in the state in the past fortnight alone. But in a society with little visible inclination to organise protest without organisational support, to dwell on statistics would be to miss the import of what's happening in Bihar. Because, the emerging battle being waged by these schoolchildren is also an assault on the numbing coldness of statistics.

For far too long the analysis has been unnervingly flat. In Bihar, they say, a kidnapping industry flourishes. To be successful is to mark oneself out for abduction. Just in recent months intimations of Bihar's flourishing private healthcare sector was confirmed by a spate of kidnappings of doctors. But

even the daily wage earners live in dread, with organised gangs extracting protection money in instalments. Abductions are often under-reported though a figure of six a day is bandied about in the state. Along with this come periodic updates on the flight of talent entrepreneurship and capital from the state. By one estimate, well over R 10,000 crore has left Bihar in the last decade. Bihar's problem has been stated eloquently. The political class has been roundly indicted. Yet, it is politicians — in government and in opposition — who are the voices of protest, who lead the debate on solutions.

It is in this context that efforts by Bihar schoolchildren's to wrest the safety of their mates must be viewed. For far too long contenders in the state's electoral arena have enjoyed monopoly in the debate over social and administrative issues. Certainly, they must be key participants in the process. But if students — so far demanding nothing more than a basic right to law and order — can bring in diverse sections of civil society into the process of crafting a new agenda for Bihar, they have taken considerable ownership of their future.

Bihar schoolchildren take to the streets

HD-1
28/1

9.8.7

By Our Correspondent

PATNA, JAN. 28. Several schoolchildren today braved inclement weather and staged a demonstration before the Raj Bhavan here. They later called on the Bihar Governor, Buta Singh, and urged him to ensure the release of the schoolchildren kidnapped across the State.

After hearing the delegation, the Governor promised to do everything to secure the release of the abducted children. He has convened a high level meeting of officials tomorrow and said he was in touch with the Centre.

The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad enforced a bandh in Bhagalpur closing down shops and detaining trains to protest against the kidnapping of Deepak Kumar, a student of the DAV Public School in the town.

The vice-chairman of the Bihar Public School Students Welfare Association, S.S. Ahmed, said that in the light of the Governor's assurance they would

wait for two days before deciding on a bandh of all schools in the State. He warned that they would have think of closing down the schools indefinitely if matters did not improve.

Three traced: Lalu

The Rashtriya Janata Dal supremo and Railway Minister, Lalu Prasad, said that the whereabouts of three children had

been traced and that the police were making all efforts to trace the other three.

One boy had been tracked to Motihari where he had secretly married a girl with whom he had eloped, he said. Another boy, Sumit, had gone to Delhi and the missing girl from Hajipur, Anjali, was also said to be involved in an affair.

The RJD chief said it would

not be long before the entire story of those behind the kidnappings and their motives were exposed. He described as conspiracy the "agenda" to rake up the issue everyday.

He appealed to those "dragging children on to the roads" not to exploit them. He also lashed out against the former Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, for seeking to turn it into an electoral issue when he had not done anything to save the infants killed in Gujarat during the 2002 riots there despite admitting in his speech at Bhagalpur yesterday that Bharatiya Janata Party members had a hand in the riots. He sought to know what Mr. Vajpayee had done when his nephew was pushed from a running train and killed.

Mr. Lalu Prasad, however, said that it was natural for the President to express concern and charged that it had been politicised by the BJP.

Editorial on Page 10

Kalam concerned

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 28. The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who communicates with children wherever he goes, is being flooded with e-mails and petitions from school students in Bihar who are agitated by the recent spate of kidnappings in the State.

Rashtrapati Bhavan sources said the President was "quite concerned about the kidnappings." Dr. Kalam's secretary, they said, was in regular contact with senior officials of the Bihar Government and that "the President is being kept informed about the developments regularly."

SATURDAY, JANUARY 29, 2005

BADLANDS OF BIHAR

10-10
29/1

WITH THREE BIHAR school children suspected to have been abducted and a fourth reported missing, the State is once again in the news for a wrong reason — this time on the eve of a crucial Assembly election. And as is to be expected, panic has gripped parents and their school-going wards. The kidnappings and the consequent protests have snatched the spotlight, at least in the urban areas, from the unfolding action on the election arena. On Wednesday, schools in Patna boycotted the customary Republic Day festivities and students formed protest human chains. For the Rabri Devi Government, already accused by its critics of running an anarchist administration, the abductions pose a challenge that could not have come at a worse time; it does not help Ms. Rabri Devi and Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad that in popular perception Bihar is something of a haven for kidnapping, thuggery and other assorted crimes. The least the State Government can do is to trace the missing children and locate the source of trouble. Already the knives are out for Mr. Prasad, with leaders of the National Democratic Alliance — George Fernandes, Pramod Mahajan, and Arun Jaitley — moving rather swiftly to blame the incidents on the “jungle raj” in the State. At a public rally on Thursday, former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in theatrical style typical of him, sought to know the whereabouts of the children.

Yet there is something out of the ordinary in the near simultaneity of kidnappings that occurred in different parts of the State. If this feature is suspiciously odd, to say the least, the rushed manner of the execution of the abductions suggests a nefarious design — disturbing public peace by creating a climate of fear. Who would benefit from the pre-election disruption

of calm? Not the Rabri Devi Government. Nonetheless the Chief Minister will do well to ask herself how the situation came to this pass. Over the years, doctors, engineers, and businessmen across Bihar have been kidnapped for ransom and some among them killed. In November 2004, as many as 20,000 doctors of government and private hospitals went on a six-day strike to protest the killing of an eminent surgeon by extortionists. Admittedly, there are other places in the country where crime levels are unacceptable; they include India's Capital, New Delhi. However, Bihar is rendered a virtual basket case by its abysmal social and development indices.

That the coming election will once again revolve around the larger-than-life personality of Mr. Prasad speaks for his enduring and dominant presence on the Bihar electoral canvas. In the 14th general election, the RJD's share of the popular vote was over 30 per cent, which is remarkable given that between them Mr. Prasad and Ms. Rabri Devi have been at the helm for the past 15 years. The contrast is provided by the fragmentation of the vote in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, which is as caste-driven as Bihar, if not more. Mr. Prasad's early years as Chief Minister were a period of enormous hope in a State that was dominated by the landed castes. He spoke in an idiom with which the marginalised classes identified themselves, and indeed there was some truth in his claim that he had given them *swar* (voice), if not *swarg* (heaven). Bihar also turned out to be one of the few States that withstood the surge of the *Sangh Parivar's* communalism. Unfortunately today the State is a picture of lawlessness with caste armies and naxalite groups combining with garden-variety criminals to hold the people to ransom.

29 JAN 2005

THE HINDU

Bihar children on warpath over kidnap

OUR BUREAU

Patna, Jan. 24: Bihar today woke up to a snowballing movement spearheaded by children demanding the release of a kidnapped boy and went to bed with the stunning news that another student has disappeared.

Police said Ravi Kant, a student of DAV Public School in Biharsharif, went missing today, six days after another schoolboy, Kislay Kaushal, was kidnapped.

Ravi Kant's family members alerted the police in the evening as he did not reach home. The police said the boy might have been kidnapped when he was proceeding to board the school bus but added that investigations are on to confirm this.

The abduction of Kislay, a student of Delhi Public School, Patna, has triggered a campaign by schoolchildren.

Over a thousand schools in and around Patna remained closed today to protest against the rising incidence of kidnapping of school students. The DAV group of schools however, remained open, but organised fasts, prayers and *yagnas* in support. Other schools planned a relay fast if the abducted child is not found by Republic Day.

Some students said they would not "celebrate" Republic Day. "We respect the nation and the Tricolour. We will participate in the flag-hoisting ceremony but will not participate in the customary cultural programmes," said a DPS student.

The students seemed to be preparing to intensify their agitation.

Some schools have already

formed groups of students to launch a relay fast from tomorrow following a call by Oxygen, a non-government organisation working for students. The NGO president, Vinod Singh, is on a fast for the last four days.

"The elders — especially the police or Laloo Prasad Yadav — have done little for our safety and Kislay's release. Perhaps it is time we children try to make a difference. We want justice, we want safety and according to our civics teachers, these are our basic rights and the government's duty. We will continue to skip our lunch till the police rescue Kislay," said a Class IX student of Notre Dame Academy.

Schools reopen for a day tomorrow before Republic Day. Sources in the local public schools' association said they were planning a "massive protest march" of children near Raj Bhavan on January 26 or 27 if Kislay is not rescued by then.

A girl of St Joseph's Convent was upset because Laloo Prasad said the protest of students at the airport was "planted" by a news channel. "Nothing can be more demeaning than to insult our genuine sentiments. We have committed no crime in demanding safety. Some politicians say the protest is only by students of the elite schools, which is anyway not true. But will they tell us where do their children study?" she asked.

A student of DAV-Patliputra said their protest was not being taken seriously because they were not eligible to vote.

"We are scared to go to the bus stop every morning. We want to draw the attention of all voters of Bihar to our condition and fear," he said.

ANOTHER STUDENT DISAPPEARS IN SNATCH-SCARRED STATE



Students of DAV School, Patna, pray for the safe return of Kislay Kaushal who was abducted last week. (PTI)

Paswan backs Cong, JMM to fight RJD

SNS & PTI 9 JAN 2005

PATNA/RANCHI Jan. 14. — Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, leader of the Lok Janshakti Party, a UPA partner, today expressed total support to the Congress, in an apparent bid to wean it away from the RJD. Should the need arise, he will even campaign for the Congress. He said the release of the list of candidates was being delayed because he wanted to avoid "friendly fights" and did not want to harm the Congress nominees.

The Congress, which intends to contest 80 seats in Bihar, today dismissed suggestions that seat-sharing with the UPA allies has collapsed. It said that efforts were on to get a "respectable" number of seats for the party to put in place a "broad secular alliance",

including the LJP. The RJD today said it could spare a maximum of 14 seats for its old ally. "Just as the Congress has announced not to field any candidates against us in Jharkhand, we will do the same thing in Bihar," quipped RJD chief Mr Lalu Prasad while talking to media persons here today.

The CPI-M said today it will contest from 14 seats in Bihar, as part of an alliance with RJD and Congress.

In Jharkhand, a split in anti-BJP votes seems likely with the JMM today saying that it will contest against the RJD. "We will contest in the 35 seats we have got (after an electoral understanding with Congress). But, we will also contest in those places where RJD fields candidates against us," Mr Durga Soren, JMM supremo Mr Sibusoren's son, said.

BJP hints at post-poll tie-ups: pg 4



Mr Lalu Prasad, Mrs Rabri Devi and Mr Subhash Yadav, Mr Prasad's brother-in-law, enjoy chura-dahai and tilkut on the occasion of Makar Sankranti in Patna on Friday. — PTI

Bihar Supremo Manages To Eke Out Caste Benefits From Sonia Cong to contest 80 seats in Bihar

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 13 JANUARY

THE Congress, which has failed to get Lalu Prasad Yadav to upgrade his offer of Assembly seats in Bihar, on Thursday, indicated its plans to contest on its own in 80 seats. But the subsequent indication that the party will restrict these contests to seats won by the NDA in the last polls, clearly showed an understanding of sorts with Mr Yadav.

Mr Yadav, who appears to have benefited once again from the anxiety of the Congress not to raise the NDA's comfort level, is learnt to have extracted a promise from the Congress leadership that its candidates will be drawn



SONIA: FIGURE WATCH

mostly from the upper caste sections. Sources said the Congress

leadership will also take care not to field many Muslim candidates as it could cause a split in a vote-bank that is, for the moment, firmly arrayed behind the RJD.

A sizeable presence of upper caste nominees in the Congress list, the RJD hopes, will cause a division in the savarna votes, denting the NDA's electoral prospects. A section of the upper castes have of late been disenchanted with the BJP and there is expectation of this section moving away from the NDA in the coming elections.

But Congress leaders here admit that the image of a spoiler that the Congress has gained after indications of the Bihar "pact" could stall the movement of upper

castes away from the NDA. The upper castes, which are anxious to see the ouster of the Lalu regime, will not find the Congress a credible platform. In any case, Mr Yadav has been claiming that after the elections, the RJD's ties with Congress will remain as cosy.

The Congress' decision not to field many Muslim candidates will once again make the RJD the lone claimant for their votes. The election would have provided an opportunity to test the current standing of "social justice" leaders in the community. The Congress, in any case, has been claiming that there has been a change in the Muslim mood and that the community is now favourably disposed towards it.

জটিল অঙ্কের চেহারা নিচ্ছে বিহারের ভোট-চিত্র

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, পটনা ও নয়া দিল্লি, ১৩ জানুয়ারি: কেন্দ্রের জোট সরকারের শরিকদের মধ্যে বিহারে আসন রফা হল এবং হলও না। আসনে পুরো ব্যাপারটিই জটিল অঙ্কের মতো।

- লালপ্রসাদের আরজেডির সঙ্গে কংগ্রেসের সমঝোতা এখনও হয়নি।
- কংগ্রেস ৮০টি আসনে প্রার্থী দেবে বলে ঠিক করেছে। এর মধ্যে ৩০টিতে লালুর সঙ্গে কংগ্রেসের সমঝোতা হলেও হতে পারে। কিন্তু বাকিগুলিতে 'বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ লড়াই'।
- রামবিলাসের লোক জনশক্তি পাটি কংগ্রেসের বিরুদ্ধে কোনও কেন্দ্রেই প্রার্থী দেবে না। তবে লালুর দলের বিরুদ্ধে সব আসনেই লড়াই।
- বিহারে ইউপিএ সরকারের দুই শরিক লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব এবং রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের সঙ্গে দর কষাকষি করে কংগ্রেস অনেকেটাই মজবুত জায়গায় পৌঁছতে চলেছে। লালুর কাছে কংগ্রেস অথমে একশোটি

আসন দাবি করেছিল। পরে কংগ্রেস নেতারা ৮০টি আসনে নির্জেনের দলের প্রার্থী দিতে চায়। গত নির্বাচনে কংগ্রেস ১২টি আসনে জিতেছিল। কিন্তু লালু তাঁদের দাবিমতো আসন ছাড়তে রাজি হননি। ফলে, আলোচনা কার্যত ভেঙে গিয়েছে। লালু অবশ্য আজও পটনায় বলেছেন, "আলোচনা এখনও চলছে।"

অন্য দিকে, বিহারে কংগ্রেস যে সব আসনে প্রার্থী দেবে, সেখানে রামবিলাসের লোক জনশক্তি পাটি কোনও প্রার্থী দাঁড় করাবে না। আজ পটনায় লোক জনশক্তি পাটির নেতারা মোটামুটি এই সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। তবে যে সব আসনে কংগ্রেস প্রার্থী দিচ্ছে না, সেখানে লালুর আরজেডির সঙ্গে সরাসরি লড়াইয়ে রামবিলাসের দল।

কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে 'আধা-সমঝোতা' এবং 'আধা-লড়াই' অবশ্যই বালু ধরে নিয়েছেন লালু-কমিউনিস্ট শিরি। এখন 'বন্ধুত্বপূর্ণ লড়াই' কতটা সীমিত করা যায়, তার জন্যই চেষ্টা চলছে।

হয়েছে। কংগ্রেসের জেতা ও বিজেপি-জোটের বিরুদ্ধে দ্বিতীয় স্থানে থাকা আসন মিলিয়ে মোট সংখ্যা হল ১৭। এর সঙ্গে আরও দশটি আসন যোগ করতে লালুরা রাজি ছিলেন। সেই সংখ্যা বাড়িয়ে ৩৫ পর্যন্ত যাওয়ার ব্যাপারেও তাঁরা নিমরাজি হয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু কংগ্রেস তাতে সন্তুষ্ট নয়।

এই অবস্থায় সি পি এমের সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি কাল পটনা যাচ্ছেন। সি পি আই নেতা এ বি বর্ধনেরও রািচি থেকে সেখানে যাওয়ার কথা। কাল তাঁদের সঙ্গে সপার্বদ লালু ও জাতীয়তাবাদী কংগ্রেসের নেতা তারিক আলোয়ারের বৈঠক হবে। চূড়ান্ত আসনরফাও কাল ঘোষণা হওয়ার কথা। তবে কালকের পরিবর্তে পরশু পর্যন্তও তাঁরা অপেক্ষা করতে পারেন। কারণ, তাঁরা চান কংগ্রেস যেন রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের দলের সঙ্গে জোট না বাঁধে।

কেন্দ্রে সরকারে আসায় রাজ্যের কংগ্রেসের মরা গাঙে জেয়ার এসেছে। অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি-র অবস্থা ঠিক উল্টো। নেতৃত্ব নেই, চলছে বিস্ফোভ। আজ ভোটের টিকিট নিয়ে তুমুল বিস্ফোভের মধ্যে পড়েছিলেন মুখতার আকাস নাকভি।

তবে বিহারের আসন নিয়ে

কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে আরজেডি-সমঝোতা না হলেও তার প্রভাব কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের উপরে পড়বে না তা আজ জানিয়েছেন লালু। তাঁ বলেন, "কোনও অবস্থাতেই কেন্দ্রী সরকার টিকিয়ে রাখার জন্য আমাদের দায়বদ্ধতা অস্বীকার করব না।"

অন্য দিকে, লালুর সঙ্গে কংগ্রেসে জোট না হওয়ার সবচেয়ে বিপাতে পড়েছেন বিহারের বিজেপি নেতারা বিহারের কংগ্রেস এবং বিজেপি-র ভোটব্যাঙ্ক মোটামুটি এক। গত কয়েকটি নির্বাচনে বিহারের উচ্চবর্গের মানুষ কংগ্রেসকে ছেড়ে বিজেপি-র দিকে ঝুঁকিয়েছেন।

কেন্দ্রে সরকারে আসায় রাজ্যের কংগ্রেসের মরা গাঙে জেয়ার এসেছে। অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি-র অবস্থা ঠিক উল্টো। নেতৃত্ব নেই, চলছে বিস্ফোভ। আজ ভোটের টিকিট নিয়ে তুমুল বিস্ফোভের মধ্যে পড়েছিলেন মুখতার আকাস নাকভি।

কেন্দ্রে সরকারে আসায় রাজ্যের কংগ্রেসের মরা গাঙে জেয়ার এসেছে। অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি-র অবস্থা ঠিক উল্টো। নেতৃত্ব নেই, চলছে বিস্ফোভ। আজ ভোটের টিকিট নিয়ে তুমুল বিস্ফোভের মধ্যে পড়েছিলেন মুখতার আকাস নাকভি।

কেন্দ্রে সরকারে আসায় রাজ্যের কংগ্রেসের মরা গাঙে জেয়ার এসেছে। অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি-র অবস্থা ঠিক উল্টো। নেতৃত্ব নেই, চলছে বিস্ফোভ। আজ ভোটের টিকিট নিয়ে তুমুল বিস্ফোভের মধ্যে পড়েছিলেন মুখতার আকাস নাকভি।

কেন্দ্রে সরকারে আসায় রাজ্যের কংগ্রেসের মরা গাঙে জেয়ার এসেছে। অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি-র অবস্থা ঠিক উল্টো। নেতৃত্ব নেই, চলছে বিস্ফোভ। আজ ভোটের টিকিট নিয়ে তুমুল বিস্ফোভের মধ্যে পড়েছিলেন মুখতার আকাস নাকভি।

বিহারে ভাঙনের মুখে শাসক জোটের এক্য

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১২ জানুয়ারি: কেন্দ্রের শাসক জোটের এক্য শেষ পর্যন্ত বিহারে ভেঙে যাওয়ার মুখে রাজনৈতিক সূত্রের খবর, আজ একান্ত বৈঠকে লালুপ্রসাদ নিজেই সনিয়া গান্ধীকে বলে এসেছেন, বিহারে যদি তাঁদের মতো লড়াইও হয়, তা হলেও কেন্দ্রে একা অটুট থাকবে। এর সহজ অর্থ, কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে লালুপ্রসাদের জোটের সম্ভাবনা কার্যত সঙ্কটে। তবে অন্য দলগুলির সঙ্গে আসন রফা নিয়ে চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে লালু দু'দিন সময় হাতে রেখেছেন। অর্থাৎ শেষ চেষ্টার জন্য দরজা খোলা রাখা হচ্ছে।

সব মিলিয়ে এখন যা পরিস্থিতি, তাতে বিহারে দুই কমিউনিস্ট পার্টি ও শরদ পওয়ারের কংগ্রেসের সঙ্গে জোট বেঁধে যে লালুপ্রসাদ ভোটে লড়বেন, সেটা একশো শতাংশ নিশ্চিত। কিন্তু

সেই জোট কংগ্রেস থাকবে কি না, তা পুরোপুরি অনিশ্চিত। বরং আজ নতুন করে এই সম্ভাবনাই জোরদার হয়েছে যে কংগ্রেস শেষ পর্যন্ত লালুপ্রসাদকে ছেড়ে রামবিলাস পাসোসায়ানের সঙ্গে জোট বাঁধবে। সম্ভাবনার সূত্রপাত করেছে সনিয়া নিজেই— রামবিলাসের সঙ্গে বৈঠকে বসেন।

বৈঠক থেকে বিহারে রামবিলাস বলেন, তিনি সনিয়াকে জানিয়েছেন তাঁর দলের সঙ্গে জোট বাঁধলে কংগ্রেসকে 'মুখামুখি' ছেড়ে দেবেন। রামবিলাসের দাবি, তাঁর এবং কংগ্রেসের জোট বিহারে দুই-তৃতীয়াংশ আসন পাবে। শেষ পর্যন্ত যদি তথাকথিত 'ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ' শিবির বিহারে দু'ভাগে ভাগ হয়ে যায়, তা হলেও অবশ্য নীতীশ কুমারের পক্ষে সময়াভাবে আর নতুন করে ভাবনাচিন্তা করা সম্ভব হবে না বলেই রাজনৈতিক

সূত্র ইঙ্গিত পাওয়া গিয়েছে। নীতীশ চাইছিলেন, বিজেপির সঙ্গে ছেড়ে এসে কংগ্রেস-পাসোসায়ানের সঙ্গে হাত মেলাতে। কিন্তু এতদিন কংগ্রেসের তরফে লালুর থেকে সারে আসার ইঙ্গিত না মেলায় তিনি শেষে বিজেপির সঙ্গে আসনরফা করে নিয়েছেন।

বাড়খণ্ডে কংগ্রেস একতরফা শিব সোরেনের দলের সঙ্গে আসনরফা করে নিয়ে 'অন্যদের' জন্য তেরোটি আসন ছেড়ে দেওয়ার বিহার-বাড়খণ্ডের ভোট নিয়ে সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল মোর্চার শরিক-সমর্থকদের মতো বিরোধ বাধে। কারণ, ওই রাজ্যে বিজেপি-বিরোধী 'অন্য' দলগুলির দখলে এখনই রয়েছে আঠারোটি আসন। শরিক-সমর্থকদের ধারণা ছিল, সেই আসনগুলি ছাড়াও যেখানে তাঁরা বিতীয় স্থানে ছিলেন, সেগুলিও তাঁরা পাবেন। কিন্তু কংগ্রেস অতিরিক্ত কোনও আসন ছাড়তে রাজি

হয়নি। কমিউনিস্টদের বক্তব্য, বাড়খণ্ডে তাঁদের জোট জিতে যাবে বলে নিশ্চিত হওয়াতেই কংগ্রেস এই ধরনের আচরণ করেছে।

বাড়খণ্ডে উপেক্ষিত হওয়ার পর থেকেই লালুপ্রসাদ কংগ্রেস নেতাদের বলে আসছেন যে তিনি নির্দিষ্ট সূত্র অনুযায়ী আসনরফা করতে চান। সূত্র হল, গত বারের জেতা আসন ও বিজেপি-জোটের বিরুদ্ধে দ্বিতীয় হওয়া আসনের সংখ্যা অনুযায়ী এ বার আসন বন্টন করা হবে। আজও তিনি সনিয়া গান্ধীর কাছে গিয়ে সেই কথাই বলেন। এই সূত্র অনুযায়ী কংগ্রেসের বিহারে সাতেরোটি আসন পাওয়ার কথা। তবে এরপরেও রাজ্যে সাতেরোটি এমন আসন আছে, যেখানে সংযুক্ত প্রগতিশীল মোর্চার কোনও শরিক প্রথম বা দ্বিতীয় স্থানে ছিল না। ওই সাতেরোটির মধ্যে দশটি দিতেও তিনি

তৈরি বলে জানিয়ে লালু সনিয়াকে বলেন, এর অতিরিক্ত কোনও আসন দেওয়া তাঁর পক্ষে সম্ভব নয়।

কংগ্রেস আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে পঁচাত্তরটি আসন চাইলেও শেষ পর্যন্ত পঞ্চাশে রাজি ছিল। কিন্তু তা না দেওয়ার চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার আগে আজ সকালে লালুপ্রসাদ নিজের মিত্রদের সঙ্গে এক দফা আলোচনা করে নেন সিপিএমের সাধারণ সম্পাদক হরকিষণ সিংহ সুরজিতের বাড়িতে। সেখানে পওয়ারের দলের তারিক আনোয়ার ও সিপিআইয়ের তরফে ডি রাজাও ছিলেন। তারপরে সনিয়ার সঙ্গে কথা সেরে তিনি চলে আসেন সিপিএমের সদর দফতরে। আলোচনার পরে সীতারাম ইয়েচুরি জানিয়ে দেন, আগামী পরশু পঁচাত্তর আসন মিলিত হয়ে তাঁরা আসন রফার চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেন।

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Left, NCP rally behind Lalu

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 12. With seat-sharing discussions between the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) remaining stuck, allies in the United Progressive Alliance and the supporting Left parties today rallied behind the RJD.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), the CPI and the Nationalist Congress Party announced they would remain with the RJD.

They asserted that the basic objective was to ensure that the communal forces did not benefit from a division of secular votes. "Discussions with the Congress are continuing," was the refrain of the Left and RJD leaders after the RJD chief, Lalu Prasad, met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, here this afternoon. Mr. Prasad left for Patna later.

"We have all agreed to be together and our seat-sharing pact would be announced in Patna on Friday," Mr. Prasad, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury, the CPI leader, D. Raja, and the NCP general secretary, Tariq

Anwar, told correspondents at the CPI(M) office here.

Paswan offers better deal

The meeting came soon after Mr. Prasad met the Congress leaders and around the time the Lok Janshakti Party chief, Ram Vilas Paswan, met Ms. Gandhi separately.

All that Mr. Paswan, who has distanced himself from the RJD, said was that he was willing to offer a better deal to the Congress. However, as of now it appears Mr. Paswan will have to go it alone after he made it clear that he was not willing to align with the Janata Dal (United).

The talks between the Congress and the RJD are held up due to differences over numbers — the former is not willing to scale down its demand from over 100 to 70 plus while the RJD is keen on applying the formula of sitting seats plus those in which the party came second in the last Assembly polls. As per the RJD's calculations, the Congress does not have a claim over more than 19 seats, though it could stretch it further by 10 more.

Mr. Prasad is also upset that

the Congress announced a pact with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and gave just 13 seats to the RJD and the Left parties in Jharkhand, which include nine seats held by the RJD and three by the CPI in the outgoing Assembly. Having adopted this equation in Jharkhand, the RJD feels that the Congress cannot expect different treatment in Bihar.

On the other hand, the CPI (M) has brought down its demand from 24 seats to 14 and the CPI from 32 to 20.

If all allies stake claims on the basis of first and second-position in the last polls, then only 17 of the 243 seats are open. The problem is how to accommodate them all.

"Friendly contests" were a possibility Mr. Prasad did not deny after it became evident that no breakthrough was likely this afternoon.

Yet, after meeting Ms. Gandhi, he told correspondents that there was "no threat to the UPA at the Centre" and that the objective of defeating the communal forces remained intact.

He expressed the confidence that the seat-sharing talks would be sorted out soon.

Bihar seat-sharing talks hit a roadblock

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. Seat-sharing discussions between the constituents of the United Progressive Alliance and allies in Bihar hit a roadblock today with the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Left parties protesting the "unilateral" agreement announced by the Congress and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha without consulting other allies.

Irked over the decision in Jharkhand that left few seats for the RJD, its president, Lalu Prasad, today threatened to ignore the Congress and forge an alliance with the Nationalist Congress Party and the Left in both Bihar and Jharkhand.

The Left parties too disagreed with the "unilateral" announcement and the CPI general secretary, A.B. Bardhan, lodged a protest with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, this evening.

Ms. Gandhi is understood to have promised to discuss the issue with senior party leaders and it is likely that she may meet Mr. Bardhan and Mr. Prasad tomorrow to sort things out.

Dhawan meets Lalu

Aware that the pact had ruffled feathers in the UPA, the Congress also set in motion a damage control exercise. Senior leader R.K. Dhawan, who had negotiated the seat-sharing pact

with the RJD for the Lok Sabha elections, met Mr. Prasad this evening while the AICC general secretary, Ambika Soni, said the party was open to talks with allies for an amicable settlement.

The RJD chief interpreted the Congress move in Jharkhand as a signal that the party was not interested in continuing its alliance with the RJD in Bihar. "What they (Congress) have done tantamounts to saying that they do not need us. In that case we will have to do what is good for us," he said.

The RJD chief appeared upset with Congress leaders, Arjun Singh and M.L. Fotedar, engaged in negotiations with the RJD/JMM and the Left. He accused them of working out the deal with the JMM to weaken the UPA and Ms. Gandhi. "By disregarding trusted allies they are actually weakening her. This will work to the advantage of the communal forces and the enemies of the UPA," he said.

While attacking the two Congress leaders and its State leadership, he was careful not to criticise Ms. Gandhi. "She has been misled. She will never do anything that will weaken the UPA. She is above all this," he said. The RJD chief said that despite his anger at the Congress, he was committed to the UPA and would do nothing that

would weaken it at the Centre.

In order to convey his displeasure, the RJD chief did not reopen the ongoing negotiations with the Congress leaders for Bihar. He met the CPI (M) Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury, last night and Mr. Bardhan this morning.

Mr. Bardhan is understood to have told Ms. Gandhi that the Left parties and the RJD would be together and that the Jharkhand seat-sharing pact had ignored the strength of their respective parties.

While the RJD has nine sitting MLAs, the CPI has three MLAs in the outgoing Assembly. Besides, the RJD has to take into account the four Janata Dal (United) MLAs who had crossed over to the party last week. The CPI, which contested the 2000 Assembly polls on its own in the then undivided Bihar, had won three and came second in two constituencies. The CPI (M), in alliance with the RJD, contested 11 seats.

After the meeting with the RJD chief, the CPI (M) Polit Bureau member, Sitaram Yechury, said his party would contest three seats in the first phase in Bihar. Polling for the 243 seats will be held in three phases.

Mr. Yechury told *The Hindu* that discussions for the subsequent phases would be held after January 14.