

EC to punish errant govt employees

Statesman News Service

28/11 5-5
Left Front meet

KOLKATA, Nov. 27. — The Election Commission is gearing up to take action against the government employees who have been accused of 'deliberate disobedience or negligence' of their poll duties during the last parliamentary election in May 2004 and afterwards, the state chief electoral officer, Mr Debasis Sen, said.

It has asked the state election department to prepare a status report on the disciplinary proceedings pending against the government staff who have been served show-cause notices since the last general election. Also the EC has ordered to initiate action against the officials and staff who have been accused of dereliction of duties during the ongoing revision of electoral rolls in the state.

"We will ask the district magistrates to submit reports on the disciplinary proceedings pending against government employees who were on poll duties during the parliamentary election. We are expecting the preliminary reports soon. Though show-cause notices were issued to many of them, we lacked the follow-up action. Henceforth, not only actions will be taken in old cases but also new proceedings will be initiated against errant officials engaged in ongoing electoral roll revision," Mr Sen said. A letter to the district administra-

KOLKATA, Nov 27.— The Left Front chairman, Mr Biman Bose, has convened a meeting of all Left Front partners tomorrow to discuss the Election Commission's strictures on persons declared as 'absconders' by police with non-bailable arrest warrants pending against them. — SNS

tions will be issued tomorrow.

"It was too remote," he commented when asked whether the proceedings initiated during the Assembly polls in 2001 would also be taken into account. According to him, around 25-30 complaints have been lodged against the officials including the election department staff who are engaged in the revision of voters' list. The visiting EC teams were annoyed as state electoral staff failed to turn up in time at the polling booths at Alipore while citizens had been waiting for them to submit applications for enrolment or objections to such inclusions on various grounds.

Today EC teams visited the booths in Kolkata north-west and north-east parliamentary constituencies, as well as several areas of Murshidabad, Nadia and South 24-Parganas.

As the EC wants to follow the "Bihar model" during the forthcoming Assembly election in West Bengal and four other states in 2006, several orders have been issued to ensure free polls.

27-member Bihar Cabinet sworn in

ASHOK Mishra and
VIJAY Swaroop
Patna, November 24

JD(U) LEADER Nitish Kumar was on Thursday sworn in as the chief minister of Bihar. He was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Buta Singh.

A disciple of Jayprakash Narayan, the 54-year-old Nitish was sworn in as the chief minister for the second time.

Also sworn in were state BJP president Sushil Kumar Modi (as deputy CM in the JD(U)-BJP coalition government), 15 cabinet ministers and 10 ministers of state. The cabinet is largely representative of all the major castes and communities.

A host of NDA stars — including former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, BJP president L.K. Advani, Akali Dal chief Prakash Singh Badal, former J&K chief minister Farooq Abdullah and JD(U) Parliamentary Board chairman Sharad Yadav — were present on the occasion.

RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, outgoing chief minister Rabri Devi and newly elected RJD MLAs did not attend the function.

The run-up to the swearing-in was marred by scuffles at the state BJP office, as supporters of a few MLAs, like Navin Kishore Prasad Sinha, clashed with each other, protesting against the alleged non-inclusion of their leaders in the new ministry.



BJP activists celebrate in Patna on Thursday.

PTI

Several supporters of a senior party MLA from Aurangabad and a few others who could not be inducted into the government jostled and clashed with those who tried to disperse them.

They also held demonstration at the hotel where Advani and other national leaders were putting up. Security was tightened around the BJP office after the incident.

Keeping his promise of giving adequate representation to all the major caste groups and communities in the state, Nitish Kumar inducted one Vaishya, one Kurmi, four Yadavs, two Koeris, four MBCs, two Dalits, two Muslims, four Bhumihars, three Rajputs, two Brahmins and a Kayastha in his team.

Transfer of power

New team in Bihar
Altogether 26 ministers, 16 of Cabinet rank and 10 ministers of state, took oath along with Nitish Kumar

Balancing act
The JD(U) has 10 Cabinet ministers and the BJP six. Of the 10 ministers of state, eight are from the JD(U) and the rest two from the BJP

Caste representation
Keeping his promise Nitish inducted one Vaishya, two Muslims, one Kurmi, four Yadavs, four Bhumihars, three Rajputs and two Brahmins

BIHAR'S REVENGE

'M' tide turned tables on Lalu

How Paswan helped NDA

ARUN Kumar
Patna, November 23

THE LJP'S RAM Vilas Paswan after the election results were out: "We played our part in ending Lalu's jungle raj. Our mission has been accomplished." Sour grapes? On the face of it, yes. After all, the man who seemed to be getting used to being called 'kingmaker' was wiped out with a measly tally of nine seats. So what is he boasting about?

But a closer look at the LJP's showing and the percentage of votes it polled shows that by not going with the RJD-led alliance, it did play a role in ending Lalu's 15-year reign.

Casualty list

The Lalu alliance lost a number of seats because of the split in 'secular' votes:

RJD: 57 seats

Congress: 13

NCP: 2

percentage of votes it garnered, which ultimately made the difference between the NDA and SDA. In as many as 85 seats, LJP candidates cornered more than 10 per cent of the votes polled, which proved vital. There were 33 seats where Paswan's men polled more than 20 per cent votes. This is apart from the seats the LJP won. In most of these seats, the LJP was the runner-up, relegating the RJD or Congress to third spot. Even in seats where the LJP polled less than 10 per cent votes, the party got votes between 2000 and 10,000 — more than the SDA candidate's margin of defeat.

As a result, the RJD lost 57 seats, the Congress 13 and the NCP two. Had Paswan been with the UPA, as in the 2004 parliamentary elections, the picture might have been considerably different. "Our job was to end Lalu's rule and we've done that. The NDA wouldn't have been able to take on the RJD on its own. We managed to do that," LJP vice-president Ranjan Yadav said. Not entirely wrong.

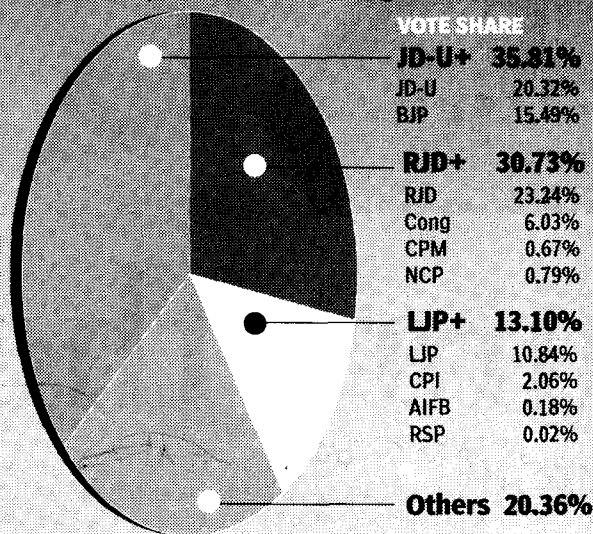
Minor figures, major factors

FINAL TALLY Seats 243

JD-U+	143
JD-U-88, BJP-55	
RJD+	65
RJD-54, Cong-9, NCP-1, CPM-1	
LJP+	13
LJP-10, CPI-3	
Others	22

THE ARITHMETIC

In terms of seats: For the RJD-led Secular Democratic Front, the vote percentage went down by more than one (it polled 30.73% votes this time). This means loss of 23 seats. JD(U)'s share went up from 14.59% to 20.32%. The BJP share stood at 15.49% — up from 10.46%. It means gain of 50 seats.



REGIONAL DIVIDE

Bhojpur	22
JD-U+	11
RJD+	4
Others	7
East	35
JD-U+	19
RJD+	13
Others	3
Mithila	44
JD-U+	24
RJD+	14
Others	6
Magadh	70
JD-U+	44
RJD+	15
Others	11
Tirhut	72
JD-U+	45
RJD+	19
Others	8

Source: NIC/Graphic: SANJAY KAPOOR

Muslims held key to verdict

HT Correspondent
Patna, November 23

THE ELECTIONS have turned several pet theories on their head. Rigid caste alignments, law and order and the voters' mindset to name a few. Lalu Prasad Yadav's fabled Muslim-Yadav (M-Y) formula went for a toss with sharp polarization in the 'M' ranks.

The Muslims overtook the Yadavs in being the most politically sought-after. All mainstream parties went overboard trying to dent the Muslim votebank to dislodge the 15-year 'dynasty'. And their efforts paid off.

Every party fielded a large number of Muslim candidates. However, only 16 managed to romp home. But the sheer number in the fray reflected the trend.

The LJP took the lead by clamouring for a Muslim CM and in the process, added an entirely new dimension to the state's minority politics. It fielded 47 Muslim candidates to take on the RJD. Though only one candidate won, it created fissures in the M-Y bedrock.

A careful peek into the M-Y disaster throws up a couple of facts. There was growing disenchantment among Muslims, who felt let down by Lalu. But the RJD chief woke up to reality a trifle too late — and blundered. The party fielded 30 Muslims and announced reservation to block the LJP. But the gambit backfired. Pitting community members against each other resulted in a chaos of sorts. On several seats, Muslim candidates fought among themselves, splitting votes.

While state RJD president Abdul Bari Siddiqui and former minister Shakeel Ahmad Khan retained their seats from Bahera and Gurua respectively, Md Nehaluddin won from Rafiganj and Astarul Imam from Kishanganj. The Congress' Muslim candidates managed to retain four seats. The BJP drew a blank though four JD-U Muslim candidates scored hits.

Minority card

LJP: 47
Won: 1
RJD: 30
Won: 4
Congress: 9
Won: 4
JD(U): 9
Won: 4

Nitish goes for a small Cabinet

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, November 23

BIHAR'S WOULD be chief minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday announced that he would induct at least 12 ministers in the new NDA government in the state.

"There will be a deputy chief minister. We will be initially inducting a small team of 12 ministers, which would be later expanded", Kumar told reporters after attending the BJP parliamentary party meeting, where he was felicitated for NDA's sweep in the Bihar Assembly elections.

Asked whether the three-month deadline he had given to restore the law and order situation in Bihar was too short, Nitish Kumar said, "Where there is a will, there is a way. If determination is there, every thing is

possible". He said people were initially apprehensive whether the RJD government could be removed at all and whether free and fair elections could be held in the state, "but both of them have been achieved".

"The myths have been exploded one after another. This government will be able to restore law and order. We will take the cooperation of all communities", he said.

Kumar said his priorities included establishing the rule of law, putting the state on the development path and creating social goodwill.

Seeking to remove apprehensions of any community vis-a-vis the new regime, he said "the common man is happy. It will be a government of all the people".

Earlier, honouring Nitish Kumar, BJP president L.K. Advani had said that the people of Bihar



Jubilation in Patna on Wednesday.

created history and the credit goes to both the NDA and Nitish Kumar.

"It's a victory over challenge", he said and expressed confidence that the face of Bihar would change in the next five

years. Expressing gratitude, Kumar said the Bihar poll verdict was a vote for change.

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, senior leaders Arun Jaitley and Sushil Kumar Modi presented bouquets and offered sweets to Kumar, amidst cheers and applause from the BJP MPs.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar, who is to be sworn in as Bihar Chief Minister on Thursday met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh before leaving for Patna on Wednesday. During the meeting which Kumar described as a courtesy call, the Prime Minister assured him of the Centre's full cooperation to his government. The would-be CM said he told Singh that he would meet him after taking over the reins of the government to discuss in detail various developmental issues.

Bihar speaks

India's institutions win

4/16
2/11
9-11 election (Gauti) 12/11

There are times to lament the state of India's institutions and times to celebrate them. Bihar's election results give several reasons to cheer. First, the people of Bihar have spoken loudly and clearly, and they have done so in favour of political and economic progress. Across castes and communities they have voted against a long-entrenched corrupt duo who had made Bihar the laughing stock of the world. Nitish Kumar trouncing Lalu Prasad in the Yadav vote itself may be one of the most interesting aspects of the result. Corruption, criminality, nepotism and incompetence marked Lalu's 15-year regime, and the people of Bihar have now told him they have had more than enough of his pretentious clowning. Bihar's potential economic resources are formidable, yet the task of turning the State around economically is simply superhuman. Here are a few simple but sobering ratios: Bihar's spending on roads and bridges is less than one fifth of what it spends on the police, and what it spends on the police is less than one third of what it spends on interest on its State public debt — which consumes more than a third of its total tax revenues. If Nitish Kumar wants to lead a genuine and modern reformist government, he can pioneer the constitutional use of declaring a financial emergency in the State, and use the honeymoon period that he has with his massive majority to push through vital fiscal and administrative reforms. It may take 15 years of clean, efficient governance to begin to turn things around, and the fact Nitish Kumar and the BJP are only now beginning to talk of a common agenda is not the most auspicious of signs. Perhaps they were surprised themselves by the result, but in any case they should have been thinking of an agenda months ahead of time so they could have hit the ground running now. Instead they followed their UPA opponents in Delhi of cobbling together an agenda ex post facto.

There are also other winners in the Bihar election. The Election Commission has produced a splendidly fair process, and demonstrated again the excellence of our democracy. (Where are the apologists now for China's totalitarian regime or Pakistan's generals?). Also, the fine quality of the justice dispensed by the Supreme Court deserves praise yet again; the Honourable Court found the Executive to have breached the Constitution, and then allowed the most important players, namely, the people of Bihar, to account for all facts and speak again. In the circumstances, we may only remind the Prime Minister of the constitutional need to seek a vote of confidence from the Lok Sabha.

THE STATESMAN

23 NOV 2005

END OF THE LALU RAJ

9. Election (8/20) H-3 28/11

RJD chief's magic formula didn't work

ARUN Kumar
Patna, November 22

THE MAGIC potion effect has finally started wearing off.

The Muslim-Yadav (M-Y) formula that powered Lalu Prasad Yadav to the winner's podium every election for the past 15 years did not work this time — at least not as much as Lalu would have wanted it to. Especially, the Muslim votes.

The first signs of cracks in the Muslim votes showed during the February elections when the LJP managed to woo away a sizeable number of them.

This time too, Ram Vilas Paswan, whose strategy was focused on breaking the Muslim vote bank, carried on with it more aggressively, with the LJP campaign revolving around installing a Muslim chief minister. Though the number of votes the LJP got did not change much the party tally, it served Paswan's purpose. The LJP chief said: "My objective was to end the RJD rule of Lalu Prasad."

With 16.5 per cent population in Bihar, Muslims always played an important role. Earlier, they were with the Congress.

After the 1989 Bhagalpur riots, the Muslims saw in Lalu a saviour. Even this time, they voted for him but their number by then had fallen.

While the RJD managed to corner about 60 per cent of the votes, the LJP got 22 per cent.

The division in Muslim votes only helped the NDA, which benefited from polarisation of other castes yearning for a change.

For the JD(U), any Muslim vote would have been a bonus and they got lots of it. About nine per cent of the Muslims voted for it.

Mamata elated, Buddha peeved

AS THE Bihar Assembly poll results poured in, Trinamool chief and NDA leader Mamata Banerjee was elated but Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said that the results were an ominous sign for the secular, democratic and progressive forces of the country.

Mamata said the victory of the BJP-JD(U) combine showed that the people haven't rejected the NDA and proved that despite electoral malpractices by the ruling state government, a strong EC could always ensure free and fair elections. Bhattacharjee, however, said: "The victory of the BJP-JDU alliance was not a good indication for the nation. In fact, the victory of the communal forces and the political change in Bihar poses danger to the entire nation."

HTC, Kolkata

Though Lalu, sensing the shortfall, had tried to woo the extremely backward castes (EBCs), promising a bagful of incentives before the elections, it was not enough to make up for the Muslim votes lost.

The party got just 27 per cent of the EBCs votes.

The break in the RJD vote bank is being attributed to years of neglect that led to an anti-incumbency wave. Economically Backward Classes and the Muslims were tired of the RJD's non-committal attitude.

Pall of gloom descends over 1, Aney Marg

ANIRBAN Guha Roy
Patna, November 22

THE SILENCE at 1, Aney Marg, the residence of former chief minister Rabri Devi, said it all. Defeat hung heavy in the air as the gates remained closed to all but senior RJD leaders.

No sight of supporters, the only people around were the battery of mediapersons who waited patiently for a byte from Lalu Prasad Yadav. But the RJD chief wasn't ready to oblige. He remained closeted inside with his senior colleagues — party national spokesperson Shivanand Tiwary and Rajya Sabha MP Vijay Yadav — till the afternoon. Losing power, especially after being accustomed to it for 15 long years, is never easy. Vijay Yadav, before entering the house in the morning, was in foul mood. "Sab galat hai. Humlog jitenge," he said, refusing to believe it was the end. According to sources, Lalu stayed glued to the TV all morning, trying to come to terms with the reality of his party's defeat. Gone was his confidence from just two days back, when he'd declared: "The RJD will get absolute majority."



As news of their party's victory poured in, jubilant supporters thronged outside the JD(U) headquarters in Patna on Tuesday.

UNI

Nitish will have to do tightrope walk

PANKAJ Vohra
New Delhi, November 22

INSIGHT

THE RESULTS of the Bihar Assembly elections may have given the National Democratic Alliance a reason to celebrate, but for Nitish Kumar, who is set to take over as the chief minister of the state, it's time to face a bigger challenge.

Nurtured in the cradle of socialist philosophy of Jayprakash Narayan with a firm belief in secular values, the bearded leader will have to do some tightrope walking to weld the diverse ideological and social backgrounds of the JD(U) and the BJP.

The present polls have made Nitish a regional leader who may have a long innings to play in his state. He and Lalu Prasad Yadav shared a common ideological bond till some years ago and also were together for many years. They fell out because Nitish reached the conclusion that in the OBC politics which they practised, Lalu had started creating a creamy layer — that of Yadavs, the community he represented.

Nitish Kumar's own view was that the benefits for the OBCs should be shared by all equally and Yadavs should not be the sole beneficiaries.

He therefore chose to part ways and floated the Samata Party (before its merger with JD(U)). His beliefs remained intact even when the NDA was

formed and unlike George Fernandes, who was willing to make compromises, Nitish was conscious of carrying the Muslim vote bank with him. This paid dividends this time.

On the other hand, the BJP as his ally has come to power by riding piggyback despite tall claims of its leaders.

Its vote bank has been essentially Hindutva base and its support base is because of the upper caste votes which rallied around its candidates. It has obviously worked to a plan on the pattern of Gujarat and Orissa.

In Gujarat, it had aligned initially with Chimanbhai Patel to capture power there on its own subsequently and in Orissa, it is expanding its base because of its alliance with the BJD. It could adopt the same strategy in Bihar except that the vote banks of the two alliance partners are different and distinct.

Though the two have come to power as a result of realpolitik adjustments, it is to be seen whether Nitish Kumar will allow the BJP to make inroads in a state where social disparity is defined by the caste one belongs to. It will be his biggest challenge to promote his own politics and at the same time check the growth of the BJP.

The rise and fall of Lalu

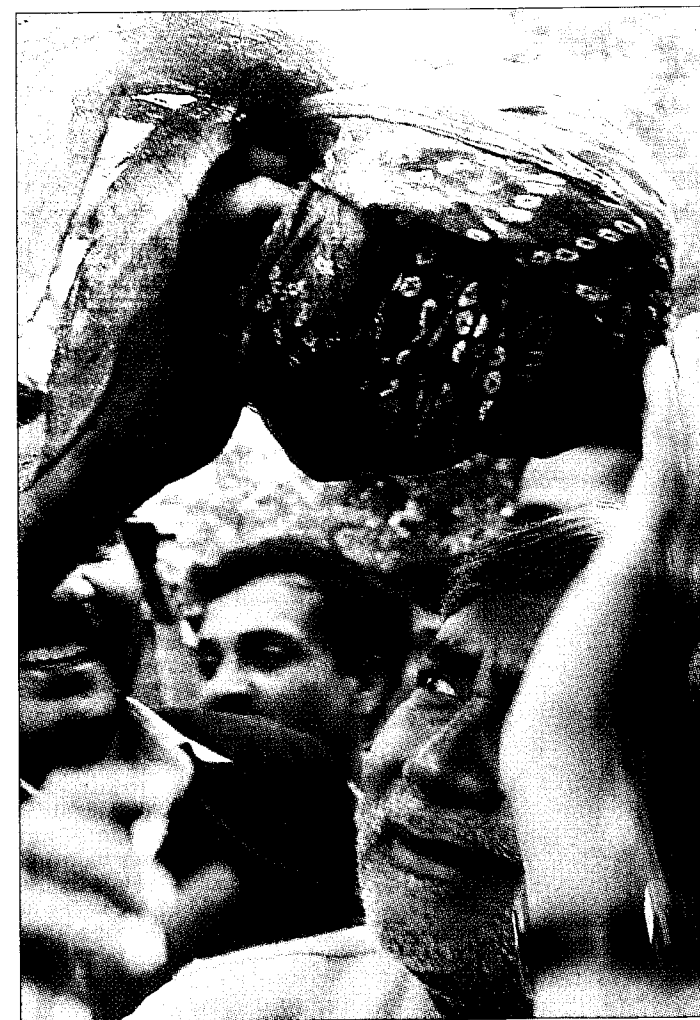


“NDA succeeded by fooling the people”

1977-1989
Elected to LS (1977); member of legislative assembly (two terms, 1980-89); becomes leader of opposition in Assembly (1989)

1990-1997
Bihar chief minister (1990-97); name crops up in a major scam (1996); leaves Janata Dal and forms Rashtriya Janata Dal (1997)

1997-2005
Between 1997 and 2001, Lalu goes to jail five times; first of Rabri's three terms as CM (1997-99); Lalu re-elected to LS (4th term), appointed railway minister (2004)



NDA activists present Nitish Kumar a turban in New Delhi on Tuesday.

PTI

NDA may fall just short of majority

9.11.2004

New Delhi: After the final phase of voting in Bihar, two TV exit polls on Saturday predicted that the Nitish Kumar-led NDA may end up just short of the winning post in the assembly polls with projections giving it 117 of the 243 seats, way ahead of the RJD-Congress combine.



Nitish: Can Afford A Smile Finally

The exit polls by Zee News and Star TV at the end of the fourth and final phase of polling showed that the Lalu Prasad-led alliance was trailing by nearly 30 seats in a hung house.

While Zee News-C voter analysis predicted 89 seats for the RJD-Congress alliance, the Star TV-AC Nielsen survey gave 87 seats to the combine—far short of the magic mark of 122.

The LJP, led by Union minister Ram Vilas Paswan, who had emerged as a kingmaker in the last polls, appeared to be in for a severe

drubbing this time. Zee News gave the party 18 seats and Star News just 16 against 29 scored last time. "Others" were shown to be getting 19 and 23 by the two channels respectively.

In today's round of polling, Zee News predicted 25 seats for the JD(U)-BJP, 10 to RJD-Congress, two to LJP and four to "others". On the other hand, Star News forecast 24 seats for JD(U)-BJP, 11 to RJD-Congress, one to LJP and five to "others".

EXIT POLLS

In the February polls, the RJD secured 75 seats. The JD(U) with 55 and BJP with 37 put up a combined strength of 92.

Meanwhile, an estimated 48% of the voters exercised their franchise in an "incident-free" fourth and final phase of the polls in 41 constituencies, taking the estimate to 47% in all the four phases. Agencies

Third round passes off peacefully, 45% turnout

TNN and Agencies 14/11

Patna: With the Election Commission's tight leash on anti-social elements this time, the third phase of the assembly elections to 57 constituencies also passed off peacefully amid a security blanket and recorded an estimated 43 to 45% voter turnout.

State election office sources said around 43-45% of over 1.17 crore voters participated in Sunday's poll exercise to decide the electoral fate of 494 candidates as no untoward incidents were reported from anywhere.

However, around 50 people, including the state BSP general secretary and two party candidates, were taken into custody for moving around in their respective constituencies in violation of prohibitory orders, official sources said. State BSP general secretary Nandkishore Ram, his party candidate for the Ramnagar assembly seat, Prabhat Ranjan, and three other activists were taken into custody for driving around the constituency in west Champaran district. Their vehicle was also seized.

DIG (Champaran range) Arvind Pandey ordered the arrest of Samajwadi Party candidate for the Dhanaha seat Ramadhar Yadav, son of bandit Basudeo Yadav, for allegedly trying to capture a

booth, the sources said. B Mukti Bodh, the BSP candidate for the Simri Bakhtiarpur seat in Saharsa district was also arrested by the BSF for going around with supporters in violation of prohibitory orders, the source said.

Election Commission special adviser K J Rao, who visited several villages in the riverine areas in the Mahishi constituency, ordered lodging of an FIR against the LJP candidate for the seat, Akil Ahmed, for moving around with his supporters on motorbikes. Two motorbikes of his supporters were also seized.

Rao also visited several places, including Saharsa, Darbhanga and Motihari, by an IAF helicopter to supervise the polling, and noted complaints of deletion of names of genuine voters from the voters' list. Polling was cancelled at booth numbers 203 and 204 under the Baheri assembly constituency in Darbhanga district as CPMF personnel failed to arrive there on time, they said.

Defects in electronic voting machines that were initially reported from various booths in Darbhanga, Kishanganj, Araria, Bettiah, Sitamarhi and Saharsa towns as soon as the polling began were rectified soon.

The state's borders with West

Union minister Fatmi arrested

Darbhanga: Union minister and RJD leader M A A Fatmi was arrested for alleged violation of model code of conduct. A team of the Lehari-asarai police station arrested the Union minister of state for HRD, Fatmi, and his driver Mohammed Nasim at his residence late on Saturday night and later released him on bail, SP Darbhanga O N Bhaskar said. Bhaskar had ordered the arrest of the minister after his vehicle was found roaming around in the town with banners and posters of RJD leaders even after campaigning for the polling in Darbhanga slated for November 13 had ended at 4 pm on Friday. TNN and Agencies

Bengal and UP besides Nepal were sealed during the polling and IAF helicopters maintained aerial surveillance, while BSF contingents patrolled the rivers. Over 72,000 personnel of central paramilitary forces and the Bihar police were deployed in the constituencies spread over 11 districts.

VOTER TURNOUT 46 PER CENT IN THIRD ROUND ■ BSP CANDIDATES, LJP MAN ARRESTED

Peaceful phase in Bihar

SNS & PTI

PATNA, Nov. 13. — Over 130 people, including two BSP candidates and an LJP nominee, were arrested as the penultimate phase of elections in 57 Assembly constituencies in Bihar passed off peacefully with an estimated 46 per cent voters turnout.

State chief electoral officer Mr NK Sinha said around 46 per cent of the over 1.17 crore voters participated in today's exercise to decide the electoral fates of 494 candidates. No untoward incident was reported from anywhere in the constituencies where polling took place, state home secretary Mr C Siroh said.

Addressing a joint press conference, chief secretary Mr GS Kang and DGP Mr



FOES TURNED FRIENDS? Political rivals Mr Lalu Prasad Yadav and Mr Nitish Kumar meet during a TV programme in Patna. — PTI

Ashish Ranjan Sinha said over 130 persons, including state BSP general secretary Mr Nandkishore Ram and two party candidates and an LJP nominee, were taken into custody for violating prohibitory orders in their constituencies. BSP candidate for

(Champan district, was arrested for moving around with his supporters violating prohibitory

14/11

Samajwadi Party candidate for Dhanaha seat Mr Ramadhar Yadav, the son of bandit Basudeo Yadav, for allegedly trying to capture a booth, officials said.

Mr B Mukti Bodh, BSP candidate for Simri Bakhtiarpu seat in Saharsa district, was arrested by BSP for going around with supporters in violation of prohibitory orders, sources said.

While Chief Electoral Officer Mr NK Singh said the poll percentage was between 47 to 50, chief secretary Mr GS Kang put the figure around 45 to 46 per cent.

Mr Kang said Mr RK Baitha, LJP candidate for Dhaka Assembly constituency in East Champaran district, was arrested for moving around with his supporters violating prohibitory

J. B. Leela (Sach)

orders. He said polling was cancelled in four booths in Baheri Assembly constituency in Darbhanga, besides another booth at Mahishi in Saharsa district as CPMF personnel did not reach there on time.

An FIR was lodged against LJP candidate for Kishanganj Mr Munna Mustaque for violation of prohibitory orders.

Two poll officials, Mr Chandrakant Jha and Mr Fekan Yadav, were arrested in Harlakh constituency in Madhubani district for allegedly indulging in electoral malpractices, he said adding voters also boycotted the polling at Booth number 123 under Laukaha constituency to protest some local problems.

Election Commission special adviser Mr KJ Rao, who visited several villages in Mahishi constituency in

the district, ordered registration of an FIR against LJP candidate for the seat Mr Akil Ahmed for going around with his supporters on motorcycles. Two motorbikes of his supporters were also seized.

Defects in electronic voting machines which were initially reported from various booths in Darbhanga, Kishanganj, Araria, Bettiah, Sitamarhi and Saharsa towns as soon as the polling began, were rectified soon.

The state's borders with West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, besides Nepal were sealed during the polling and Indian Air Force helicopters maintained aerial surveillance. BSF contingents patrolled the rivers to ensure peaceful poll described to be unprecedented in the history of Bihar.

EC backs Bihar point man

'Allegations against Rao unwarranted, reckless and totally baseless'

HTC and Agencies
New Delhi, November 4

THE CAMPAIGN of the RJD-led UPA in Bihar against the Election Commission's point man, K.J. Rao, was rejected on Friday by the three-member body, which expressed full faith in his "integrity, impartiality and unbiased approach".

"The commission unanimously rejects the allegations against Rao as totally unwarranted, reckless and baseless and expresses its full faith in his integrity, impartiality and unbiased approach towards all sections of society in discharge of the functions entrusted to him by the commission", the commission said in a Press Note on Friday.

POLL PANEL POSTURING

Double blow

■ The three-member Election Commission, on Friday expressed full faith in point man K.J. Rao's "integrity, impartiality and unbiased approach"

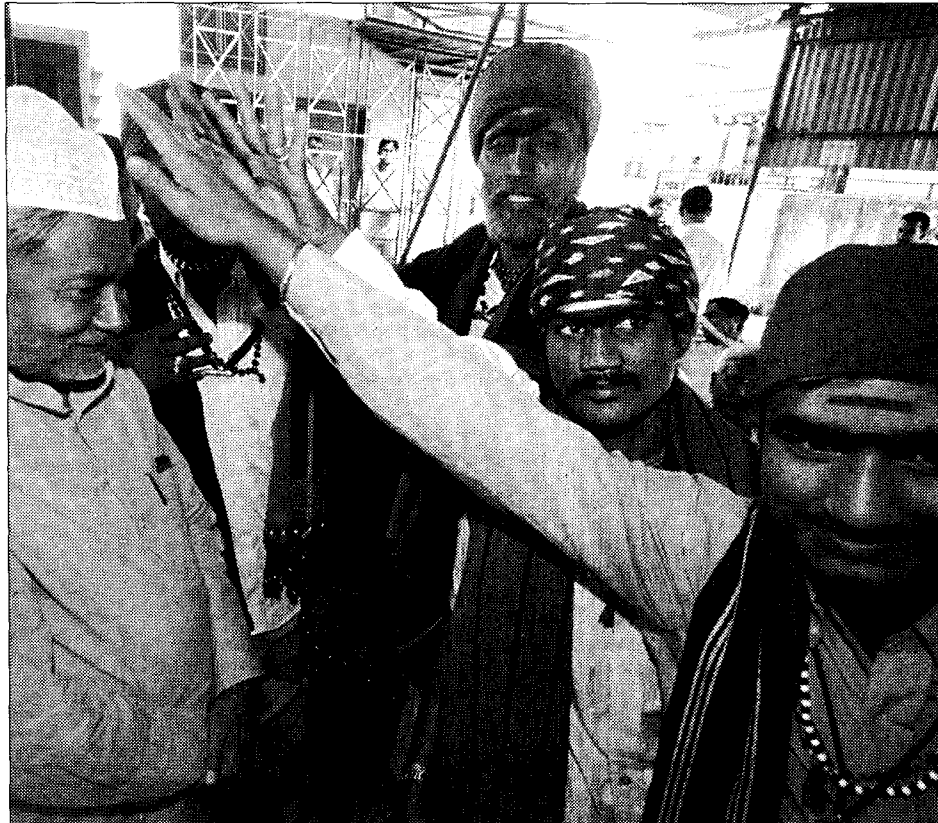
■ The commission also rejected the UPA demand for a repolling in booths 46, 47 and 50 of the Bhagalpur Assembly constituency

Gupta of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and All India Congress Committee secretary Ranjit Thomas — met the Election Commission and complained against Rao, demanding an immediate apology for his alleged attempts to "humiliate a particular community".

Singh had said that, during an inspection of Bhagalpur town and the Nath Nagar area, Rao had reportedly said the area was a "Pakistani mohalla".

"Having considered carefully all the facts and circumstances, the commission is of the unanimous view that Rao did not make any remarks... against any particular community or hurt their sentiments in any manner", the Election Commission said on Friday.

The stand that was taken by the Election Commission came as a major blow for the UPA government on the eve of the third phase of Assembly elections that is to be held in Bihar this month.



Nitish Kumar with Telugu Brahmins at his residence in Patna on Friday.

Police raid fails to net Jaiprakash

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, November 4

NEARLY TWO weeks after a non-bailable warrant (NBW) was issued against him, police on Friday raided the official residence of Union minister Jaiprakash Narayan Yadav here but returned empty handed. Armed with a copy of the NBW, two sub-inspectors of Bihar Police, accompanied by a team of the Delhi Police, descended on Yadav's 5, Ashoka Road bungalow on Friday afternoon to arrest the RJD leader for allegedly facilitating the "illegal escape" of his brother from police custody. The policemen searched the house for about half-an-hour and questioned some of those inside, including some servants of the minister of state for water resource development.

However, Yadav managed to elude them. The police personnel refused to disclose whether they had found anything which could boost their search for the Minister.

A court in Jamui in Bihar had on October 24 issued non-bailable warrants against Yadav and four others, including his brother and RJD candidate for the state polls Vijay Prakash and suspended police officer Mukteshwar Prasad, for facilitating the "illegal escape" of Prakash from police custody. He had moved a bail application the next day which was rejected.

Inaction unfortunate: BJP

Terming as "very unfortunate" the continuance of Jaiprakash in the Union government despite being an "absconder", the BJP on Friday renewed its demand for his ouster.

"There cannot be a bigger assault on democracy than continuance of an absconder in the Union government despite a non-bailable warrant against him," BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley said at a Press conference here on Friday.

Cong anti-institution: BJP

PRESS Trust of India
Patna, November 4

Assailing the Rashtriya Janata Dal-Congress combine for their assault on the Election Commission and its adviser, K.J. Rao, the BJP on Friday accused the Congress of being "anti-institution".

"The Congress has always been anti-institution. Indira Gandhi had attacked all institutions — be it Parliament, the judiciary or the media — during Emergency and, now, her party has unleashed an assault on a constitutional body like the Election Commission", BJP general secretary in-charge of Bihar Arun Jaitley said.

Jaitley charged the RJD-Congress combine with trying to "spread the poison of communalism for political gains."

"Neither the media, nor the officials accompanying Rao heard him utter anything that could hurt the religious sensibilities of any community.

"But Rao, and through him the Election Commission, was targeted for alleged communal prejudice", Mr Jaitley said, claiming that the Bihar electorate had seen through the sinister conspiracy of the two parties.

He slammed the All-India Congress Committee general secretary and in-charge of the party's Bihar election campaign Digvijay Singh for speaking as an RJD spokesman and spreading canards about K.J. Rao.

"This blatant attack on constitutional bodies must stop for the sake of Indian democracy and the Indian electorate", the BJP leader added.

Priya has done nothing for the people: Sarpotdar

By S Balakrishnan/TNN

Mumbai: He is one of the seniormost leaders of the Shiv Sena, whom party chief Bal Thackeray has always banked on for executing his orders. From getting jobs for Marathi-speaking people to leading a mob during riots, Thackeray blindly trusts his Man Friday, who has been with the party ever since its inception in the late sixties. Meet Madhukar Sarpotdar, who is soft-spoken and sophisticated, but when it comes to leading agitations he can be as militant as any Sainik.

Sarpotdar is trying to regain the Mumbai north-west LS seat which he has won twice. He is pitted against Priya Dutt, whose father Sunil Dutt's death has resulted in the byelection. In a candid interview to TOI, Sarpotdar fielded a number of questions.

Q: The Congress has fielded Priya Dutt in the hope that the sympathy factor would help her. What's your take on this?

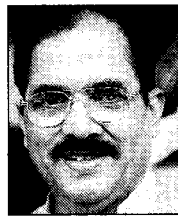
A: I don't understand how there can be any sympathy for her. The Congress did not observe the death anniversary of Indira Gandhi recently. When they have forgotten her, how do you expect them to remember Sunil Dutt?

Q: I am not talking about sympathy among Congressmen, but among the people of the constituency, especially the poor.

A: Let us not forget that Sunil Dutt died a natural death, unlike Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi who were murdered by terrorists. I can understand if there was sympathy for their families, but Sunil Dutt died peacefully. There cannot be any sympathy for Priya because of this.

Q: But Sunil Dutt was immensely popular among the slum-dwellers who form a vast chunk of the electorate. Won't all that goodwill be transferred to Priya?

A: Sunil Dutt did stop demolition of slums. But in terms of providing civic amenities to slum dwellers, his track record was poor despite the fact that he was elected several times. As an MP, I was responsible for providing electricity to slums on land belonging to the Airport Authority of India (AAI). The authority was not giving permission, but I got electricity for



the slum dwellers. I also ensured power supply for the slums of Behrampada and Nehru Nagar (Juhu), apart from providing civic amenities. Sunil Dutt's MP's fund had even lapsed on a few occasions since he did not recommend public work.

When there was a stampede in Nehru Nagar I was there to help. No Congressmen were to be seen then. I had lobbied for a railway line from Bandra to Kurla so that people need not go all the way to Dadar. I had obtained sanction from different agencies, but since Sunil Dutt did not pursue the project it is yet to take off.

Q: Priya is only 39 and is banking on the support of young people. In contrast you are in your seventies. Will this be a handicap?

A: Not at all. I have an excellent track

record of service to the people. Even when I was not an MP, I remained in touch with them. When our area was affected by floods on July 26, I urged the government to distribute relief to the poor. In contrast, a prominent Congress leader was busy diverting kerosene for public use to the black market. Priya Dutt was never groomed to be the political successor of her father. She has not done anything for the people.

Q: During the Dassera rally speech, Bal Thackeray referred to the emotional ties between him and the Dutt. This gives the impression that he is really not keen on defeating Priya.

A: Subsequent to the rally, Balasaheb clarified his stand. He is a person who speaks in a straight-forward manner. He shares an excellent relation with several film personalities, but has never compromised on his politics. He is going to campaign for me.

Q: Prominent Shiv Sainiks of the constituency like Shrikant Sarmalkar and Jaywant Parab have defected to the Congress. Aren't you feeling handicapped?

A: I introduced Sarmalkar and Parab to the Sena. Their joining the Congress will not affect me. They have not done anything for the people. In fact, it's good that they are no more with us.

Q: There are reports that the differences between Uddhav and Raj, the BJP's lukewarm support to you and the Muslim alienation will weaken your prospects.

A: Both Uddhav and Raj were with me when I filed my nomination. The BJP is backing me and as for the Muslims, when did they ever vote for the Sena?

05 NOV 2005

Caste slur on EC

Questions raised over transfer of officials

SAROJ Nagi

New Delhi, October 28

IT CAN only happen in Bihar. But this time, it appears that the politicians aren't to be blamed.

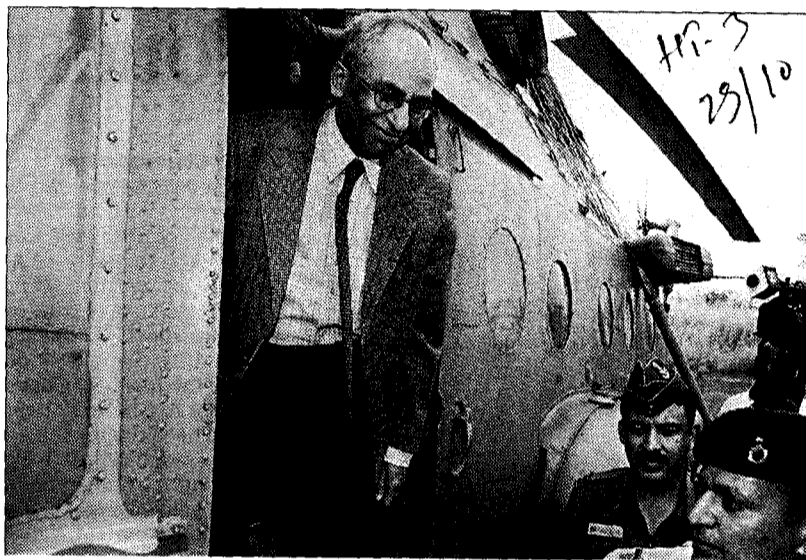
Questions are being raised about the transfer of 50 senior district officials from the minority community, Scheduled Castes and backward classes. Barring a Kurmi superintendent in Patna, all of them have been replaced by upper-caste officers.

Not surprisingly, these queries are being directed at the state Election Commission by representatives of the Lok Parishad, a people's movement working in Bihar, because the changes were effected in the past few weeks — and after the announcement of the Assembly election in Bihar.

The list of 10 district magistrates who have been transferred and removed from election duty include three Scheduled Caste members, four Muslims and three from the backward classes. Their replacements are from the upper castes — Brahmins, Bhumihars, Kayasths and Rajputs. The pattern was repeated when it came to the selection of the seven superintendents of police for Patna, Saran, Katihar, Nalanda, Sheohar, Sitamarhi and Darbhanga.

Sheer coincidence? No, there is more to it than that. The list of 19 deputy superintendents of police shifted may not have been seen as part of a deliberate design until they are juxtaposed with the names of the officers who replaced them.

The transferred officials include Scheduled Caste members and Muslims (seven each) and backwards (five). The new list has seven Brahmins and Bhumiyars, six Kayasths and five Rajputs. Eyebrows are also being raised about the caste composition of the SDOs removed and replaced. "Are these transfers a part of the Election Commission's well-planned moves?" asked Rupesh and Balram of the Lok Parishad.



Chief election commissioner B.B. Tandon at Patna airport on Friday.

PTI

Polls in seven Bihar seats today

SEVEN SUPER-sensitive constituencies of Bihar, where polling was deferred due to security reasons on October 26, will go to polls on Saturday amidst unprecedented security arrangements. Chief electoral officer N.K. Sinha said simultaneous re-polling would be held at 114 booths in Jamui Assembly constituency, which went to the polls in the first of the four-phase elections on October 18.

Jamui constituency has been in the news in the recent days over the arrest and subsequent illegal release of Vijay Prakash, RJD nominee and brother of Union minister of state for water resources, Jaiprakash Narain Yadav from police custody. A local court had issued non bailable arrest warrants against the minister, his brother and

three others on Monday. Both Yadav and his brother have gone underground and a Jamui court on Thursday dismissed the Union minister's anticipatory bail prayer. Home secretary H.C. Sirohi said that foolproof security arrangements had been made to conduct free and peaceful elections on Saturday. Sinha said 15,72,183 voters would exercise their franchise to decide the fate of 62 candidates in seven constituencies. Prominent among them are former state ministers Ramnath Thakur (JD-U) and Ashok Singh (LJP) from Samastipur, former leader of the Opposition Upendra Prasad Singh (JD-U) from Dalsinghsarai, state LJP parliamentary board chairman Satish Kumar from Surajgarha and RJD's Shanti Devi, from Kharagpur. **PTI, Patna**

Polluted force

But EC steps have some effect in Bihar

It seems to have turned into a full-scale war between the RJD that is doing everything to subvert the prospects of a free and fair poll and the Election Commission that is desperate to enforce the rule of law. The problem may not have arisen if the Bihar election had not been staggered over four phases lasting almost a month. That cannot justify the reckless impunity with which senior leaders of Lalu Prasad's party abuse their position. It is worse when the culprit is Jai Prakash Yadav, Union minister of state for water resources, who believes that the law does apply to his brother, an RJD candidate, who was arrested on polling day after using firearms to intimidate voters and being found with an abundance of cash and liquor. If the police did their duty, it was because of the Election Commission's pro-active role. It is also clear that the police are torn between call of duty and threats from politicians like Yadav who managed to rescue his brother from jail at dead of night. Events of the last few days have confirmed that while one section of the police is ready to stick their necks out, others run away from responsibility. The latter includes the IG who conspired with the local OC to please the Union minister and the Additional DGP who chose to proceed on leave when asked to submit a report.

Clearly the police have been badly polluted by the RJD. It also explains why when one section rises to the occasion, another surrenders meekly. It does no credit to the force to debar Mohammad Shahabuddin from entering his constituency, Siwan, for two months. More appropriately, he should be behind bars after the non-bailable warrants of arrest against him are executed. The silver lining is that Lalu is being told in so many words that his party will not get away with money and musclepower. Whether or not he wins the election is immaterial. The little effort made to clean up the mess in Bihar deserves to be welcomed.

29 OCT 2005

Congress, RJD accuse EC adviser of power misuse

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

*J. Bhaskar
(S. S. S. S.)*

*11/7
27/10*

New Delhi: After being at the receiving end for long, the UPA went on the offensive against the Election Commission on Tuesday. A delegation comprising RJD-Congress leaders accused EC adviser K J Rao of behaving like an "extra-constitutional authority."

UPA leaders also protested to election commissioners about the way cases were registered against Union minister Jaiprakash Narayan Yadav against whom a non-bailable warrant has been issued for pressurising the Bihar authorities to release his brother from custody after he was arrested for booth-capturing.

"K J Rao is behaving like an extra-constitutional authority. He is holding press meets and ordering registration of cases against people," AICC general secretary Digvijay Singh said after he and his colleagues P R Dasmunshi and Prem Chand Gupta met the election commissioners.

UPA leaders also claimed that J P N Yadav had not committed any wrong and his brother Vijay Prakash had been released by the police. "False cases have been registered against the Union minister as a reaction," Singh said. He claimed that since Vijay



K J RAO: Facing flak

Prakash was not given security despite being a candidate from a Naxal-hit area, he was carrying a licensed weapon. Asked if J P N Yadav would resign in view of the warrant of arrest against him, Singh said efforts were on to get a bail from the high court, and "if required he would do so".

Dasmunshi said the UPA was not questioning the authority of the EC but was only objecting to the manner EC officials were projecting "everybody as dishonest".

In their memorandum, UPA leaders said, "While we fully support any legal action against the accused persons irrespective of the party, caste and any other consideration, the same cannot be made a pretext for taking the law into the hands by certain officers. We do not support any illegal act of the accused and the law must take its own course. At the same time, it is essential that the rule of law is upheld at any cost and no officer is allowed to take the law into his hands."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

27001 2005

41 per cent vote in Bihar second phase polling

2710
9-Selection (80-20)

Special Correspondent

PATNA: The second phase of the Bihar Assembly elections in 62 constituencies on Wednesday was by and large peaceful. But the death of a person at the hands of Border Security Force personnel near the Pakhauli booth in Raghapur, where the former Chief Minister, Rabri

Devi, is seeking re-election, has snowballed into a controversy.

About 41 per cent of the 1.3-crore voters exercised their franchise. While the deferred election in seven constituencies will be held on October 29, the third and fourth phases are scheduled for November 13 and 19.

Governor Buta Singh, issued

a notification for the final phase in 41 constituencies spread over five districts.

On the BSF shooting in the Raghapur constituency, Chief Secretary G.S. Kang and Director-General of Police Ashish Ranjan Sinha said they had directed the Vaishali district magistrate to order a magisterial enquiry into the death of Pappu

Kumar. They declined to comment on the incident, which they described as a case of mistaken identity.

It is said the BSF personnel shot Pappu Kumar, mistaking him for a booth looter. But the villagers were up in arms saying he was innocent.

A man with a religious bent of mind, he was returning after his

daily bath in the Ganga, they claimed.

Rashtriya Janata Dal chief and Railway Minister Lalu Prasad demanded a judicial enquiry into the killing and action against the guilty security personnel.

Mr. Kang and Mr. Sinha were also apologetic about the behaviour of CRPF personnel at three booths in Munger.

আজ বিহারে দ্বিতীয় দফার ভোট

বেগুসরাই থেকে 'নির্বাচিত' সাংসদ সুরজভান, সংযুক্ত জনতা প্রার্থী

২৫ অক্টোবর— আকাশে হেলিকপ্টার, নদীতে স্পিডবোট আর পথে আধা-সামরিক ও পুলিশ বাহিনী। এই রকম অভূতপূর্ব নিরাপত্তার মধ্যে বুধবার বিহার বিধানসভার দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ের ভোট। ৬২টি আসনে ভোট হচ্ছে। আগে ঠিক ছিল এদিন ৬৯টি আসনে ভোট হবে। কিন্তু নিরাপত্তার কারণে ৭টি আসনের ভোট পিছিয়ে ২৯ অক্টোবর করার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে নির্বাচন কমিশন। দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ের ভোটে উল্লেখযোগ্য প্রার্থীদের মধ্যে রয়েছে প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী রাবভিডেবী, কংগ্রেস প্রদেশ কমিটির সভাপতি সদানন্দ সিং, সি পি এমের রামদেব বর্ম, বি জে পি-র আশ্বিনীকুমার চৌবে, রামবিলাসের ভাই পশুপতি পরশ-সহ রাবভি মন্ত্রিসভার বেশ কয়েকজন সদস্য। ৪৫০ জনের বেশি প্রার্থী প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বিতা করছেন। ৬২ আসনের মধ্যে রাজ দ ৪৩, কংগ্রেস ১৪, এন সি পি ১, সি পি এম ৪, বি জে পি ২৩ এবং সংযুক্ত জনতা ৩৭টি আসনে প্রার্থী দিয়েছে।

কাদওয়া, বারসই, দলসিংসরাই, সমস্তপুর, সরাইরঞ্জন, খাগপুর, সুরঘড়া কেন্দ্রের ভোট নেওয়া হবে ২৯ অক্টোবর। গত ১৮ অক্টোবর ভোটে বেনিয়মের অভিযোগে জামুই আসনের ১৪৪টি বুথে এদিন আবার ভোট নেওয়া হবে। এদিকে রাবভিডেবীর কেন্দ্র রাণোপুর-সহ লালগঞ্জ, মহিনার কেন্দ্রকে অতি উত্তেজনাগ্রন বলে ঘোষণা করেছে নির্বাচন কমিশন। এই কেন্দ্রগুলিতে অতিরিক্ত আধা-সামরিক বাহিনী মোতায়েন করা হয়েছে। রাবভিডেবীর কেন্দ্রে বি এস এফ নামানো হয়েছে। নির্বাচন কমিশনের বিশেষ উপদেষ্টা কে জে রাও নিজে হেলিকপ্টারে বিভিন্ন কেন্দ্র পর্যবেক্ষণ করবেন। প্রথম পর্যায়ের অধিকাংশ নকশাল প্রভাবিত অঞ্চলে ভোট হওয়ায় যে পরিমাণ নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছিল, এবার তার থেকে বেশি নেওয়া হচ্ছে। নির্বাচন দপ্তর সূত্রে জানা গেছে, দ্বিতীয় পর্যায়ের ভোটে প্রায় ২৪ জন 'বাহুবলী' প্রার্থী রয়েছে। তাদের

দলবলের হাতে এ কে-৪৭, এ কে-৫৭-এর মতো আধুনিক অস্ত্রশস্ত্র রয়েছে। এর জন্য নিরাপত্তা আরও বাড়ানো হয়েছে। ৫৬৭ কোম্পানি কেন্দ্রীয় আধা-সামরিক বাহিনী, ৪০ কোম্পানি বিহার সেনা পুলিশ, ২৩ হাজার শস্ত্র পুলিশ এবং ৯ হাজার হোমগার্ড নিয়োগ করা হয়েছে। বেগুসরাই, ভাগলপুর, নৌগাছিয়া, বৈশালী এবং পূর্ণিয়া জেলার নদীগুলিতে কমান্ডোরা স্পিড বোটে টহল দেবে। দুটি হেলিকপ্টারে আকাশ থেকে নজর রাখবে কমান্ডোরা। এছাড়া জওয়ানদের টহল চলবে। বৃথ দখল বা গণ্ডগোলার চেষ্টা হলেই গুলি চালানোর নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে। বুথে বুথে থাকছে ডিজিটাল ক্যামেরা। গত ফেব্রুয়ারির ভোটে এই ৬২ কেন্দ্রে রাজ দ ২৩, ২৪, কংগ্রেস ৭, লো জ পি ১৫, ৩১, জে ড (ইউ) ১৪, ৮৮, বি জে পি ৮, ৯ এবং নির্দল

ও অনারা ৩০.৭৬ শতাংশ ভোট পেয়েছিল। এদিকে, লালপ্রসাদ যাদব এবং নীতীশ কুমারের পর এবার নির্বাচন কমিশনের কোম্পে পড়লেন জনতা দল (সংযুক্ত) সংসদীয় বোর্ডের চেয়ারম্যান শারদ যাদব। শারদ যাদবের বিরুদ্ধে পুলিশ একটি এফ আই আর রুজু করেছে। নির্বাচনী আচরণবিধি ভঙ্গের দায়ে। গতকাল সন্ধ্যায় রাণোপুর বিধানসভা কেন্দ্রের অধীন মোহনপুর এলাকায় নির্ধারিত সময়েরও বেশিক্ষণ ধরে নির্বাচনী প্রচার চালানোর জন্য তিনি অভিযুক্ত হয়েছেন। রাণোপুরের রিটানিং অফিসার তথা মহকুমা শাসক সঞ্জয়কুমার আগরওয়াল এই এফ আই আর দায়ের করার নির্দেশ দিয়েছিলেন। লোক জনশক্তি পার্টির সাংসদ সুরজভান সিংকে বেগুসরাই থেকে 'নির্বাচিত' করেছে জেলা প্রশাসন। ৩১ অক্টোবর পর্যন্ত সুরজভানের বেগুসরাইয়ে টোকা নিষিদ্ধ। দলের প্রার্থীদের হয়ে প্রচার চালাচ্ছিলেন সুরজভান। প্রশাসনের আশঙ্কা,

ভোটের সময় তিনি গুণ্ডগোল বাধাতে পারেন। বেগুসরাইয়ের মোকামা কেন্দ্রে সংযুক্ত জনতা দলের প্রার্থী বাহুবলী অনন্ত সিংয়েরও তাঁর কেন্দ্রে টোকা নিষিদ্ধ করেছে প্রশাসন। অন্যদিকে, নিবেদিতা লক্ষ্মণের দায়ে আটক গাড়ি জবরদস্তি থানা থেকে বের করে নেওয়া এবং বাগার এস ডি পি ও-কে আটকে রাখার দায়ে উত্তরপ্রদেশের মন্ত্রী ব্রহ্মশঙ্কর ত্রিপাঠী ও সমাজবাদী পার্টির ২ বিধায়ক রাধেশ্যাম সিং এবং সি কে রাইয়ের বিরুদ্ধে এফ আই আর করেছে বাগা পুলিশ। ভোটারদের মন পেতে বিহারে প্রার্থীরা নানা কায়দা নিচ্ছেন। কহলগাঁও কেন্দ্রের প্রার্থী প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস সভাপতি সদানন্দ সিংয়ের কায়দা অভিনব। তিনি তাঁর কেন্দ্রে বি ডি ও-র মাধ্যমে ভোটার মুখে রাতারাতি ১৫০০ লাল কার্ড বা বি পি এল কার্ড বিলি করেন। বিহারীরা তুমুল ইচ্ছাই বাঁধান। নির্বাচন কমিশন কহলগাঁওয়ের বি ডি ও-কে সাসপেন্ড করেছে।

বিপ্লব সরকার, পাটনা

৩-৬-১৯৫৭

43 per cent turnout in first phase of Bihar polls

Polling largely peaceful in most constituencies across the State; one killed in police firing

J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI: An estimated 43 per cent of the 1.23-crore electorate exercised their franchise on Tuesday in the first phase of polling for the 57 Bihar Assembly seats that were up for election. A total of 541 candidates, including 37 women, are in the race.

Briefing reporters here, Deputy Election Commissioner Anand Kumar said polling in the 12 districts was largely peaceful with only one person being killed by security forces. He said 96 persons, including three Rashtriya Janata Dal candidates, were arrested for trying to damage electronic voting machines (EVMs) or attempting booth capturing.

Mr. Kumar said the Bihar Military Police opened fire at the Chorram polling booth in Aurangabad district to prevent looting of the polling station; one person was killed. In the Gopindpur Assembly constituency, RJD candidate Sanjay Prabhat was arrested for damaging EVMs, while in the Dev constituency, RJD candidate Suresh Paswan was arrested along with seven others for carrying a rifle and ammunition.

In Jamui, RJD candidate Vijay Prakash Yadav was arrested for moving with people with arms. Mr. Kumar said detailed reports were being sought and



VOTERS' DAY: Women armed with voter's identity cards wait for their turn at a polling booth near Jehanabad during the first phase of elections in Bihar on Tuesday.

- PHOTO: PTI

action would be taken against them.

Magistrate suspended

A patrolling magistrate was suspended for trying to influence polling in the Shahpur constituency in Bhojpur district. Damage to EVMs was reported from Nawada and Jamui districts. Police opened fire but

there was no loss of life. Inter-party clashes were reported from Jamui and Gaya districts.

In Jamui, three persons were arrested. In Gaya, Election Commission parties were not sent to four polling stations as it was apprehended that "our parties would be attacked by the nationalists." In Jamui, poll parties failed to reach two polling stations.

Polling would be held there later.

The poll was boycotted at eight polling stations in five Assembly constituencies for various reasons. A repoll would be ordered wherever necessary after analysing the reports from returning officers and Election Commission observers, said Mr. Kumar. About the action to be

taken against two police officers who were transferred on Monday for meeting RJD leader Lalu Prasad, Mr. Kumar said reports had been sought and action would be taken on the basis of the reports.

Asked whether running of special festival trains for Bihar's Chhath festival by Railway Minister Lalu Prasad would violate the model code of conduct, he said a reference was made to the Commission by the Railway Ministry. The Commission had permitted special festival trains as was done last year.

Mr. Kumar said 17,483 EVMs were used for 13,769 polling stations. Digital cameras were used at certain polling booths depending on their sensitivity. A large number of security forces were deployed to ensure free and fair polls.

Proper deployment

Our Special Correspondent reports from Patna:

Bihar Chief Secretary G.S. Kang said repolling would not be needed at more than 20 booths. The election was peaceful and well managed owing to proper deployment of forces, he added. Voting would take place on October 21 in the constituencies where elections could not be held on Tuesday, along with the four constituencies where polls had been deferred.

(Note)
J Venkatesan

Bihar goes to polls amid tight vigil

90,000 Security Personnel Deployed

Patna: IAF choppers patrolled the sky and nearly 90,000 security personnel were deployed in Naxal-hit region covering 57 out of 243 assembly seats in Bihar which goes to polls for the second time in a year on Tuesday.

Nearly 1.23 crore voters will decide the fate of as many as 541 candidates in the first phase, for which elaborate security arrangements are in place at all the 13,338 polling booths.

Chief electoral officer N K Sinha told reporters that the Election Commission had made it clear that polling, which will be through electronic voting machines, would not be held in booths where security was not provided.

Chief secretary G S Kang said around 90,000 men and officers of central paramilitary forces, Bihar Military Police and District Armed Police besides home guards would provide security.

All the 57 constituencies are located in 12 naxalite-hit districts, including Patna, Bhojpur, Buxar, Kaimur, Rohtas, Gaya, Jehanabad, Arwal, Aurangabad, Nawada, Banka and Jamui. According to Kang, four IAF choppers would track the movement of Naxalites even as security forces had been provided with mine detectors and anti-mine vehicles.

In a special drive launched by the state police on the instructions of the commission over the past three months, over 1.4 lakh potential trouble-makers have been arrested. The police also seized over 3,000 firearms and unearthed over 100 illegal gun factories, Sinha said.

Though earlier polling was scheduled to be held in 61 constituencies in the first phase, it was postponed in Gaya (town), Gaya (mufassil), Bodh Gaya and Belaganj to Oct 21 to ensure effective deployment of the police in Gaya district.

Prominent among those whose fate would be sealed on Tuesday include ministers in the Rabri Devi government Shyam Rajak (Phulwarisharif), Jagdanand Singh (Ramgarh), Mahabali



Singh (Chainpur), Illiyas Hussain (Dehri), Raghvendra Pratap Singh (Barahra), Shivanand Tiwari (Shahpur) and Shakeel Ahmed Khan (Gurua).

While the RJD has fielded its nominees in 49 constituencies, its ally Congress has put up candidates in seven and CPM in one. NDA allies BJP and JD (U) are contesting in 24 and 33 seats respectively.

The first phase is crucial for all, but more importantly for RJD which had secured 23 of the 57 seats last time. JD(U) had bagged 12, BJP (four), LJP (nine), CPI-ML (four), Samajwadi Party and Congress (one each) and Independents (3).

Elections to the Bihar assembly are being held in four phases. Polling for the second phase covering 69 assemblies will be held on October 26, while 72 constituencies would be covered in the third phase on November 13. The last phase of polling, covering 41 seats will be on November 19 while counting of votes would be taken up on November 22. Agencies

IG, DIG Meeting At Lalu Residence Violates Model Code Of Conduct CRPF officials singed in EC pre-election fire

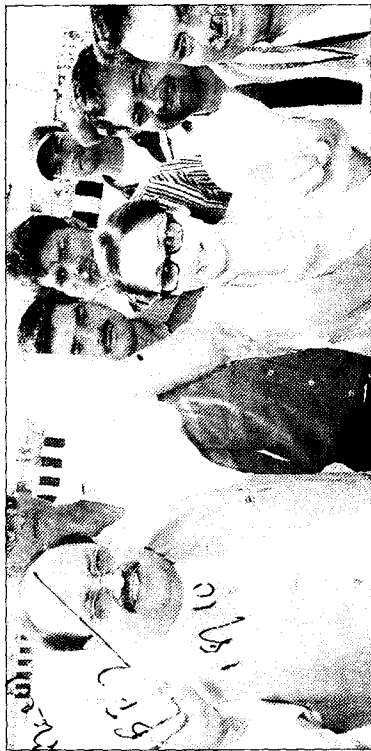
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 17 OCTOBER

THE Election Commission on Monday stepped in to expose the unwholesome electoral calculus of the Union railway minister by ousting two senior CRPF officials — an IG and a DIG — who held a late night meeting with Lalu Prasad Yadav at the his I, Anne Marg residence in Patna.

The two officers, who transgressed propriety, have been involved in deployment of police personnel in the election-bound state. According to the EC, IG, CRPF, Arun Chibber and DIG, Alok Raj, were guilty of having violated the model code of conduct which bars all poll-related officials from accepting hospitality from any candidate or party functionary or accompanying the latter on campaign tours. There have also been reports about RJD leaders hosting Punjab Police personnel in Gaya's Karti.

On verifying the reports of Mr Chibber and Mr Raj's meeting, the RJD chief at his residence on Sunday night, the EC concluded that their confluence in the posts of IG and DIG, CRPF, in election-bound Patna was not in the interest of free and fair polls. The poll panel thus asked the ministry of home affairs (MHA) to transfer the two officers during the course of the elections and replace them with suitable candidates of its choice.

As for the CRPF, even as it clarified



Poll Vault: Amar Singh and Jayaprada in Patna before an election rally on Monday — PTI

that its officials in Patna had only met Mr Yadav to discuss the security upgradation at his residence there, it meekly agreed to the directive of the Union home ministry to replace Mr Chibber and Mr Raj with IG, Kolkata, and DIG, Sindhri with immediate effect.

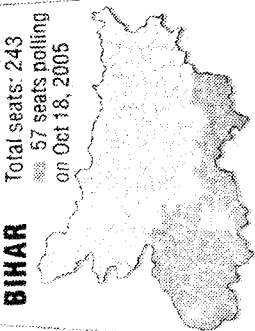
The EC's decision, which is aimed at reaching the UPAs' 'secular' mascot a lesson in constitutional decency, instantly became a potent weapon in the hands of the NDA. The NDA leadership alleged there was a concerted attempt on the part of the UPA to sabotage elections. Expectedly, the UPA leadership was silent on Mr Yadav's assault on the election commission's sensibilities.

Meanwhile, CEC BB Tandon on Monday asked parties to observe 'highest standards of electoral ethics

and morality' in the conduct of free and fair polls in the state. He also appealed to the electors to come out in large numbers and exercise their franchise fearlessly and according to their free will. The political parties and candidates should ensure that their 'enthusiastic, sometimes over-enthusiastic supporters and workers eschew violence of any kind and do not coerce, intimidate or browbeat the voters to vote against their free will or wish'.

"Their appeals should not arouse passion on account of religion, race, caste or language or create feelings of ill will or hatred between different sections of the community," Mr Tandon said a day ahead of the first phase of elections to 57 constituencies in the Naxalite-dominated region.

FIRST PHASE POLLING
BIHAR Total seats: 243
57 seats polling on Oct 18, 2005



Seats Polling:	61*
Total Candidates:	584
Women Candidates:	39
Male Electors:	70,52,423
Female Electors:	61,10,458
No. of EVMs:	18,635
Polling Stations:	14,343

* Elections in four constituencies of Gaya district postponed to Oct 21 **KBK**

He also asked government officials including the security personnel from central paramilitary forces and the state police to observe 'utmost neutrality and impartial conduct' of the polls, the second in Bihar this year.

They should remember that they are officers of the commission, being on deputation to it, while deployed on an election related function and are subject to its superintendence, control, direction and discipline," he warned.

Bihar set for elections tomorrow

✓✓
of Elections
(State)
H.D. 1
17/11

Campaign ends for first phase

Special Correspondent

PATNA: Unprecedented security cover has been put in place as campaigning ended on Sunday for the first phase of the Bihar Assembly elections to be held on October 18. The Election Commission has decided to hold the elections in four constituencies of Gaya district on October 21 for security reasons. The first phase is being conducted in 57 constituencies spread over 12 districts in the State.

Six hundred companies of paramilitary forces, the Bihar Military Police, the district police and home guards have been deployed in view of the threat from Maoists who have given a call for poll boycott.

Altogether 90,000 police personnel will guard 13,493 booths. The EC has decided to deploy Central forces to guard 70 per cent of these booths. The other booths will be manned by the BMP and other armed forces. No booth has been left unguarded following the EC directive that elections will not be held in

booths not protected adequately. Besides, the State administration has arranged for air surveillance.

In the February elections, naxalite violence claimed the lives of 11 police personnel. This time polling will be held against the backdrop of two naxalite attacks on a railway station and police station and an assault on the former Union Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad, at an election meeting in Nokha in Rohtas district.

Digital cameras will be installed in the booths to record the polling process and identify those trying to cast a ballot a second time.

Two principal alliances — the Secular Democratic Forces comprising the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Congress, the CPI (M) and the NCP, and the National Democratic Alliance comprising the BJP and the JD(U) — are slugging it out for a clear verdict.

Another report on Page 12

No polling in Bihar booths lacking security: EC

TNN AND AGENCIES

Patna: In an attempt to check ballot-rigging, the Election Commission has ordered that polling will not be held in booths that will lack adequate security during the Bihar assembly elections. It also ordered extensive video filming at polling stations to catch bogus voters.

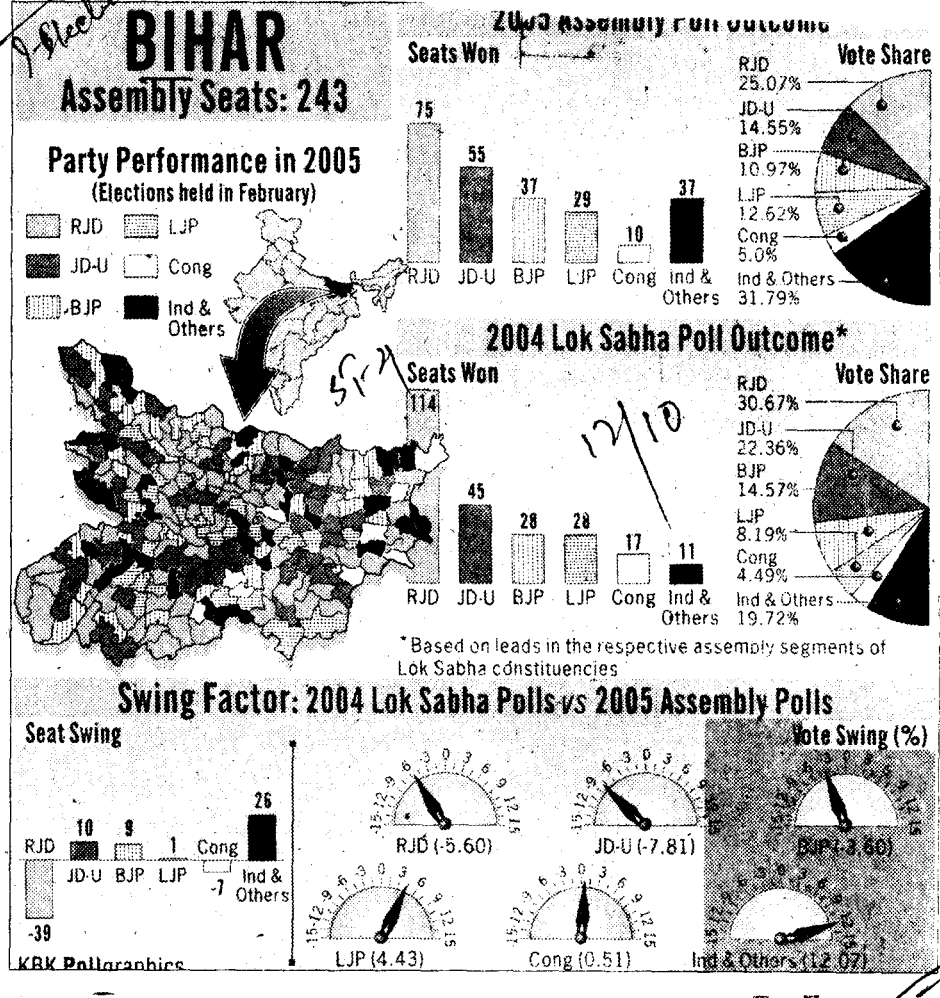
Chief electoral officer (CEO) N K Sinha said that though district magistrates and superintendents of police would be responsible for force deployment, two additional director generals of police would supervise the electoral exercise.

"Electronic voting machines will be handed over to poll personnel only at those polling stations where there will be deployment of security forces," Sinha said, adding that paramilitary forces would be stationed at almost all sensitive booths. But he clarified that forces would not examine the identification documents, which would be scrutinised only by polling staff.

The CEO said about 600 companies of paramilitary forces will be deployed for the first phase of polling in 57 sensitive constituencies in Naxalite-hit Patna, Bhojpur, Buxar, Kaimur, Aurangabad, Jehanabad, Gaya, Arwal, Nawada and Banka districts on October 18.

Earlier, polling was scheduled in 61 constituencies in the first phase but was postponed for October 21 in Gaya (town), Gaya (mufassil), Bodh Gaya and Belaganj to facilitate effective deployment of central paramilitary forces. Sinha said 1,500 cameras will be used to keep an eye on bogus voters during the first phase of polling.

Meanwhile, an election control room has been set up at Raj Bhavan to enable governor Buta Singh keep an eye on poll-related developments.



CONFLICTS SURFACE AS BIHAR POLLS NEAR CLIMAX

RJD-CPM rift widens 2nd phase work starts

Patna Patna
28 SEPTEMBER 28 SEPTEMBER

DIFFERENCES surfaced on Wednesday in RJD-led alliance in Bihar over seat-sharing with CPM, which announced it would to contest ten seats, one excess of its allotted quota of nine. "We have decided to contest the Purnea seat though it has not been allotted to us as our party has a strong support base there" CPI-M state Secretary Vijaykant Thakur told a press conference here. The CPM, which has been allotted nine seats, will cross swords with RJD candidate in Sugauli and Congress nominee in Bisfi.

RJD president Lalu Prasad had announced on Tuesday a seat-sharing accord under which the RJD would contest 175 seats, Congress 51, NCP eight, while leaving nine seats for CPM. He had said that 'rare exception' was allowed with regard to Sugauli and Bisfi seats where the allies would contest against each other. Mr Thakur sought to play down these differences describing them as 'minor' and claimed that in rest of the seats all the allies would fight as 'one'. He also released the list of nine candidates. — PTI

WITH governor Buta Singh's notification for holding polls in 69 of the 243 constituencies on October 26, the process for the second phase of the Assembly elections in Bihar, began on Wednesday. In the second phase, the constituencies going to the polls are spread over 12 districts — Muzaffarpur, Samastipur, Vaishali, Bhagalpur, Munger, Lakhisarai, Sheikhpura, Begusarai, Khagaria, Araria, Katihar, and Purnea.

The outlawed CPI(M) had given a call to boycott the four-part polls. Keeping this in view, the state administration has decided to deploy more paramilitary forces during the polls. Last week, the notification for the first phase of polls in 61 Assembly constituencies on October 18, was issued. The filing of nomination papers is on.

Most of the constituencies going to the polls are in Maoist-hit Gaya, Jehanabad, Aurangabad, Arwal, Rohtas, Kaimur, Buxar, Bhojpur, Patna, Nawada, Jamui and Banka districts. The third and the fourth phases are scheduled on November 13 and November 19. — PTI

Paswan gives RJD below 40

Patna
28 SEPTEMBER

CLAIMING that Lalu Prasad's RJD will have to settle for just 40 seats in the coming Bihar assembly elections, Lok Janashakti Party chief Ram Vilas Paswan on Wednesday said his party has finalised the seat-sharing arrangement with its allies the CPI and Forward Bloc.

Mr Paswan said Lok Janashakti Party would contest in "around 200 seats" while CPI would contest 37 seats and the Forward Bloc three. However, the RSP had not specified the number of seats it intended to contest. — PTI

28 SEP 2001 The Economic Times

551 29/9

63% turnout for Asansol by-poll

feeding

Statesman News Service

ASANSOL, Sept. 28. — Either side hauled the poll panel over the coals but the Asansol Lok Sabha by-election passed off peacefully today with 63 per cent of the electorate voting. Re-polling was recommended, though, at a booth reportedly taken over by armed goons.

Boycotting was reported from two booths and malfunctioning electronic voting machines had to be replaced in eight. The Trinamul Congress demanded re-polling in nine booths in the Jamuria, Raniganj and Asansol Assembly segments. Of the 1,124 polling

stations, 320 were "hyper-sensitive," each of which had two armed guards allotted to it.

Jamming and capturing of polling booths came to be alleged by the Trinamul after 1 pm though it had no agents in most places. It said that Asansol mayor Mr Tapas Roy, backed by 40 people, had tried to "overpower" the polling officers in booths 25 and 26 at Dhrupdanga. The vice-chairman of Jamuria Municipality, Mr Sujit Dutta, was charged with trespassing on a booth in Sripur about 12.30 pm. The district unit of the CPI-M said that he had gone there to find out why the voting was slow. But Election Commission

observers caught the party on wrong foot at booth 55 in Guru Nanak School when some 20 people, carrying arms, barged in. West Bengal's chief election officer, Mr Basudeb Banerjee, said: "According to the returning officer, it was a clear attempt at booth-capturing which continued for 25 minutes. Policemen were supposed to open fire but there were genuine voters around the place, too. The RO has recommended re-polling."

The state CPI-M secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, said: "The voting was peaceful despite the EC's non-cooperation." The party's district secretary, Mr Amol Halder, said: "The observers provoked

our cadres but the boys behaved coolly."

Mr Moley Ghatak, Trinamul candidate, alleged: "The observers did nothing in an emergency, preferring not to respond to telephone calls even though each of them had his personal number for SOS messages." The inspector-general of police, western zone, Mr Anil Kumar said: "Deployment of personnel conformed to the requirements and had been decided on in consultation with the observers." The police seized about 40 vehicles today. Booths 89 and 115 witnessed a boycott each for lack of civic amenities.

BJP, JD(U) differ over seat-sharing formula

Parties to go for two manifestos

PRESS Trust of India
New Delhi, September 24

HICCUPS OVER allocation of certain seats won by former LJP MLAs, who have switched over to JD (U), have delayed the release of the first list of party candidates for the Bihar Assembly elections even as it held talks with the BJP on seat-sharing.

"Talks with the BJP are still on and the list will be released at the right time", JD (U) spokesman, Shambhu Shrivastwa, told reporters, trying to downplay the differences between the NDA partners. JD (U) parliamentary board chairman Sharad Yadav and BJP Bihar in-charge Arun Jaitley on Saturday held talks to give final touches to seat-sharing adjustment.

After the meeting, Jaitley said there was a chance of two parties contesting the polls on separate manifestos. Though Shrivastwa asserted that there was "no dispute" between JD (U) and the BJP over certain seats, sources said the two parties were fighting over three seats with both NDA partners claiming them.

YAWNING CRACKS

The JD (U) was expected to announce its first list on Saturday but the differences have led to the delay. The BJP has already stolen a march over JD (U) having released its first list of 80 candidates on Friday. Under a seat-sharing accord, the BJP will contest 105 seats, leaving the rest for JD (U) in the 243-member House.

The spokesman said the two NDA partners would come out with separate manifestos though they would hold joint election campaigns. He said JD (U) was already working on its manifesto. The two parties had contested the last Assembly elections on separate manifestos.

To a question, Shrivastwa said JD (U) was opposed to reservation on communal lines but was in favour of extending reservation to Dalits belonging to Muslim and Christian communities as that available to Dalit Hindus. At the party briefing, former Bihar minister and Congress leader Kumud Ranjan Jha joined JD (U) reposing full faith in the leadership of Nitish Kumar.

Claiming that the Congress had become irrelevant in Bihar having surrendered to RJD chief Lalu Prasad, Jha said, "People like R.K. Dhawan and Kapil Sibal have used their position as state party in-charge only to enter Raja Sabha."

Earlier in the day, chairman of the JD (U) parliamentary board Sharad Yadav and the BJP Bihar in-charge Arun Jaitley along with other leaders from the two parties held parleys on seat-sharing to give final touches to seat adjustment.

BATTLE FOR BIHAR

Phase I
Polling day: October 18

Seats: 61
Close NDA-RJD battles likely in Rohtas, Bhojpur, Buxar and Aurangabad districts. Four of 14 seats that CPI-ML won at stake. LJP may not perform that well since past winners have left it

Feb 2005 poll
RJD-Cong: 26
NDA: 18
LJP: 8
CPI-ML: 4
Others: 6

Phase II
Polling day: October 26

Seats: 69
The battle in this phase is likely to be between NDA and RJD alliance because most LJP winners are now with JD(U)

Last show
RJD: 28
NDA: 17
LJP: 14

Phase III
Polling day: November 11

Seats: 72
NDA is the dark horse. BJP expected to do well in East and West Champaran, RJD in Darbhanga, JD(U) in Supaul

Last show
JD(U): 18
BJP: 17
RJD: 21
LJP: 4
Others: 12



RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav enjoys a paan in Patna on Saturday.

Phase IV, polling day: November 19

Seats: 41
BJP had won four Patna urban and semi-urban seats and the JD-U had virtually swept Nalanda. This round includes six seats in Gopalganj, the home district of RJD chief Lalu Yadav and 10 in Saran district, a large part of which overlaps Lalu's Chapra Lok Sabha constituency

Last show
RJD: 9
NDA: 22
Others: 10

Cong delinks UPA from Paswan move

SAROJ Nagi
New Delhi, September 24

FOR THE first time since LJP's Ram Vilas Paswan refused to join the RJD-led alliance, the Congress of dividing the secular vote in Bihar, the Congress delinked his presence in the Manmohan Singh government at the Centre and his decision to break ranks with the UPA in the state.

"We do not link his presence in the Central cabinet with his moves in Bihar," said Abhishek Singhvi, curiously echoing the point that Paswan has all along been making when he floated a separate secular LJP-CPI-RSP-FB front and reiterated his anti-Lalu, anti-BJP stand. The Congress' comments came in the backdrop of the repeated demands by the RJD and the CPI(M) that Paswan should quit the UPA for refusing to jointly fight the JD(U)-BJP in the forthcoming Assembly polls.

After going along with these parties in a bid to pressure Paswan into coming on board, Digvijay Singh, AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar, recently clarified that it was neither his nor his party's view that the LJP quit the UPA — a point made by the AICC on Friday. The Congress, however, sees Paswan's front as a move that threatens to divide the secular vote, violate the spirit of coalition dharma and help the saffron camp.

With the Congress stating that Paswan's stand in Bihar would not compromise his position at the Centre, the RJD-led alliance has braced itself for a multi-cornered contest in which the secular allies stand divided in their battle against the JD(U)-BJP, with the SP and BSP likely to act as spoilers.

To complicate matters, the RJD-led combine would not only fight the Paswan front — their allies at the Centre — but also engage in 'friendly' contests with each other in about half a dozen seats where there is no agreement yet.

The NCP and the CPI(M) are likely to contest eight seats each and the Congress 45-50, including some seats like Sugoli and Bisfi on which there is no agreement with the RJD. With rebels waiting in the wings, this raises the spectre of 'friendly' contests — a possibility earlier ruled out by Singh.

Meanwhile, in his bid to contest a lion's share of the seats, Lalu Yadav promised berths in legislative council to the NCP, the CPI(M) and the Congress, including former PCC chief Ram Jatan Siraha. The list of candidates, constituencies and the Common Minimum Programme — which promises five per cent reservation for Muslims to undercut Paswan's 'Muslim-CM' slogan — will be jointly released by the combine in Patna early next week.

There would also be a couple of joint rallies by Sonia Gandhi, Sharad Pawar, Lalu Yadav and CPI(M) leaders. The Congress' central election committee will clear its list on Sunday, with single names proposed in at least 35 constituencies.

RJD's code violation

PRESS Trust of India
Patna, September 24

AN FIR has been registered against former Bihar minister and RJD candidate for Phulwarisharif Assembly constituency Shyam Rajak, considered close to railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, on the charge of violation of the model code of conduct.

Sub-divisional magistrate (Sadar) S.K. Gupta lodged the FIR at the Kotwali police station on Friday night charging Rajak and others with using more than three vehicles while going to file his nomination at the district collectorate, police said.

RJD MP Ramkrishna Yadav and party MP from Gopalganj Aniruddh Prasad, high-profile brother-in-law of Lalu Prasad, had also accompanied Rajak when he went to file the papers.

Left differences may widen

SYED Sajjad Ali
Agartala, September 24

IF PUBLIC rhetoric of Sitaran Yechuri bears any indication, differences among Left parties is likely to widen over Bihar elections. CPI(M) politburo member Yechuri criticised CPI's decision to forge an alliance with the Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) in contravention of left unity.

Central leader of CPI(M), which is all set to tie up with Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar elections, failed to persuade Ram Vilas Paswan to join the

common 'secular' platform to defeat the communal block led by BJP. "Emergence of third block (LJP and all) with regard to Bihar elections would help the communal forces", Yechuri said in a rally to mark annual conference of DMFI at Ambassa, north Tripura.

He criticised CPI's unilateral declaration to go with the LJP without taking other Left parties into confidence. The Left think-tank was visibly annoyed for hitherto failing to play a larger role in Bihar. Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar and senior

leaders of the ruling party were present in the rally. Yechuri criticised the UPA government at the Centre and cautioned his party would not spare the government on its anti-people policies. He reminded that Left parties were acting as 'watch dog' so that the government did not deviate from the common minimum programme.

Chief Minister Sarkar in his speech concentrated on issues related to the region. He demanded that the Union government declare military in Northeast as a national problem.

Parties hold talks for Bihar polls

9-Block in Bihar

40/1
21/9

RJD-led combination has more or less finalised seat-sharing

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The battle for Bihar will see a contest between the allies of the United Progressive Alliance and its supporting parties, with the Lok Jan Shakti Party and three Left parties insisting on taking on both the Janata Dal (United)/Bharatiya Janata combine and the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

Tuesday saw the RJD, the Congress, the Nationalist Congress Party and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) on the one hand and, the LJP, the Communist Party of India, the All India Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party on the other holding discussions on seat-sharing arrangements for the October-November polls.

Seat-sharing finalised

The RJD-led combination has more or less finalised the seat-sharing arrangement. After a second round of meeting, RJD chief Lalu Prasad said the talks progressed well and details of seat allocation would be disclosed after the September 23 Election Commission notification. Mr. Prasad accused LJP chief Ram Vilas Paswan of pursuing an agenda to help Nitish Kumar of the JD (U) become the chief minister.

AICC general secretary Digvijay Singh told correspondents: "By and large there is a broad

agreement on seat sharing ... it couldn't have been smoother."

The combine has identified the constituencies and the number of seats to be contested for the 243-member Assembly.

Under a formula, the Congress may get nearly 35 seats, the CPI (M) and the NCP 15 and the rest could go to the RJD.

The Congress has maintained that the number of seats it contests is not the issue but those in which it has prospects of winning.

Paswan clarifies

At the meeting between Mr. Paswan and D. Raja (CPI), Debabrata Biswas (AIFB) and Abani Roy (RSP), Mr. Paswan told the three that the LJP's earlier offer that it would not put up candidates against the Congress was not valid now.

As for the equations with the CPI (Marxist-Leninist), he has decided to leave the matter to the three Left parties to sort it out. As far as the LJP is concerned, it has an understanding with the CPI, RSP and the AIFB.

The talks, now on in Patna between these parties, would determine the course.

Mr. Paswan told presspersons that the thrust of his campaign would be creation of a "new Bihar" and form a government by defeating the JD (U)/BJP combine

Congress gives up on Paswan, laments split

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 19 SEPTEMBER

EVEN as the RJD, Congress, NCP and CPM started seat-sharing talks for Bihar on Monday, the AICC has virtually accepted the inevitability of a divided UPA in the Bihar election fields and thus a division in the "secular" votes.

An evidently helpless Congress leadership on Monday acknowledged the "democratic right" of Mr Ram Vilas Paswan to chart a separate course while lamenting that it was "our hope and efforts" to unite secular forces in the state against the JD(U)-BJP combine. Though AICC general secretary Digvijay Singh, had given Mr Paswan time till September 23 to make up his mind on which side he was contesting in the elections, the LJP leader yesterday formally announced his party's tie-up with CPI and other non-CPM Left parties, thereby making the deadline meaningless.

Since the Congress had already distanced from Mr Yadav's by-now-waning demand for ousting Mr Paswan from the Cabinet for not aiding the RJD power project by saying it had to be a collective decision of the ruling allies, Mr Singh parroted the same line today.

"It is an issue for the national leadership of the UPA to decide". With the NCP also distancing from the "oust Paswan campaign", for the record Mr Yadav only has the backing of the CPM on that count,

especially after many others favoured practical course of de-linking the national politics of UPA from the allies state compulsions.

On Mr Paswan's resolve to go ahead with the Left-anchored 'third front' in the state, party spokesman Jayanthi Natarajan said, "It has been our efforts to put a united face of all secular forces, but now Paswan seems to have made up his mind to go his way. We understand his democratic right to decide his course."

The Congress, aware of the importance of the 24 RJD MPs in the UPA, has this time limited its action-plan to fully back the RJD, giving it no scope to complain of a "secular betrayal", and hope to get a "presentable number of seats" this time.

In the first round of talks today, the RJD allies, who have identified 113 "negative seats for RJD" have urged Mr Yadav, keen to get around 170 of the total 243 seats for his party, to be realistically generous in sharing seats with them. They hope to complete the exercise in a day or two. Mr Paswan is expected to meet Ms Gandhi this week and formally inform his decision to fight against the RJD front.

With a clear split in the UPA in Bihar, many Congress leaders privately admit that it could have an adverse effect on the RJD front. With the upper castes rallying behind Mr Nitish Kumar this time with a vengeance, they also worry the possibility of a section of the influential non-Yadav OBCs also backing the JD(U) leader's most determined effort to capture the 15-year old RJD rule.



NECESSARY EVIL FOR AICC

Muslim body to back JD(U) at the hustings

Ashok K Mishra
PATNA 19 SEPTEMBER

WHEN all major political formations in Bihar are vying for minority votes in the forthcoming Assembly election, the decision of the All India Pasmanda Muslim Mahaj (AIPMM) to back the JD(U) could be a big boost to its leadership.

The party will obviously like to flaunt the support it has received from a Muslim body like the AIPMM, which has remained in the forefront espousing the cause of reservation for Dalit Muslims. At the ground level, however, it is arguable whether the support will pay rich dividends to the JD(U) at the ensuing hustings.

"The JD(U) has been vehemently supporting our demand for seeking scheduled caste status for Muslim and Dalits. Nitish Kumar has also called for the disbanding of the Justice Rangnath Mishra commission, an issue which we have been raising," said AIPMM national president Ali Anwar. He added that the state unit of the organisation has passed a resolution to support JD(U) candidates in the forthcoming Assembly elections.

Simultaneously, Mr Ali also hoped that in the future the JD(U) will wash off its hands from its ties with the BJP. "If Mr Kumar strengthens his political position, this will lead to the political weakening of the BJP," Mr Ali stated. "Barring a few excep-

tions, we will back the JD(U) nominees, even though the party is in alliance with a communal party like the BJP. At several other places, we may even extend our support to the CPI(ML), CPI and the CPI(M) candidates, as these parties are also opposed to the provision of reservations allowed on the basis of religion," said Mr Ali. He also admitted that the AIPMM may even field some of its candidates on a few seats.

Interestingly, Mr Kumar's plea for seeking SC status for the Dalit Muslims has not gone down well with the BJP.

In fact, a section of the party's leadership even publicly berated Mr Kumar for speaking his mind on the issue, which it stoutly opposes.

20 SEP 2005

The Economic Times

EC rap for Pawar

NEW DELHI, Sept. 13. — The Election Commission today issued a notice to the Union agriculture minister, Mr Sharad Pawar, for violating the model code of conduct now in force ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections.

The notice has been served on the basis of a complaint filed after Mr Pawar was filmed on 8 September promising the revival of a sugar mill in a public rally at Motipur, Muzaffarpur. He had also reportedly promised that the Centre would open sugar mills in Bihar to improve the lot of sugarcane farmers. The decision of putting the Union minister on notice was taken after video recordings of the public meeting addressed by him had been shown. The Election Commission gave him four days' time to reply to the notice, an EC official said.

"The commission would like to have your comments on the above mentioned violation of the model code of conduct. Your comments

must reach the commission latest by 16 September," the notice reads.

The Commission also issued advisories to the Centre and the state government reiterating its standing instructions on the model code of conduct, restraining ministers and government officials from announcing any financial grants in any form, laying the foundations of any projects or making promises to construct roads.

Sugar subsidy

In a move that may raise eyebrows given the Bihar elections are around the corner, the Centre today decided to provide an interest subsidy of Rs 525 crore to revitalise sugar mills in the country by reducing their interest on term loan rates to 10 per cent. Queried on this Mr Pawar said the decision was taken by a Nabard committee set up in consonance with a Union Budget proposal this year and did not violate the model code. — SNS

BIHAR ■ Two-member team slams appointments made after code came into effect

EC reads out model code to Buta

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 9

THE Election Commission (EC) today criticised the Bihar administration and Governor. Buta Singh over appointments made to various constitutional bodies in violation of the model code of conduct.

Following the report of a two-member team set up by the Commission, the EC concluded that many appointments were made after the model code came into force.

The team had submitted that the appointments to various posts in the Bihar State Minority Commission, State Commission for Backward Classes and 15-Point Programme Implementation Committee were notified by the state government on Sep-

their duties and functions to observe the model code in letter and spirit".

The EC also wrote to the Bihar Chief Secretary that it was the duty of Bihar officers to have apprised the Governor of the model code having come into force before issuing notifications in pursuance of his orders on relevant files.

With regard to appointments to the State Minority Commission, the two-member team pointed out that the file was submitted to the Governor on May 28, and it was cleared by him on September 2. The appointment notification was issued

What the EC report said

- EC team says appointments to state minority, BC commissions made on Sept 3, after code came into effect
- Tells Bihar Chief Secy that it is the duty of officers to inform the Governor of the model code coming in force
- Members of BC commission were shown as having joined on Sept 3 in the forenoon while the appointment order was issued after 6.15 pm

tember 3 after the model code came into effect.

Observing that Governor Buta Singh had cleared long-pending files on the eve of announcement of the poll schedule, Commission sources said the "officers have thus failed in proper discharge of

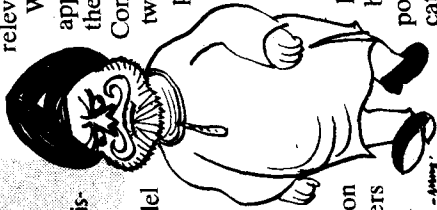
Former Congress MP shot dead in Sheikhpura

■ PATNA: Unidentified assailants on Friday shot dead former MP and Congress leader Rajo Singh at Sheikhpura town in North Bihar. This is the first major political murder after the announcement of poll dates in the state. Singh was gunned down by three motorcycle-borne criminals outside the Congress party office. Police suspect the murder to be the result of political enmity in view of the upcoming Assembly elections. — ENS

on September 3 at 6.30 pm, and by then the model code was in force. Also, the file proposing appointments to the State Commission for Backward Classes was submitted to the Governor on July 15, and cleared by him on September 2.

The EC team also took note of the fact that two members of the Backward Classes Commission Ghulam Takir and Ram Karan were shown as having joined on the forenoon of September 3, whereas the appointment or-

der was issued after 6.15 pm on September 3. The Commission also observed that similar haste was shown in appointments made to the 15-Point Programme Implementation Commission, Bihar Public Service Commission and Bihar state Nagarik Parishad. Acting on the report, the EC ordered status quo be maintained with regard to non-statutory bodies like the 15-Point Programme Implementation Committee and Bihar State Nagarik Parishad.



Why? Sheikhpura (near Patna) 9-3

Staggered doubts

J. B. ...
2004 EC's extraordinary measures for Bihar

The Election Commission needed to show some earnestness in setting things right in Bihar and the result was evident during the assembly poll in February. Nevertheless, the corrective measures adopted this time are extraordinary. Seldom has an assembly election been staggered over a month. Bihar is an exception by any standards. But there are doubts whether the plan to have the poll in four phases from 19 October to 19 November will serve the purpose the EC has in mind. The ostensible reason is to have adequate central paramilitary forces to cover more than 50,000 polling booths. But there is also the likelihood that mischief-makers will find it easier to operate during the four phases, defeating the purpose of preventing the evils that are endemic to Bihar. In any case, this need not be treated as a precedent because of problems that could arise over a long drawn out poll. What the EC may be suggesting is that Bihar is in a class of its own, made worse by a Governor working overtime to please vested interests. The first signal came when the commission, in the face of stiff resistance from the RJD, replaced district magistrates who it felt were guilty of dereliction of duties. But what it does not deal with are the danger signals coming with Ram Vilas Paswan and Lalu giving cynical twists to caste and communal factors. Paswan is targeting Lalu's traditional vote-bank by throwing up the idea of a Muslim chief minister and the RJD leader eyes Dalits firmly ensconced in Paswan's camp. Neither Muslims nor Dalits have reason to be delighted.

The battle lines are drawn. There are disturbing signs that if Lalu and Paswan, functioning in the same coalition at the Centre, persist with their perverse devices, it may produce fresh social tensions in an already lawless state. They are treading on dangerous ground. Lalu has already used a letter written by an observer for the 2004 parliamentary poll to suggest that the EC has a caste bias; and he has followed this up with an allegation that the DMs transferred by the commission belonged to scheduled castes and OBCs. The UPA government at the Centre recognises this to be a sick game but maintains a discreet silence because it cannot choose between Lalu and Paswan. The result is that evil networks have survived. The Election Commission has risen to the task. The best the Congress can do is to restrain the Governor and give the EC the endorsement it needs for the cleansing operation.

J. Bhattacharya
(State)

Assembly delimitation hearing draws flak

Debasis Sarkar
SILIGURI 5 SEPTEMBER

THE first public hearing on the delimitation process for state Assembly constituencies took place at Siliguri on Monday amidst unprecedented security. Political stalwarts from across the state were present at the hearing, which saw a lot of heated exchanges.

Trinamool leaders questioned the legal validity of the process and demanded its rejection. Party MLAs Saugata Roy and Kalyan Banerjee, present at the hearing, hinted that their party may go to court. However, Congress (I) was comparatively cool with its objections and suggestions. CPI(M), however, extended its full support to the draft delimitation proposal. Trinamool supremo Mamata Banerjee demanded fresh notification to be published following all the norms specified by the delimitation Act, 2002, challenging the legal validity of it.

Right after the hearing commenced at 2.30 pm, Dipak Ghosh, an associated member of the Delimitation Commission and a Trinamool leader, demanded an explanation from commissioner chairman Justice Kuldip Singh as to why all the members were not given a compilation of the suggestions and objections which came in response to the publication of the draft delimitation proposal. This is already prescribed by the delimitation Act, 2002.

Mr Roy objected to the fact that West Bengal state chief election officer Basudev Banerjee, a non-member of the commission, was seated on the dais with the panel of commission members and demanded his removal from the panel. GNLFF supporters from Darjeeling hills demanded publication of the draft proposal in electronic medium, as prescribed in the delimitation Act, but "not complied with". As an explanation, Justice Singh said the compiled response of all is given only to the three permanent members of the commission, but not to any associated members that includes Mr Ghosh. He also commented that Mr Banerjee will remain in the panel "as per the practice followed in whole country."

The proceeding continued despite Trinamool's demand to cancel the public hearing, supported by BJP members and the hill parties.

The Commission's files

Four-phase Bihar polls in October, November

✓
 J-Blection
 (Bihar)

HO-1

Counting on November 22 and all results likely the same day 9/9

J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission on Saturday announced a four-phase polling schedule for the Bihar Assembly elections from October 18 to November 19.

Addressing a press conference here, Chief Election Commissioner B. B. Tandon said the second phase of voting would be on October 26 and the third phase on November 13. In the first phase 61 constituencies would go to the polls; 69 in the second; 72 in the third and 41 in the fourth. Counting of votes would be taken up on November 22 and all results might be declared the same day. The entire poll process would be completed by November 23.

Mr. Tandon, flanked by Election Commissioners N. Gopalas-

BIHAR ASSEMBLY ELECTION SCHEDULE 2005				
	Phase-I (61 seats)	Phase-II (69 seats)	Phase-III (72 seats)	Phase-IV (41 seats)
Start date for nominations	Sept 23	Sept 28	Oct 19	Oct 26
Last date for nominations	Sept 30	Oct 5	Oct 26	Nov 2
Scrutiny	Oct 1	Oct 6	Oct 27	Nov 3
Last date for withdrawal	Oct 3	Oct 8	Oct 29	Nov 5
Date of Poll	Oct 18	Oct 26	Nov 13	Nov 19
Counting	Nov 22	Nov 22	Nov 22	Nov 22

KBK PolGraphics

wamy and Navin Chawla, said the Model Code of Conduct would come into immediate effect for the State Government, political parties and the Union Government as far as Bihar af-

fairs were concerned.

Asked about the long schedule, he said it was fixed keeping in view the availability of Central para-military forces, the law and order situation, including

problems posed by naxalites, the communications system and condition of roads.

The Commission also took into consideration festivals such as Dussera, Deepavali and Chhat falling in October and November.

There would be maximum deployment of para-military forces under the supervision of the poll observers and monitoring by the Commission.

The State Government was asked to ensure strict implementation of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act so that weaker sections were not intimidated to vote in a particular manner.

An official would act as the returning officer for only one constituency. In the past, there was one returning officer even for three or four constituencies.

SC nod for election in Bihar

P. B. election
119
SP-1

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Aug. 31. — With the 22 November deadline for constituting the Bihar Assembly not too far off, the Supreme Court today gave a virtual go-ahead to the Election Commission to announce the poll schedule by refusing to pass any order on an appeal for a stay on the electoral process.

A three-judge Bench comprising Chief Justice Mr RC Lahoti, Mr Justice GP Mathur and Mr Justice PK Balasubramanyan framed four important questions on the scope and extent of immunity from court proceedings enjoyed by Governors under Article 361 and referred it to a Constitution Bench, which would begin working on 6 September. It said the plea for a stay on the elections as sought by the petitioners, including former NDA MLAs, who had challenged the dissolution of the House by a Presidential proclamation on 23 May, could be heard by the Constitution Bench.

If what Mr S Muralidhar, the EC's counsel, said was an indication, the commission would come out with a Press release announcing the poll schedule within two to three days, signalling the commencement of the poll process and the coming into force of the Model Code of Conduct. He also said the polls would be conducted in three or four phases taking into account the number of holidays in October and November.

The petitioners' counsel, Mr PS Narasimha, had contended that the EC should be restrained from announcing the polls as it would bar any intervention by the Supreme Court, rendering the petitions challenging the Centre's decision to impose President's rule infructuous.

The Bench asked the EC whether it could wait till 6 September, when the Constitution Bench would take up hearing of the matter.

While Mr Muralidhar said that the EC would abide by what the court said, additional solicitor-general Mr Gopal Subramaniam said any such observation would amount to a stay. He added that such an order would hit at the root of the presidential proclamation which intended to put in place a popular government through fresh elections.

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0 1 SEP 2005

Supreme Court won't stay Bihar poll process

9- Brechtin (8/26) HD-1 1/2

J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to pass any order on applications seeking to restrain the Election Commission from announcing the commencement of the Assembly election process in Bihar.

A three-judge Bench comprising Chief Justice R.C. Lahoti, Justice G.P. Mathur and Justice P.K. Balasubramanyam, hearing a batch of petitions challenging the legality of the dissolution of the Assembly, posted the matter

to September 6 and said the plea for a stay on the elections would be listed before a Constitution Bench.

Counsel for the Commission, S. Murlidhar, said it was expected to issue a press release in two or three days announcing the poll schedule.

To a question, counsel told the Bench that though the press release did not have statutory force, it would mean the commencement of the poll process and the coming into force of the model code of conduct. The

Commission usually issued a press release at least three weeks before the proposed poll dates, in view of the elaborate arrangements it has to make. It would hold the Bihar polls in three or four phases taking into account the number of holidays in October and November.

Counsel said that according to a Supreme Court judgment the election process would have to be completed within six months of the date of dissolution of the House. In Bihar, it had to be done before November 22.

Counsel for one of the petitioners, P.S. Narasimha, who pleaded for a stay on the election process, intervened and said, "What we are asking for is revival of the Assembly."

Initially when the Bench asked Mr. Murlidhar whether the Commission could wait till September 6 for issuing the press release, Additional Solicitor-General Gopal Subramaniam said any such direction would amount to a stay on the poll process and hit at the root of the Presidential Proclamation, which

intended to put in place a popular government through fresh elections.

When the petitioners reiterated their plea for a stay on the poll process, the Bench said it was not going to pass any order and they could raise the matter before the Constitution Bench. "It is up to the Commission to take a decision, keeping in mind the pendency of the case before this court."

See also Page 12

CEC arrives, Bihar DMs exit

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Aug. 25. — Taking serious exception to their "very poor" performance in respect of preparation of electoral photo identity cards, the Election Commission today ordered the transfer of DMs of Sheohar, Nalanda and Khagaria. The EC which reviewed the preparation for the Assembly elections with top Bihar officials, ordered the "immediate" suspension of Officers-in-Charge of three police stations in the state capital for "concealing" information regarding the non-bailable warrants pending with them for execution. The total number of

Charge-sheet filed against Goswami

PATNA, Aug. 25. — Bihar State Vigilance Investigation Bureau today filed a charge-sheet against former Patna district magistrate Gautam Goswami and 10 others in connection with the multi-crore flood relief scam. The vigilance team, led by SP Mr Ashok Kumar Singh, filed the charge-sheet against Goswami and others in the court of Vigilance judge Mr Srinivas Prasad. Besides Goswami, names of alleged kingpin of the scam Santosh Kumar Jha and additional district magistrate Basudeo Prasad were also figured in the charge-sheet. — PTI

NBWs pending execution at the moment is 70,189.

The DMs whose shifting has been ordered are: Mr Rajiv Lochan (Sheohar), Mr Ramshobhit Paswan (Nalanda) and Mr Srinarain Murty (Khagaria), state personnel department secretary Mr Ravi Kant told. The Officers-in-Charge placed under sus-

pension are Mr PN Sahu (Sultanganj), Mr KK Singh (Buddha Colony) and Mr K Chandra (Alamganj), he added. Two electoral registration officers were also ordered to be placed under suspension for committing "gross irregularities" in preparation of electoral rolls for the February Assembly polls,

of election. (Brah)
CEC Mr BB Tandon told reporters after reviewing arrangements for the elections expected some time in October-November.

He also "divested" the district authorities of their responsibility to deploy security personnel at the polling booths. "The deployment of forces will not be left to the district authorities. This will be done under proper observation of observers and special observers," Mr Tandon added that no officer (both from police and administrative side) against whom FIRs had been lodged or were facing cases would be deployed at the polling booths. He added that central government employees would be engaged in poll duty.

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26 AUG 2004

তমসা হইতে লঠনে

তমসা হইতে আলোকে লইয়া যাও: বিহারের নির্বাচনে এ বার ইহাই ধূয়া হইতে পারে। কেননা, বিদ্যুৎবাত্তির অভাবে অভাবী এই রাজ্যটিতে আপাতত লঠনও নিষিদ্ধ হইল, অন্তত আগামী নির্বাচনের দিন পর্যন্ত। নিষেধাজ্ঞাটি জারি করিয়াছে নির্বাচনী কমিশন। নিষেধাজ্ঞার কারণ: বিহারের প্রধান রাজনৈতিক দল আর জে ডি-র প্রতীকই যেহেতু লঠন, এই বিশেষ বস্তুটির ব্যবহার অক্ষরজ্ঞানহীন মানুষের মনে এক প্রকার প্রভাব ফেলিতে পারে। নির্বাচনী রীতিনীতি মানিয়াই কমিশন নিশ্চয়ই এই আদেশ দিয়াছে। তবে এই বহুদলীয় গণতন্ত্রের দেশে তো নানা দলের নানা চিহ্ন। আর জে ডি দফতর হইতে যে প্রশ্ন উঠিয়াছে, তাহাও সুতরাং প্রশ্নাধিকারযোগ্য— তবে কি এ বার অন্য প্রতীকগুলিও নিষিদ্ধ হইবে, যেমন, সমাজবাদী পার্টির 'সাইকেল', কিংবা এন সি পি-র 'ঘড়ি', এবং, সর্বাপেক্ষা গুরুতর, কংগ্রেসের 'হাত'? সাইকেল কিংবা ঘড়ি বিহনে বিহারবাসী যদি বা অতি কষ্টে কালাতিপাত করেনও, হাত বিনা তো তাহাদের দিন চলিবে না। এই ব্যবস্থা কি কংগ্রেসের পক্ষে অপার পক্ষপাতিত্ব নহে? প্রসঙ্গত, গৃহকোণে বা জনহীন তমসাময় পথে লঠন নিষিদ্ধ হইলেই যে লোকে দলে দলে লঠনের বদলে অন্য চিহ্নকে ভোট দিতে ছুটিবেন, এমন যুক্তিতে কিন্তু লালুপ্রসাদ যাদবের প্রতিপক্ষরা মোটেও আশাবিত্ত নন, বরং নির্বাচনী প্রচারের প্রারম্ভেই এমন বাধ্যতামূলক তমসা জারি হওয়াতে তাঁহারা আপাতত রীতিমতো বিপর্যস্ত। বিপন্ন বোধ করিতেছে ক্ষমতাসীন আর জে ডি-ও। রাজ্য জুড়িয়া এখন তুমুল গোলযোগ: লঠনের বিকল্প খুঁজিয়া বাহির করিতে বাধা বাধা অফিসারগণ ব্যতিব্যস্ত। কেহ বলিতেছেন, লাখখানেক মোমবাতি কেনা যাউক। কাহারও বক্তব্য, নির্বাচনী বুথে মোমবাতির আগুন সামলাইয়া দুষ্কৃতী মোকাবিলা হইবে কি? কাহারও মতে, 'রিচার্জবল' বৈদ্যুতিক লঠন কেনাই ভাল। কাহারও মতে, তাহা খরচে পোষাইবে না।

ইত্যাকার ব্যস্ততা এবং চাপান-উতোরের মধ্যে হারাইয়া যাইতে বসিয়াছে আসল কথাটি। কথাটি গণতন্ত্র ও শিক্ষার সম্পর্ক বিষয়ক। শিক্ষার প্রসার ছাড়া গণতন্ত্রের চেহারা কেমন দাঁড়াইতে পারে, সেই বিষয়ক। বিহারের মতো রাজ্যে যেখানে অধিকাংশ ঘরেই শিক্ষার প্রথম রশ্মিটুকুও পৌঁছয় নাই, সেখানে ছবি দেখিয়াই মানুষ নির্বাচনী প্রার্থী বা দলকে আন্দাজ করিয়া নেন, এবং ছবির ভরসাতেই ভোটটিচিহ্নে ছাপ দেন। সুতরাং ছবি কিংবা প্রতিকৃতির প্রভাব যে সেখানে শিক্ষা-অধ্যুষিত জায়গার অপেক্ষা অনেক সুদূরপ্রসারী, সে বিষয়ে সন্দেহ কী। কিন্তু তাই বলিয়া ছবি বা প্রতিকৃতি কিংবা ছবির বিষয়বস্তুকে নিষিদ্ধ করিয়া তো গণতন্ত্রকে কার্যকর করা যায় না। একমাত্র অক্ষরজ্ঞানের প্রসারেই এই অভিশপ্ত গণতন্ত্রের নিরাময় সম্ভব। বিহারের এই ঘটনা চোখে আঙুল দিয়া দেখাইয়া দেয়, শুধু ভোটাধিকার অর্জনেই গণতন্ত্রের মূল্য প্রমাণিত হয় না। যেমন তেমন একটি ছাপ দিলেই ভোটমাধ্যমে মতপ্রকাশের পবিত্র কর্তব্য সুসম্পাদিত হয় না। তাহার জন্য প্রয়োজন পারিপার্শ্বিক সম্বন্ধে কিছু ধারণা ও সেই পরিপার্শ্ব লইয়া মতনির্মাণের ক্ষমতা। ইহা একমাত্র লেখাপড়ার মাধ্যমেই সম্ভব। সুতরাং মানুষকে লেখাপড়ার সুযোগ দিয়া মতামত নির্মাণ ও সেই মতামতের যোগ্য প্রকাশ শেখাইবার কোনও বিকল্প থাকিতে পারে না। একমাত্র তাহা হইলেই এই একশো আট কোটির দেশের বহু-বিজ্ঞাপিত গণতন্ত্র অর্থবহ হইতে পারে। অশিক্ষার তমসা হইতে শিক্ষার দিকে যাইবার জরুরি প্রয়োজনটি পুনর্বীর মনে করাইয়া দিল এ বারের লঠন প্রহসন।

2006 2005

ANANDABAZAR PAILIKA

EC lays the rules for Bihar polls

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 10. — The Election Commission today asked the Bihar government to reshuffle the state administration and transfer all officials connected to the Assembly elections posted in their home districts or those who have completed three years in the present office.

The decision was taken to ensure free and fair elections and to avoid chances of favouritism. "No official 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 the past four years," the EC said in an order to the Bihar chief secretary.

These instructions will cover both officials appointed for specific election duties including district election officials, returning officials and assistant returning officials and also other district level officials including additional district magistrates, deputy collectors, sub-divisional magistrates, tehsildars and BDOs.

Within the ranks and file of the police, these instructions would be applicable to IGs, DIGs, Senior Superintendents of Police, and SPs, sub-divisional heads of police, officers-in-charge of police stations and sergeant majors.

The EC said officials against whom the commission has recommended disciplinary action or who have been charged for any lapse in election-related work or who were previously transferred under the orders of

GUIDELINES

- Poll officials posted in home districts to be shifted
- 'Tainted' officials not to be given poll duties
- State CEO to be consulted prior to new postings
- Compliance report to be submitted by 31 August

the Commission should not be given postings that entail election-related duties.

The EC has also asked the state government to consult the chief electoral official of Bihar while posting new persons in place of the present incumbents who stand transferred as per this policy.

Observing that some of the transferred officials tried to circumvent the objective by going on leave and being physically present in the district, the order said the EC viewed this seriously and directed that all such officers should be asked to move physically out of the districts from which they were transferred immediately on receipt of transfer orders.

"The Commission's policy is conveyed at this stage prior to the formal announcement of the elections to ensure that the state government takes necessary steps to transfer the officers falling in the categories. If steps are taken immediately then largescale dislocation of officers immediately after the announcement shall not be necessary", it said.

The EC also sought a compliance report from the authorities by 31 August.

1 1 AUG 2001 THE STATESMAN

'NO TRANSFER OF POLL OFFICIALS' EC restrains Bihar Governor

Statesman News Service & PTI

NEW DELHI/PATNA, Aug. 2. —The Election Commission today asked the Bihar government not to transfer district collectors and election-related officials without its consent.

The EC, however, did not make any observation over the tussle between the Bihar Governor, Mr Buta Singh, and the chief secretary Mr GS Kang, over the transfer of 17 senior officers.

The EC also asked the state strictly to follow its earlier directives to expedite the execution of non-bailable warrants pending in the state in large numbers and to conduct special search operations to unearth illegal arms.

In a letter to the state government, the EC said no district election officer (district collector) and deputy collector in charge of elections, electoral registration officer and assistant electoral registration officer should now be transferred without the consent of the commission.

The decision was taken since the district collectors were supervising the electoral photo-identity card programme, the EC said.

This is third such directive to the state government in view of the Bihar elections scheduled for October this year.

In its two previous directives, the Commission had asked the state government to execute all non-bailable warrants, take preventive action against habitual offenders and to launch a drive to seize illegal arms and ammunition in the state to maintain law and order during the Assembly elections.

PIL filed against IPS transfers

Amid the continuing controversy over the recent transfer of 17 IPS officers in Bihar, a public interest litigation was filed today

House snub for Nitish

NEW DELHI, Aug. 2. — After a heated discussion on the recent happenings in Bihar, the Lok Sabha tonight rejected JD-U leader Mr Nitish Kumar's resolution expressing deep concern over the "deteriorating law and order situation" in the state by 100 to 72 votes. The over six-hour discussion under Rule 184 entailed voting. The Opposition pressed for voting, apparently to score a political point, though it was outnumbered and had no hopes of getting the resolution passed. The resolution also covered the situation arising out of the chief secretary of Bihar proceeding on long leave, apparently dissatisfied with the transfer of officials reportedly without his knowledge. — SNS

in the Patna High court, challenging the transfers, claiming that these had been made "without the consent of responsible functionaries".

Filing the PIL, the suspended deputy inspector-general of police, Mr Ajay Verma, argued that the transfer orders had been passed without the consent of the chief secretary in violation of the Bihar Rules of Executive Business, 2005 and sought a stay. The transfers led to a stand-off between Mr Buta Singh and Mr Kang, prompting the latter to proceed on leave in protest.

Rule 27 a (iv)(i) of the Bihar Rules of Executive Business states that proposals pertaining to important decisions like a reshuffle of senior officers should be routed through the chief secretary, the petitioner contended.

President's Rule to continue

Parliament tonight adopted a statutory resolution moved by the home minister, Mr Shivraj Patil, approving continuation of President's Rule in Bihar for another six months beyond 7 September.

THE STATESMAN

J. Bleeker
(Neli)

Historic win for LDF in bypolls

Retains Azhikode, Koothuparamba constituencies, posting huge margins

Staff Reporter

HD-7
MS
KANNUR: The Left Democratic Front (LDF) has registered a historic win in the byelections to the Assembly from the Koothuparamba and Azhikode constituencies, retaining the two seats with high margins.

When the counting of votes was over by 12 noon on Sunday, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was virtually swept away by the stunning margins secured by the LDF candidates. The results have weakened the UDF's allegation of large-scale bogus voting by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in the two constituencies in the past.

In Koothuparamba, LDF candidate P. Jayarajan of the CPI (M) posted a record margin of 45,377 votes over his UDF rival, K. Prabhakaran, of the Congress.

Mr. Jayarajan polled 81,872 votes and Mr. Prabhakaran 36,495 votes. Mr. Jayarajan's winning margin broke his own lead of 18,620 votes over Mr. Prabhakaran in the 2001 Assembly election and the LDF's surplus of 31,580 votes in the Koothuparamba segment in the 2004 Lok Sabha election. All the four independent candidates in the constituency together polled 3,102 votes. It was the Supreme Court's disqualification of Mr. Jayarajan's 2001 election that necessitated the byelection in Koothuparamba.

The UDF received a severe drubbing in Azhikode where it had expected a major improvement in its voting share, if not a surprise win. LDF's maiden candidate M. Prakashan of the CPI (M) defeated his UDF rival, C. A. Ajeer, of the Communist Marx-

ist Party (CMP) by a margin of 26,376 votes. Mr. Prakashan polled 62,898 votes and Mr. Ajeer 36,522 votes. The margin of CPI(M)'s T.K. Balan, whose demise necessitated the byelection, in the 2001 Assembly poll was 9,796.

The latest margin even crossed the LDF's lead of 19,204 votes in this segment in the 2004 Lok Sabha election. The lone independent candidate here polled 1,651 votes.

A quick evaluation of past election results showed that the LDF candidate in Koothuparamba, P. Jayarajan's victory margin of 45,377 votes surpassed all previous records.

He broke the record of veteran Kerala Congress leader, R. Balakrishna Pillai, who had secured a victory margin of 36,711 votes in 1980 in Kottarakkara as

an LDF candidate in the formative days of the Front. Public Works Minister M.K. Muneer had reached very close to breaking Mr. Pillai's record by securing 36,017 votes in Malappuram in the 2001 Assembly election. His party colleague, E. Ahamed, Union Minister of State for External Affairs, had secured 35,785 votes in Tanur in the 1987 election.

That the LDF was heading for a clean sweep in both constituencies was clear in the first few rounds of counting as results started to come from the counting stations here (for Azhikode constituency) and at Thalassery (for Koothuparamba).

When the third round of counting was over in Koothuparamba, Mr. Jayarajan had secured a formidable margin of 16,189 votes.

06 JUN 2005

THE HINDU

Congress sweeps three by-polls in Haryana

9. Bheelia
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Landslide victory consolidates Hooda's hold over the State

Rajesh Ahuja

CHANDIGARH: As expected, the Congress not only swept the three Assembly by-elections in Haryana but its candidates, including the Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, won with huge margins of over one lakh votes.

According to the results declared on Sunday, Mr.Hooda, who contested from his traditional KiloI constituency, defeated his nearest Indian National Lok Dal nominee, Azad Singh Attri, by a margin of 1,03,635 votes. Mr.Atri could poll only 3,063 votes. And in Tosham, Kiran Chaudhary, the widow of the late Agriculture Minister, Surender Singh, fared even better as she won by a massive margin of 1,25,520 votes. In

Hisar constituency, Savitri Devi, the widow of the late Power Minister, O.P.Jindal, won by a margin of 1,02,231 votes. Interestingly, the INLD and BJP had not fielded candidates in Tosham and Hisar constituency. It may be recalled that both

Mr.Surender Singh and Mr.Jindal were killed in an air crash on March 31.

Mandate

According to political observers, the landslide victory of the Congress has further consolidated Mr. Hooda's hold over the State after the Lok Sabha MP from Rohtak was hand-picked by the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, to rule Haryana where the party won 67 out of 90 Assembly seats in the February elections.

Mr.Hooda has thanked the people of KiloI, Tosham and Hisar for the unprecedented mandate given to him and and Mrs.Kiran Chaudhary and Mrs.Savitri Devi. He said this massive mandate of the people reflected their faith in the policies and programmes of the Congress party, especially in the efforts being made to make Haryana free from atmosphere of fear and corruption. "Efforts would be made to fulfil the aspirations of the people and make Haryana number one State in the field of development in the next five years," he reiterated.

He announced that he would visit each village of the KiloI constituency after the ensuing Vidhan Sabha session from June 9 to personally thank the people. During his visit to each vil-

lage, he would hear the grievances of the people and resolve their problems on the spot.

Mr.Hooda said that he would soon resign from the Lok Sabha after consulting the Lok Sabha Speaker on Monday.

In a significant remark, he said that the issue of inducting Ms.Chaudhary in the Cabinet would be considered at the time of its expansion but at the same time he made it clear that there was no "proposal" to expand his Ministry.

He claimed that the KiloI by-election had set new healthy precedents and clearly established that if the people contested the polls themselves, wasteful expenditure could be avoided and the election conducted peacefully.

06 JUN 2005 THE HINDU

GOP LOSES STRONGHOLD IN UP, HARYANA BRINGS GOOD NEWS

Cong wins 3 out of 5 seats in Goa Mulayam shows one-UPmanship

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 JUNE

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 JUNE

THE Congress managed to erase, at least partially, the Goa blot on Sunday when it won three of the five by-elections in the state. With ally NCP winning one seat, the stage is set for the return of the Congress in the state.

Equally encouraging must be the three bypoll victories in Haryana, where the election outcome has shown that the goodwill for the Congress is still intact. The state, which provided a landslide victory to the party just three months ago, gave three Congress candidates margins of over one lakh.



But all's not well for the Congress. The outcome in Uttar Pradesh has shown that the electoral battles in the state continue to be between the SP and the BSP. The SP-RLD alliance, which mopped up all four seats, emphatically declared that the ruling party in the state is on a consolidation mode. The Congress' hopes of a re-

covery in the state is still distant as its candidates finished off as also rans. The strong pro-SP mood would require the Congress to fashion an effective strategy and not leave its fortunes to the "charms" of the dynasty.

What must be equally galling for the Congress is the defeat of its candidate in Chamrajpet, vacated by Maharashtra governor S.M. Krishna. The victory of the JD(S) candidate suggests the Congress has started ceding its traditional bases to the ally — something that afflicted the BJP when it was running a coalition at the Centre.

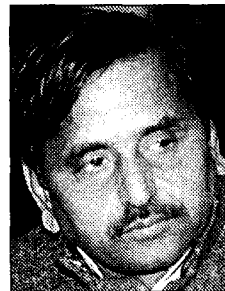
The record margin victories of CPM candidates in Kerala is an ominous signal to the Congress, which will have to face the Assembly polls in less than year. The current popular mood against the Congress-led UDF government, disaffection of its allies and split in the party are seen as a guarantee for a five-year term for the CPM-led Left Democratic Front.

These three developments suggest that the Congress has not recovered in its trouble spots and a year of UPA governance has not helped its recharge plans. While vast tracts of Uttar Pradesh continue to be out of bounds for the Congress, alliances are not helping the Congress' electoral project.

The Goa result, however, will help it deal with the Opposition's charge that constitutional deficiencies were not observed by governor S.C. Jamir. With the BJP reeling under political and ideological doubts, the defeat of its candidates will be backbreaking for its cadre.

MULAYAM Singh Yadav on Sunday showed that he's the boss in Uttar Pradesh, with the Samajwadi Party making a clean sweep of the by-elections to the four Assembly seats with the help of its alliance partner, Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal. The SP-RLD alliance, in the process, wrested a seat each from the BSP (Allahabad West) and the BJP (Khairagarh), retaining the remaining two, Varanasi North and Haiser Bazar.

The Congress' hopes of regaining its traditional base in the state — home to both Sonia Gandhi and her son



Rahul — were dealt a body blow, with its candidates forfeiting their security deposits in all the four constituencies. The by-election verdict merely confirms the trend that has been on display in the state since the 2002 Assembly polls, with the SP emerging as the largest outfit and the BSP its main challenger. The BJP, which held sway over the state for almost a decade, and the Congress, have been pushed to the margins.

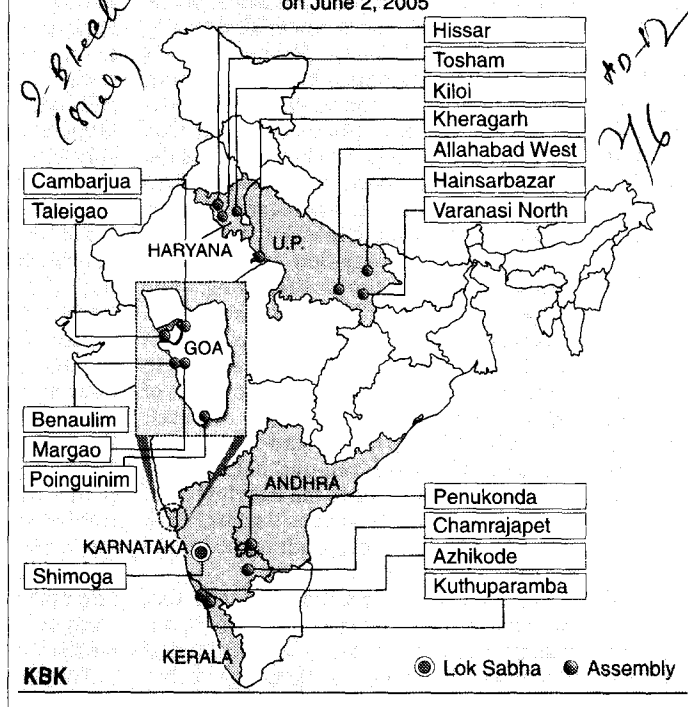
With Sunday's results, the SP inched closer to the half-way mark on its own in the 403-member House. It now has a strength of 196, while its alliance partner, the RLD, has a flock of 15. The combine also enjoys the backing of over a dozen independents and smaller parties. While the BSP emerged as runners-up in Khairagarh, Haiser Bazar and Allahabad West, where its candidate Puja Pal, wife of the slain MLA Raju Pal, was trounced by the SP's Mohd Ashraf Ahmed, younger brother of controversial MP Atiq Ahmed, the BJP lost to the SP in Varanasi North.

Contesting from behind the bars, Ashraf Ahmed, who's the main accused in the murder of Mr Pal, wrested the Allahabad West constituency from BSP's Ms Pal. The margin in this case was an impressive 13,383 votes. SP candidate Algu Prasad, however, could scrape through by a margin of a mere 94 votes in Haiser Bazar. His nearest rival here was the BSP's Dashrath Prasad.

Mr Yadav's outfit retained the Varanasi (North) seat, where its nominee Rabia Begum defeated her nearest BJP rival Ravinder Jaiswal by a margin of 15,958 votes. The byelection had been caused by the death of Ms Begum's husband. The SP's alliance partner, the RLD, snatched the Khairagarh seat from the hands of the BJP, whose candidate was pushed to a humiliating fourth spot.

Byelections in six states

One Lok Sabha seat and sixteen Assembly seats going to polls on June 2, 2005



KBK

02 JUN 2005

THE HINDU

5/10/05 EC and Bihar

UPA must abide by principles of election Bihar

The dissolution of the Bihar assembly at this particular juncture indicated which way the wind was blowing. Allegations of "horse-trading" have reached rock bottom, although it must be said that what the NDA did to win over support of LJP MLAs — would probably have been the same whichever party was involved in the administration. This is proved by the positions taken by different parties on the timing of fresh elections. It is for the Election Commission to decide. but even the Union law minister, Hansraj Bhardwaj, jumps the gun, declaring they would be at the end of September. The notice came from the EC's office after a survey of the situation in the state. No one is unaware of the effects of the monsoon. But the fact that everyone in the UPA — the Congress, the RJD and LJP — have rushed to suggest a winter poll confirms that, more than the monsoon, they need time to set their house in order.

The NDA is clamouring for an early election. The hope is that they will cash in on the wave of resentment against Buta Singh-Lalu Prasad nexus that deprived Nitish Kumar of an opportunity to become chief minister. The NDA demand is not altogether valid, but the impression is that it is better placed to give Lalu a run for his money. To begin with, Lalu must decide whether he can do business with Ram Vilas Paswan whom he considers as "deadly" as NDA leaders. While Sonia Gandhi tries to bring the two Bihar leaders who are part of her group together, Lalu confesses to his mistakes and merrily presses on with the campaign. Within 48 hours of the dissolution, he announces new railway lines dedicated to freight and handsome rewards for gangmen working along the tracks from Patna to Sultanganj. That is clearly not enough. There are many other factors like the Dalit and Muslim votes which must be sorted out before he can finally say he is ready. The question is, why must the EC appear subservient to petty politicking? The UPA dodges the question.

30 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

PASWAN TOO WELCOME: RAGHUVANSH

Secular front to take shape

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 27. — The Congress, Left Front and the RJD have reached “a tacit understanding” on floating a “Bihar-centric” secular front to prevent division of the secular vote and ensure its consolidation for the forthcoming Assembly elections in the state.

Sources told The Statesman here today that the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the RJD chief and railway minister, Mr Lalu Prasad, and top Left Front leaders were in touch with each other. They are waiting for the return of the Election Commission team from Bihar before giving the final shape to the proposed front.

Giving credence to the formation of a “Bihar-centric” front, the RJD leader, Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, today said that such a front was very much in the offing. He also made it clear that the proposed front would be open to all like-minded persons, including the LJP leader, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan.

While underlining the need for fighting the communal forces under “a single banner”, Mr Singh said his party had nothing against Mr Paswan.

The proposed “Bihar-specific” front is being seen as a tactical necessity and is likely to include the Left Front, including the CPI-M, CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc.

The Left Front, which is supporting the UPA at the Centre from outside, is very likely to joint the proposed front.

The Left has decided to stay “distant from the Congress” in view of the Assembly elections in Kerala and West Bengal, sources said.

The Congress spokesman, Mr Abhishek Singvi, at the party’s press briefing here, said his party had tried to float a “broad-based alliance” comprising the secular

Early Bihar polls sought

PATNA, May 27. — Almost all parties except the LJP demanded early Assembly elections in Bihar when a two-member Election Commission team, comprising deputy election commissioner, Mr Anand Kumar, and EC’s counsel, Mr SK Menhiratta, arrived here today. During their separate meetings with the EC team, delegations of the BJP and the JD-U pressed for a single-day polling, saying it would put a check on the movement of criminal elements. “When polls are conducted in several phases, criminals easily shift their bases and influence the process,” BJP chief Mr Gopal Narayan Singh said.

The LJP, however, pleaded for elections at year-end or in January-February next year.

“We are not in favour of holding elections during the monsoon since it would affect relief work in the flood-hit areas,” its leader Mr Pashupatinath Paras said.

The RJD said it was always ready for the polls although it favoured elections after the rains.

“We are ready for elections but we have to keep in mind the problems of the voters,” the party’s state unit president, Mr Abdul Bari Siddiqui, said after meeting the EC team. He demanded strict enforcement of the EC directive that foolproof security must be arranged for voters belonging to the SC/ST/weaker classes and the minority community. He demanded that photo I-cards be handed over to all voters before the elections. The team will submit a report on Wednesday. — SNS

forces in the last Assembly elections in Bihar. But somehow that did not materialise then. He said his party would work for the coming together of such forces and make it as broad-based as possible. On the subject of the composition of the proposed alliance, he hinted at including Mr Prasad’s RJD and the LJP of Mr Paswan.

More reports on page 5

28 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Lalu prevails, polls for Bihar

Gov rushes two reports, Paswan skips Cabinet meet

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 23

THE BIHAR assembly, which had been put in suspended animation following a fractured mandate, has finally been dissolved. President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, currently in Moscow on a four-day official visit, okayed the recommendation of the Union cabinet in the early hours of Monday.

The cabinet recommendation leading to the dissolution of the assembly was preceded by high drama. As soon as the news of a possible claim by JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar to form a government came in, RJD chief and railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav set the dissolution ball rolling with ample support from the Left parties.

A reluctant Congress leadership is believed to have tried hard to cobble up a secular government by prevailing upon LJP chief Ramvilas Paswan to join hands with arch rival Lalu to prevent Kumar from staking a claim. Negotiations for arriving at a consensus over a candidate from the minority community to head the secular formation are reported to have continued till late in the evening.

But a reluctant Lalu in tandem with Left Front leaders CPM general secretary Prakash Karat and his senior party colleague Sitaram Yechuri tilted the scales in favour of a dissolution decision.

The dye was cast at a late-night emergency cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at his residence. Armed with two successive reports of Bihar Governor Buta Singh, the cabinet okayed the recommendation. Paswan, who was also summoned to attend the emergency cabinet conclave, stayed away.

Announcing the Centre's decision on Monday, home minister Shivraj Patil said the decision to recommend the dissolution of the Bihar assembly had been taken to prevent horse-trading.

Unhappy with the Centre's decision, Paswan lashed out at Lalu and the NDA, holding them both responsible for bringing matters to such a pass.

But he asserted that the responsibility for not allowing a secular government to be formed in Bihar lay entirely with Lalu as he did not agree upon an RJD-led regime headed by a Muslim from his party and insisted upon Rabri Devi as CM. Paswan said after the Congress urged him on Sunday to help form a UPA government in the state, he agreed to support an RJD-led regime provided party leader Jabir Hussain, chairman of the Bihar Legislative Council, was made the CM. As this was not acceptable to Lalu, there was no option left but to dissolve the House under the circumstances, he said.

Meanwhile, an angry NDA has demanded immediate polls and the recall of Governor Buta Singh. "It is obvious that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh once again yielded to the pressures of the tainted railway minister, Lalu Prasad, whose party has been trounced in the Bihar polls," a statement by NDA leaders said.

Full coverage on page 2

KEY PLAYERS: HOW THEY CAN PLAN THEIR NEXT MOVE

LALU YADAV

- His biggest victory is that he has neutralized Paswan and got Congress firmly on his side
- Gains time to regroup his party and rework caste-community equations
- President's rule will help him to continue his influence in the administration like appointment of advisors and key officials
- Coming days will test his tactics of managing Paswan (a cabinet minister like him) while keeping political edge

RAM VILAS PASWAN

- Looks a loser, can't hope to repeat the last poll magic
- Will have to compromise with Lalu for his political survival
- Loses clout with Congress with desertion of his party MLAs
- Can still play Muslim card to dent Lalu

NITISH KUMAR

- He, too gets time to project himself as NDA leader in Bihar as a counter-foil to Lalu
- Paswan men now with him. Becomes rallying point for all non-Yadav forces
- Saved from managing an unwieldy combination to keep numbers (remember 2000 fiasco when despite having been sworn in, he just couldn't keep it for long)

Sound & fury

Now there is no question of staying with Paswan. We (the 15 LJP MLAs who were in Jharkhand) will either form a separate party or merge with some other party.

Prof Anil Kumar
LJP MLA

All those who hobnobbed with NDA will be expelled

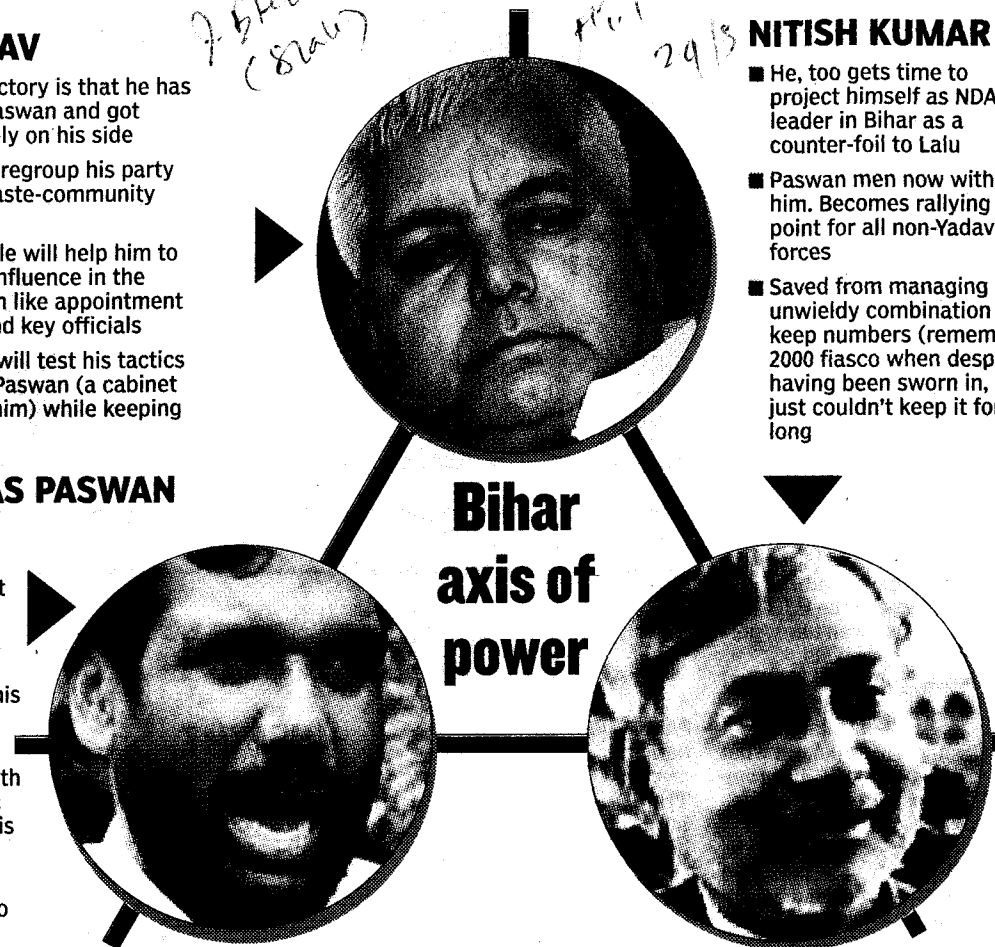
Ram Vilas Paswan
LJP chief

The fight will be fought both on the legal and political fronts

Arun Jaitley
BJP general secretary

The Governor was left with no other option than to recommend dissolution keeping in view the sinister bid by the NDA to buy LJP MLAs.

Lalu Yadav
RJD chief



NDA planned Jharkhand-type op

SHEKHAR Iyer
New Delhi, May 23

THE CENTRE'S move to dissolve the Bihar assembly could not have come a day later. For, the NDA had readied a Jharkhand-style operation with aircraft and cars ready to present its flock of legislators to form the government.

But RJD president Lalu Yadav got wind of it and alerted Congress leaders. A Cabinet meeting was hastily called on Sunday night and its recommendation for the dissolution of the state assembly was faxed to the President in Russia post-haste.

A day's delay could have changed the balance in favour of the NDA.

If the dissolution had not taken place — at least 22 rebel LJP MLAs would have surfaced in Ranchi on Monday and would have announced their decision to support JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar as CM of an NDA-led regime. The strategy was not to split Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP but to invoke a provision of the new Anti-Defection Law to show a majority of MLAs have set the party's line.

Of the 29 MLAs in Paswan's party, 15 had left Patna for Ghatsila last weekend. Letters of support had even

been obtained from four MLAs who are in jail in Bihar. The idea was: pressure the Centre by displaying that the NDA alliance had more than the requisite 120 legislators with it. That strategy had worked in Jharkhand, forcing Raj Bhavan to invite the NDA to form the government.

But this time, things went haywire. Firstly, Governor Buta Singh made a big noise as soon as the rebel LJP MLAs left Patna. And as the NDA waited for the rebel figure to reach at least 22, Paswan acted to save the remainder of his flock.

Three LJP MLAs (belonging to the

upper castes) along with seven others were "brought" to Delhi on Sunday by LJP MP Suraj Bhan Singh, who is known for his muscle power. Paswan presented the 10 MLAs before the media to claim that he had effectively prevented a split for which a two-thirds majority was required.

But by Sunday evening, the three MLAs — Dulhar Chand Singh, Anil Chaudhury and Nagina Devi — were back in touch with NDA men to take the flight out of Delhi to join the rest of the team in Ranchi. But, New Delhi was taking no chances. Hence, the dissolution of the assembly.

'No action against Sapharishi'

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 10. — The controversial IAS official, Mr Sapharishi who is retiring on 31 July may rest assured that little or no action will be taken against him for violating service rules by going to town with his allegations against the two Election Commissioners for which the government today slapped a show-cause notice on him.

"The official has only raised a pertinent question about the integrity of two constitutional authorities. He has not said or done anything against the government or the department — CAPART — he is serving," a senior official told The Statesman on condition of anonymity. As such there is hardly any provocation for the government to take any punitive action against him, he added.

The official said any action against the officer in question had to be taken before his day of retirement. The Department of Personnel and Training that has issued the show-cause notice to Mr Sapharishi will now examine his explanation. "The long and short of it is that the government will give a decent burial to its own notice."

The RJD is also ready with fact-sheets against the two Election

More known, little seen in state

NEW DELHI, May 10. — Mr LV Saptarishi, who is now seen as someone close to Mr Lalu Prasad and the RJD, is a 1969 batch West Bengal cadre IAS official who has spent comparatively little time in the state. Instead, he is remembered for a controversial tenure in Bangladesh. Mr Saptarishi is remembered by fellow officers for serving for a while as a senior officer in North Bengal. "He was only there for about six months and then, he went back to the Centre." Earlier, he had served in the state, including in the districts. — SNS

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, May 10. — BJP has attacked Dr Manmohan Singh for his "silence" over CAPART Director-General Mr LV Sapharishi's "unsubstantiated allegations" against two Election Commissioners and demanded dismissal of the senior IAS officer for violating civil servants' conduct rules.

"We are being confronted with a bizarre scenario where a serving bureaucrat levels unsubstantiated allegations against a constitutional authority, a minister (Mr Lalu Prasad) demands resignation of Election Commissioners on the basis of a letter written to another minister (Mr HR Bhardwaj) who denies having received it and the Prime Minister is silent.

"He is a weak PM not in control of the situation," senior BJP leader Mr Ravi Shankar Prasad told reporters here last night.

PM's silence irks BJP



Mr Ravi Shankar Prasad

Asked if Mr Prasad seeking resignation of Election Commissioners Mr BB Tandon and Mr N Gopalaswamy could be taken as the government's demand in view of "collective responsibility of the Cabinet", the BJP leader said: "You should ask the PM. Nothing could be more ludicrous. This only reinforces our belief that he is not in control of the situation."

Terming Mr Sapharishi's allegations as "a serious case of violation of conduct rules", Mr Prasad demanded that he should be suspended and dismissed from service. He, however, added: "I doubt the government has the guts to do so."

11 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

CEC, Commissioners meet President

New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI: Chief Election Commissioner T. S. Krishnamurthy and Election Commissioners, B. B. Tandon and N. Gopalswamy, met President A. P. J. Abdul Kalam on Monday and apprised him of the facts relating to the countermanding of the polls in the Chapra Lok Sabha constituency last year. They were with him for about 30 minutes.

This development took place even as the allegations made by L. V. Saptharishi, a senior IAS officer, against Mr. Tandon and Mr. Gopalswamy were mentioned in both Houses of Parliament earlier in the day.

The Lok Sabha was adjourned briefly as Speaker Somnath Chatterjee refused to allow the issue to be raised saying that the

conduct of constitutional authorities could be discussed only under certain rules.

After meeting Mr. Kalam, they did not talk to the media but Commission sources said they submitted a detailed report to Mr. Kalam, explaining their version of the issue. Mr. Saptharishi had alleged that Mr. Tandon and Mr. Gopalswamy had countermanded the elections in Chapra where RJD leader Lalu Prasad was a candidate, at the instance of then Home Minister and BJP leader L.K. Advani.

The issue came up in both Houses but much of what transpired was struck off the records. In the Lok Sabha, the RJD — backed by M. Ramadass of the Pattali Makkal Katchi and some other members from Tamil Nadu — tried to raise the issue.

10 MAY 2005

10 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

Poll Panel Members Meet Kalam To Explain Action Taken In Chhapra

EC-bashing: Govt refuses to come to Lalu's help



commissioners. "I have not received any such letter. I cannot tell you if he has sent the letter to another minister under whom he is working," Mr Bhardwaj said. "The minister can certainly call for his (the civil servant's) explanation".

Indicating that the bureaucrat might have breached the discipline by criticising the EC, the law minister said: "It is not proper for a civil servant to criticise any constitutional authority. They come under certain discipline and they should adhere to that."

But Lalu Prasad Yadav stuck to his demand for the resignation of the two election commissioners. Mr Yadav, who had a meeting with Sonia Gandhi, is learnt to have insisted on action against the EC officials.

Our Political Bureau NEW DELHI 9 MAY

THE government on Monday distanced itself from the assault on the Election Commission (EC) by Capart chief L.V. Sapharishi — an IAS officer — and his political bosses when law minister H.R. Bhardwaj said the government will not be a party to the attempts to question the legitimacy and authority of the constitutional body.

The EC, on its part, made it clear that it will not allow allegations against it to go uncontested

when its members met President APJ Abdul Kalam to explain its action in Chhapra. "The panel shares the facts of the case with the President," an EC-spokesman said. Sensing that the development could give the impression that politicians and senior functionaries of the government are unwilling to submit to the constraints of democratic institutional arrangements, the law minister reprimanded the civil servant for criticising the constitutional authority while debunking the claim that a letter was addressed to him detailing complaints against the

of the House for mud slinging and running down constitutional authorities," Mr Shekhawat said in the House.

The Lok Sabha Speaker, too, condemned the behaviour of the RJD members in Parliament. The BJP, which seized upon the opportunity, said there is an "increased tendency on the government's part to disparage various institutions including constitutional authorities."

This disquiet was on display when Rajya Sabha chairman Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and Speaker Somnath Chatterjee described the attempts to rake up the issue in Parliament as unfortunate. "The RJD is part of the government. It should take up such issues with the government. Please don't use the floor

Citing several instances, BJP leader Arun Jaitley said: "The Prime Minister is not merely a silent spectator to this subversion and attack on institutions. This government is an active participant in perpetuating this."

Laloo on the rampage

For the RJD supremo, tarnishing constitutional institutions has become a habit

LALOO PRASAD YADAV'S exertions against the Election Commission of India must be seen in context. A pattern is becoming visible. Every time it looks like the RJD boss could finally be hemmed in by the troubles that trail him, political and legal, he kicks up a very loud, very public, fuss. Suddenly he is the centre of the show. There he is, flamboyantly cutting through due process, preferably ranged against a formidable public institution, all the better for the irresistible photo-op. In the run-up to Bihar polls, he conjures up a brand new inquiry to excavate Godhra's "truth". From the site of a devastating railway accident, the Union railway minister proclaims his own persecution by Narendra Modi. Now, when cases of the fodder scam and those that have to do with assets allegedly disproportionate to his income encircle him once more, his lawyers take it into their hands to tell the Supreme Court just how it cannot supervise the judicial proceedings. Then, the minister himself flashes a civil servant's letter and asks for the election commissioners' resignation, if not a restructured institution.

The allegations themselves are serious, but shifty. What began on Day 1 mainly as a charge that two election commissioners—one of them the CEC-to-be—had decided to countermand the Chapra polls last year because of "their allegiance

to BJP, RSS and other communal alliances", narrowed on Day 2 to mainly a slur on the EC's "casteism". There are the coincidences that need explaining. The two bureaucrats on the offensive are both serving in a ministry presided over by a Laloo lieutenant; one of them was superseded and is presently on the verge of retirement and approval of a post-retirement sinecure. Even if these are convincingly explained away, there still remains the manner in which the EC's credibility is sought to be questioned. A constitutional body cannot be dragged through a public harangue like this. A case against the EC, if there is one to be made at all, must be substantiated and pursued with rigour and respect for due process. A Union minister should know this.

The problem is really this: Laloo Prasad Yadav's repeated refusal to play it by the rulebook. And a patchwork government in which the Congress feels it must grin and bear this defiance by the leader of a paltry band of MPs for its own survival. But Laloo, and the Congress, must know that there is a high price to be paid for political adventurism of the kind that is currently on display. Institutions like the EC are important not just for the work that they do but also because they shore up the health of the larger system. If the EC's credibility is undermined through irresponsible politics, we all pay.

Charges are baseless: poll panel

J. Bheetha (8/25)
10/1 9/15

Casteist remarks made, says Saptharishi

Aarti Dhar

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission on Sunday said it was "beneath its dignity" to respond to "scurrilous and baseless allegations" made against it by the former special observer for Bihar during the Lok Sabha elections last year, L.V. Saptharishi, in a letter to Union Law Minister H.R. Bhardwaj.

But Mr. Saptharishi, a senior IAS officer now holding charge as Director-General of the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), reiterated his charge with emphasis on the "casteist" remarks made by the Commissioners. He also firmly believed that the Lok Sabha poll in Chapra was countermanded last year on "extraneous grounds." He was ready to stand by his allegations through an affidavit and face cross examination if necessary.

"Reprehensible"

Election Commissioners B.B. Tandon and N. Gopalaswamy and Chief Election Commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy met here on Sunday morning to discuss the issue in the light of the controversy raised by Mr. Saptharishi. They issued a statement deprecating the personal attacks made on the two ECs and K.J. Rao, Adviser to the Commission, as "highly reprehensible."

Mr. Krishnamurthy said this shocking controversy "should not have happened." He was present at the meeting where Mr.

Tandon is alleged to have passed "casteist" remarks about the community to which Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad belongs, but had heard nothing. "Mr. Saptharishi is entitled to his opinion and we to ours," he told reporters at the India International Centre, just a little distance away from where Mr. Saptharishi, a 1968 West Bengal cadre officer, was addressing a press conference. "Our decision is open to judicial review and anyone can challenge it," he added. He defended the decision to countermand the poll in Chapra.

Mr. Saptharishi also held his ground, telling reporters that there were others present during that Commission meeting who would confirm the remarks made by Mr. Tandon against the community. "Any individual who makes casteist remarks cannot be fit to be the country's Chief Election Commissioner. Mr. Tandon's remarks were endorsed by Mr. Gopalaswamy," he said.

He firmly rejected the idea that he had made these allegations in the hope of being rewarded with a post-retirement office. He had gone public with his allegations with a sense of moral responsibility and for the sake of thousands of honest officers who were doing their job with integrity.

Mr. Saptharishi said he believed there was no case for countermanding elections in the entire constituency and that was what he had written in his report.

08 May 2005

ANADABAZAR PATNKA

ছাপরায় ফের ভোট নিয়ে কমিশনকে তোপ লালুর

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, পটনা, ৭ মে: নির্বাচন কমিশনের দিকে তোপ দাগলেন লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব। রেলমন্ত্রীর অভিযোগ, বিজেপির সঙ্গে হাত মিলিয়ে তাঁকে লোকসভা ভোটে হারানোর 'গভীর যড়মন্ত্র' করেছিল কমিশন। এ জন্য পরবর্তী মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনার বি বি টন্ডন এবং অপর নির্বাচন কমিশনার এন গোপালস্বামীই ইস্তফা দাবি করেছেন তিনি।

গত লোকসভা ভোটে বিহারের ছাপরা কেন্দ্রে প্রার্থী হন লালু। প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী ছিলেন বিজেপির রাজীবপ্রতাপ রুড়ি। ব্যাপক গোলমাল ও রিগিংয়ের অভিযোগ ওঠায় ওই কেন্দ্রে নতুন করে ভোটাভিযোগ গঠন করা হয়। সপ্তর্ষি তাঁর বক্তব্য, পরিহ্রিত বাতাবিক থাকা সত্বেও তাঁকে হারাত্তই প্রথম দফার

ভোট বাতিল করা হয়। রাজীবের অভিযোগের ভিত্তিতে ছাপরায় এক দল পর্যবেক্ষক পাঠিয়ে নতুন করে ভোট করার সিদ্ধান্ত নেয় নির্বাচন কমিশন।

কমিশনের বিরুদ্ধে লালুর হাতিয়ার নির্বাচন কমিশনেরই বিশেষ পর্যবেক্ষক এল ডি সপ্তর্ষির একটি চিঠি। পশ্চিমবঙ্গ ক্যাডারের এই আইএএস অফিসারকে বিহারের সব ক'টি আসনের জন্য পর্যবেক্ষক নিয়োগ করা হয়েছিল। কাল কেন্দ্রীয় আইনমন্ত্রীকে লেখা এক চিঠিতে সপ্তর্ষি বলেছেন, ছাপরায় ফের ভোটাভিযোগের কোনও দরকার ছিল না।

তাই অভিযোগ, লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী এক রাজীবপ্রতাপ রুড়ির 'অসৌকৃতিক' দৃষ্টি মৌতাত্তে সিদ্ধান্ত এই কেন্দ্রে ফের ভোটাভিযোগ করা হয়। সপ্তর্ষি তাঁর চিঠিতে আরও লিখেছেন, তিনি দিল্লি

পরে কমিশন সরকারি ভাবে তার প্রতিক্রিয়া জানাবে। সপ্তর্ষির উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তুলেছে বিজেপিও। দলের সহ সভাপতি ও বিহারের নেতা সুশীল কুমার মৌদী এ দিন সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, লোকসভা ভোট মিটে যাওয়ার এক বছর বাদে সপ্তর্ষি কেন এ কথা বললেন সেটাই প্রশ্ন। হয় তিনি কারও নির্দেশে এই অভিযোগ করেছেন, কিংবা পেশাগত ঈর্ষার কারণে।

গুজরাত্তে তাঁর উপরে হামলা নিয়ে বিজেপির দিকে তোপ দেগে তেমন হলে পানি পানি লালু। তাই নয়। হাতিয়ার নিয়ে তিনি ফের আসলে লেমে পড়েছেন। আজ পটনায় তড়িঘড়ি ডাকা এক সাংবাদিক সম্মেলনে লালু বলেন, লালকৃষ্ণ আডবানী যে এই দুই নির্বাচন কমিশনের সঙ্গে চক্রান্ত করে তাঁকে

ছাপরা থেকে হারাতে চেয়েছিলেন, সপ্তর্ষির চিঠি থেকেই তা স্পষ্ট। যাদবদের সম্পর্কে যে মন্তব্যের কথা সপ্তর্ষির চিঠিতে আছে, তা নিয়ে লোকসভায় সরব হবেন বলে জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন লালু। তাঁর মতে, দুই নির্বাচন কমিশনার যা বলেছেন, তা গোটা যাদব সম্প্রদায়ের অপমান।

লালু আজ সপ্তর্ষির লেখা চিঠিটিও সাংবাদিকদের বিলি করেন। এই চিঠিতে সপ্তর্ষি কেন্দ্রীয় আইনমন্ত্রীকে লিখেছেন, "মুখ্য নির্বাচন কমিশনার হিসাবে বি বি টন্ডনের নিয়োগ এবং নির্বাচন কমিশনার হিসাবে এন গোপালস্বামীকে রাখা নিরপেক্ষ নির্বাচন, গণতন্ত্র ও ন্যায়ের জন্য ক্রম্য নয়। বিবেক আমাকে নীরব থাকতে দিচ্ছে না। তাই এই চিঠি লিখছি।"

EC announces bypoll for 5 seats in Goa

New Delhi: The Election Commission today announced crucial bye-elections for five assembly seats in Goa on June 2,



Krishnamurthy

whose outcome could rekindle efforts to form a popular government in the state which was brought under President's rule and assembly put under suspended animation.

The commission also announced the poll schedule for bypolls on June 2 to one lok sabha constituency of Shimoga in Karnataka and 12 other assembly constituencies spread over Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Jammu and Kashmir.

Congress, which had ruled Goa just before central rule was clamped in early March, has a strength of 17 seats with its allies in

the 40-member house and BJP and its partners also have an identical number.

The state has been rocked by repeated political turmoil with Congress and BJP enjoying razor-thin majority and frequent change of political loyalties by MLAs belonging to either side of the political divide.

The five vacancies in Goa—taleigao, Cambarjua, Benaullim, Margao and Poinguinim—have been caused due to the resignation of incumbent MLAs in the month-long political drama with power changing hand from BJP to Congress.

While Congress had demanded holding of early bypolls in Goa, BJP pressed dissolution of the house and holding of fresh assembly polls in the state.

Byelections to Shimoga parliamentary constituency in Karnataka has been necessitated by the resignation of former karnataka chief minister S Bangarappa and his shift from BJP

and to Samajwadi party.

The 12 other assembly constituencies where bypolls would be held are four in Uttar Pradesh, three in Haryana, two in Kerala, and one each in Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka, EC said in a press note today.

According to the poll schedule issued by EC, notification would be issued on May 9. The last date for filing nominations would be on may 16 and the scrutiny the following day. The last date for withdrawal of nominations would be on may 19.

The counting of votes would take place on June 5.

Besides Goa, the assembly constituencies that are going to polls are: Hainsar-bazar, Varanasi north, Allahabad west and Kheragarh (all in UP), Kilo, Tosham and Hissar (all in Haryana), Kozhikode and Kuthuparamba (in Kerala), Penukonda (AP), Zanskar (J and K) and Chamrajapet (Karnataka). PTI

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

সুপ্রিম কোর্ট ১১ মার্চ

আস্থা ভোট নিতে বেলল ঝাড়খণ্ডে

দেবারুণ রায়, দিল্লি □ রজত মণ্ডল, রাঁচি

৯ মার্চ— সুপ্রিম কোর্টের রায় বিপাকে ফেলে দিল শিবু সোরেন তথা ইউ পি এ সরকারকে। ১৫ মার্চ নয়, ১১ মার্চেই আস্থা ভোট নিতে হবে শাসক জোটকে। আস্থা ভোটের আগে কোনও অ্যাংলো-ইন্ডিয়ান সদস্য বিধানসভায় মনোনীত করা যাবে না। শক্তি পরীক্ষার দিন বিধানসভায় শান্তি-শৃঙ্খলা বজায় রাখতে অধিবেশন ভিডিও রেকর্ডিং করার নির্দেশও দিয়েছে সর্বোচ্চ আদালত। রেকর্ডিংয়ের কপি আদালতে পেশ করতে বলা হয়েছে। ঝাড়খণ্ডের মুখ্যসচিব ও ডিরেক্টর জেনারেল অফ পুলিশকে সর্বোচ্চ আদালত বলেছে, বিধায়করা যেন নির্বিঘ্নে বিধানসভায় পৌঁছতে পারেন এবং নিরাপদে ও স্বাধীনভাবে ভোট দিতে পারেন, সেই ব্যবস্থা করতে হবে। প্রধান বিচারপতি আর সি লাহোটির নেতৃত্বে তিন সদস্যের বেঞ্চ আজ এই নির্দেশ দেয়। প্রসঙ্গত, ঝাড়খণ্ডের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী এবং এন ডি এ নেতা অর্জুন মুন্ডা রাজ্যপাল সৈয়দ সিবতে রাজির সিদ্ধান্ত সুপ্রিম কোর্টে চ্যালেঞ্জ করেছিলেন। আবেদন করেছিলেন শিবু সোরেন সরকারকে খারিজ করার, আস্থা ভোট এগিয়ে আনার এবং আস্থা ভোটের দিন কোনও বিচারপতিকে বিধানসভায় নিরপেক্ষ পর্যবেক্ষক হিসেবে নিয়োগ করার। সর্বোচ্চ আদালত অবশ্য রাজ্যপালের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়ে প্রশ্ন তোলেনি এবং খারিজ করেনি শিবু সোরেন সরকারকে। তবে কয়েকটি ক্ষেত্রে অর্জুন মুন্ডার আবেদনে সাড়া দিয়ে শাসক জোটের উদ্দেশ্যে বাড়িয়ে দিয়েছে। রাজ্যপাল সৈয়দ সিবতে রাজি 'নিজের বিচার ও বিবেক অনুসারে' শিবু সোরেনকে

দিল্লি যাওয়া হল না শিবু সোরেনের। রাতেই রাঁচি ফিরে এলেন পাটনা থেকে। বিমানবন্দরে দেখা হয় লালুর সঙ্গে। প্রশ্ন করতে সোরেন বললেন, ১১ মার্চ গরিষ্ঠতা প্রমাণে অসুবিধা হবে না।

সরকার গড়তে ডাকেন ২ মার্চ দুপুরে। সন্ধ্যায় শপথ নেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী শিবু ও ৬ মন্ত্রী। আদবানির নেতৃত্বে এন ডি এ ৪১ বিধায়ক নিয়ে হাজির হয় রাষ্ট্রপতি কালামের দরবারে। রাষ্ট্রপতি তলব করেন রাজিকে। কালামের সঙ্গে কথা বলে দিল্লি ফিরে সিবতে রাজি ১৫ মার্চ আস্থা ভোট নিতে বলেন শিবু সোরেনকে। গত রাত পর্যন্ত শিবু সোরেন ওই তারিখ মাথায় রেখেই এগোচ্ছিলেন। ১০ মার্চ বিধানসভার অধিবেশন শুরু। ১১ স্পিকার নির্বাচন। ১৫ আস্থা ভোট। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের আজকের রায় শিবু সোরেনের সব হিসেব উল্টে দিল। সংযুক্ত জনতা দলের নেতা ইন্দর সিং নামধারীকে স্পিকার নির্বাচিত করে এন ডি এ-র শক্তি ৪১ থেকে কমিয়ে ৪০ করা এবং একজন অ্যাংলো-ইন্ডিয়ান সদস্য মনোনীত করে ইউ পি এ-র শক্তি ৪০ থেকে বাড়িয়ে ৪১ করার পরিকল্পনা ভেঙে গেল সুপ্রিম কোর্টের রায়। আজ সকালে খোশমেজাজে ক্যাবিনেট বৈঠক সেরে সাংবাদিক সম্মেলনে হাজির হয়েছিলেন শিবু সোরেন। ঘোষণা করেছিলেন, 'গরিব-গুর্বোদের এই সরকার আস্থা ভোটে সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা প্রমাণ করে টিকে থাকবে সম্মানে। আমরা আম ঝাড়খণ্ডের প্রতি দায়বদ্ধ। ক্যাবিনেট বৈঠকে তাই বেশ কিছু সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে, যা সরকার স্থায়ী হচ্ছে এমন ইঙ্গিত পাওয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই কার্যকর করা হবে।' উপমুখ্যমন্ত্রী স্টিফেন মারাভি, সংসদীয় মন্ত্রী গিরিনাথ সিং, পথ নির্মাণ মন্ত্রী বন্ধু তিরকেদের পাশে নিয়েই শিবু জানান, '২৫ পয়সা কিলো দরে নুন, দু'টাকায় চাল, এক টাকায় গম ও ১০ টাকায় ধুতি-শাড়ি বিলি করা হবে গরিবদের। একটিমাত্র বাল্ব জ্বালানোর জন্য গরিব মানুষকে কোনও বিদ্যুৎ বিল দিতে হবে না। কেন্দ্রীয় আইন বিভাগের ছাড়পত্র পেয়ে গেছি। বিধানসভায় একজন অ্যাংলো-ইন্ডিয়ান সদস্য মনোনয়নের ব্যাপারে আর কোনও বাধা নেই। আমরা সর্বসম্মতিক্রমে 'অ্যালফ্রেড জর্জ ডি' রোজারিও'-কে মনোনয়নের জন্য বেছে নিয়েছি। নতুন মন্ত্রিসভা আজ আর একটি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সিদ্ধান্তে রবিশঙ্কর মজুমদারকে রাজ্যের অ্যাডভোকেট জেনারেল পদে নিয়োগের বিষয়টি পাকা করে। ৩ মার্চের ঝাড়খণ্ড বন্ধু বি জে পি সমর্থকদের হামলায় জামশেদপুরে যে ব্যবসায়ীদের দোকানপাট পুড়ে গিয়েছিল, তাঁদের প্রত্যেককে ১০০০০ টাকা ক্ষতিপূরণ বাবদ দেওয়ার কথাও ঘোষণা করেন শিবু। অর্জুন মুন্ডার আবেদনের পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে সুপ্রিম কোর্ট আজ বলেছে, ১১ মার্চ বিধানসভা ডাকার জন্য নোটিসের প্রয়োজন নেই। এই রায়ই নোটিস। বিধানসভায় শক্তিশালী করার পুরো রিপোর্ট প্রোটেক্ট স্পিকারের কাছে চেয়েছে সর্বোচ্চ আদালত। রায়ের প্রভাবতই খুশি এন ডি এ শিবির। অর্জুন মুন্ডা বলেছেন, আমি সুবিচার চেয়ে আদালতের দ্বারস্থ হয়েছিলাম। পেয়েছি। বিধায়ক কিনে ইউ পি এ গরিষ্ঠতা প্রমাণের যে চক্রান্ত করেছিল, বিচারপতিরা তা ব্যর্থ করে দিলেন। কংগ্রেস মুখপাত্র আনন্দ শর্মা বলেন, বি জে পি বিধায়ক কেনা-বেচার অভিযোগ করছে। অথচ ভোটের ফল ঘোষণার প্রায় সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ৫ নির্দল বিধায়ককে ওরা অপহরণ করল। বিধায়করা তাঁদের নির্বাচনী কেন্দ্রেও যাওয়ার সুযোগ পেলেন না। ঝাড়খণ্ড পার্টির নেতার সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করতে দেওয়া হল না ওই দলের বিধায়ককে। এই বি জে পি-ই কেন্দ্রে বাজপেয়ীর ১৩ দিনের সরকার বাঁচাতে লোকসভায় ২ জন সদস্য মনোনীত করেছিল। বিহারে নীতীশ কুমারকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী পদে বসিয়ে গরিষ্ঠতা প্রমাণ করতে এন ডি এ বিধানসভায় সদস্য মনোনীত করেছিল। আস্থা ভোটের আগে সরকার গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে পারে না বলে এন ডি এ দাবি করছে। অথচ ওদেরই ১৩ দিনের সরকার বহুজাতিক সংস্থা এনরনকে এ দেশে কাজের অনুমতি দেওয়ার নীতিগত সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছিল। এন ডি এ-র দ্বিচারিতা রাজনৈতিক পরিবেশ দূষিত করছে। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের আজকের রায় 'সোনিয়া গান্ধীর গালে খাপ্পড়' বলে মন্তব্য করেছে বি জে পি। তার জবাবে আনন্দ শর্মা বলেন, এখানে সোনিয়া গান্ধীর নাম আসে কীভাবে? বি জে পি নেতারা যে কোনও কাজে আর এস এসের দরজায় ছুটে যান অনুমতি নিতে। আমাদের দলের ঝাড়খণ্ডের নেতারা গণতান্ত্রিক পদ্ধতি মেনে সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন। তার জন্য সোনিয়া গান্ধীকে আক্রমণ করা হবে কেন? এদিকে মুখ্যমন্ত্রী শিবু সোরেন পাটনা বিমানবন্দরে সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, ১৫-র বদলে ১১ মার্চ আস্থা ভোট হলেও আমি নিশ্চিন্ত। আমরা জিতবই। প্রকাশ্যে এ কথা বললেও শিবু সোরেন আসলে কতটা উদ্বিগ্ন তা বোঝা গেল তাঁর সফরসূচি পরিবর্তনে। আজ তাঁর পাটনা থেকে দিল্লি যাওয়ার কথা ছিল। যাননি। রাঁচি ফিরে আসেন। রাতে তিনি ইউ পি এ-র রাজ্য নেতাদের জরুরি বৈঠকে ডাকেন। আগামী কাল বসছে বিধানসভা। তার আগে সর্বশেষ পরিস্থিতি বিশ্লেষণ করতেই বৈঠক। আগামীকাল জয়পুর থেকে রাঁচি ফিরছেন ৫ নির্দল-সহ এন ডি এ-র ৩৬ বিধায়ক। দলীয় পাহারায় ৫ নির্দলকে সভায় হাজির করার ব্যবস্থা করা হয়েছে। ব্যাপক নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছে। সুপ্রিম কোর্টের রায় উজ্জীবিত এন ডি এ নেতারা আজ রাষ্ট্রপতির সঙ্গে দেখা করেন। ঝাড়খণ্ড বিধানসভায় আস্থা ভোটের সময় পর্যবেক্ষক নিয়োগের আবেদন জানান। এন ডি এ-র আহ্বায়ক জর্জ ফার্নান্ডেজ পরে সাংবাদিকদের বলেন, আস্থা ভোটে জবরদস্তি বা জালিয়াতি না হয় সেটা দেখতে নিরপেক্ষ পর্যবেক্ষক নিয়োগের দাবি জানিয়েছি রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে। তিনি আমাদের বক্তব্য শুনেছেন। এন ডি এ নেতারা মুখ্যমন্ত্রী শিবু সোরেনের পদত্যাগ দাবি করেন। তাঁদের মতে, সুপ্রিম কোর্টের রায়ের পর শিবু সোরেনের মুখ্যমন্ত্রী পদে থাকার কোনও অধিকার নেই। সর্বোচ্চ আদালত শিবু সোরেনের মনোনয়ন নিয়ে সংশয় প্রকাশ করেছে। এরপর কীভাবে তিনি মুখ্যমন্ত্রী পদে থাকেন? রাজ্যের প্রশাসনের নিরপেক্ষতা নিয়েও সংশয় আছে আদালতের। তাই মুখ্যসচিব ও ডি জি-কে নিরপেক্ষভাবে কাজ করতে নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে।

11 MAR 2005

FLOOR TEST ADVANCED TO 11 MARCH

SC cracks the Jharkhand whip

NEWS & PTI

NEW DELHI, March 9. — In a major embarrassment for the Jharkhand Governor, the Supreme Court (coram: Lahoti, CJ; Sabharwal and Dharmadhikari, JJ) today ordered a floor test in the Assembly on 11 March instead of 15 March, to determine who commands a majority in the House — the UPA nominee, Mr Sibu Soren, or the NDA's Mr Arjun Munda.

Virtually disapproving of the manner of government formation in Ranchi, the Bench observed: "If what is stated in the petition filed by Munda is true, then it is a total fraud on the Constitution." The Bench said it was passing the interim order as Mr Munda, who filed the petition challenging Governor Syed Sibtey Razi's action in inviting Mr Soren to form a government, has proved a "strong prima facie case".

The Bench also virtually stayed any move to nominate a representative of the Anglo-Indian community as a member of the House by saying this could wait till a "legitimate" government took over.

The Bench advanced the floor test date wondering as to why the Governor had given five days more to the Soren government to prove its majority when the



If what is stated in the petition filed by Munda is true, then it is a total fraud on the Constitution

— Supreme Court

MLAs were to take oath on 10 March. The Governor had himself advanced the floor test date from 21 March to 15 March after he was summoned by the President in the wake of the controversy over his decision to invite Mr Soren. The NDA later paraded its strength before the President.

The court, while ordering video-recording of proceedings of the floor test, said its interim order would be regarded as a notice for convening of the Assembly and no separate order would be required for this purpose. Warning that "any disturbance during the floor test would be viewed seriously," the Bench asked the pro-tem Speaker to "faithfully" announce the result of the floor test.

The Bench, which passed the order on the line of an earlier Supreme Court order for a composite floor test in Uttar Pradesh

in 1998, directed the chief secretary and the state DGP to "see that all elected MLAs attended the proceedings of the Assembly freely, safely and securely without any interference by anybody".

The NDA petitioned the President today to urge him to ensure proper security on 11 March.

The Supreme Court order came after counsel for Mr Munda, Mr Mukul Rohtagi, alleged that the Governor had given a long time to the JMM chief to "indulge in horse trading". The Bench, which was considering the appointment of a retired Supreme Court judge as an independent observer for the floor test, gave full vent to its anguish after Mr AM Singhvi, appearing for the state, said courts had no role to play at this juncture.

While a cautious Congress merely said it respected the verdict, the NDA welcomed it. JD-U president Mr George Fernandes thanked the court for the order. Former chief minister Mr Babulal Marandi said Mr Soren should resign on moral grounds if he has any respect for democracy. Former Jharkhand chief minister Mr Arjun Munda said: "I approached the court as efforts were afoot for horse trading... I have also raised questions regarding the Governor's role."

Another report on page 4

Bihar script minus princes of Patna

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, March 7: A cabinet without Laloo Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan recommended President's rule in Bihar at a meeting tonight.

The newly elected Assembly was kept in suspended animation.

Laloo Prasad Yadav, railway minister, was in Delhi for a part of the day but did not stay for the meeting. Ram Vilas Paswan, steel minister, did not even come to Delhi.

Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, a senior minister from Laloo Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal, also stayed away. Laloo Prasad indicated that his absence was a protest of sorts against the refusal to

recognise the RJD's "legitimate" claim to be invited first as the single largest party.

His party colleague Raghuvansh said he did not go because he had a scheduled ministry meeting that continued far too long.

"I was informed of the cabinet meeting after I returned this afternoon (from Patna). But I had already summoned all the senior officials of my ministry for a meeting on a matter which is a thrust area for the PM," Raghuvansh said.

Sources in the United Progressive Alliance said Paswan kept off fearing that he may have to "confront" an irate Laloo Prasad and give an explanation for the Bihar deadlock.

Although a face-off be-

tween the allies-turned-adversaries was avoided today, the sources pointed out that sooner rather than later, the two would find themselves at the same table.

As alliance leaders were asking themselves what lay in the future, Laloo Prasad made at least one thing clear. He would not destabilise the government, though he blamed Paswan for his "intransigence" in blocking the formation of a "secular" dispensation in Bihar.

"I am not a narrow-minded politician, I will not put forward any such proposal," Laloo Prasad said about asking the alliance to drop Paswan.

Nor would he personally request alliance leaders to

Gandhi, dating back to the days when he spoke out against those who labelled her a "foreigner", may be under strain. Observers read this sign in Sonia meeting him at the National Advisory Council office and not at her residence at 10 Janpath as is her practice when she holds talks with senior allies.

Sonia is also believed to have not found time to meet another ally, Shibu Soren, Jharkhand's new chief minister appointed in circumstances that have given the Congress a red face.

Laloo Prasad is believed to have told Sonia the Centre must not buckle under the BJP's pressure and appoint advisers to the governor, Biju Singh, without consulting him.

He said officials appointed by the former chief minister, Rabri Devi, must not be shuffled en masse.

BJP president L.K. Advani met Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, stressing the importance of appointing "competent and honest" advisers to tackle "corruption and criminalisation" in Bihar.

According to party spokesperson Sushma Swaraj, the Prime Minister replied: "There cannot be two opinions in this regard."

Among the names doing the rounds for the advisers' posts are of former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey and the former chief economic adviser, Shankar Acharya. Advani also urged Singh to "fix responsibility" for the "as-

sault on democracy" in Goa and Jharkhand and recall the governors there.

Sources in the Prime Minister's Office said Singh replied that the post of the governor was a constitutional one and they had the power to act on their own and the Centre never "dictated orders" to them.

With the battle lines drawn between the main players, observers see little prospect of an understanding developing in the near future.

Laloo Prasad said he was not in favour of early polls. But his bitterness, not just towards Paswan but also other "secular" parties like the Samajwadi Party and CPI (ML), has made the task of forming an RJD-led government tough.

FOUR CORNERS

Congress

Sees President's rule as only option, neutral on Laloo & Paswan

Laloo Prasad

Abuses Paswan but wants Congress to bring him around

Ram Vilas Paswan

Not ready to bend though Laloo is willing to compromise

BJP

Priority is to ensure Laloo does not get his advisers in Raj Bhavan which will rule

coax Paswan into joining his party to form a government.

The "rapproch" he is supposed to have with Sonia

Verdict is against Lalu!

9/11/04
Bihar set for power-hungry politicians

It would be an insult to the electorate in Bihar after the verdict against Lalu if, by a desperate combination of managerial prowess, money and muscle-power, the RJD should ride back to power. After the last election, Lalu had fallen short of a majority and offered ministerships to all Congress MLAs. This time he is a shorter still but the Congress has an alliance with Ram Vilas Paswan who with 33 seats can call the shots. It is evident that Bihar hasn't found an alternative but it has expressed unequivocal disgust at the cycle of crime, nepotism and mis-governance during RJD rule. By all laws of constitutional government it should result in Lalu throwing in his towel but he has not been taught how the towel should be thrown! Hence the countless possibilities. There may have to be a short spell of President's rule as Paswan suggests to allow himself time to extract concessions. His joining hands with Lalu supposedly to keep out the communal forces is possible if Sonia Gandhi brokers a deal. He may also be propped up as chief minister by the NDA — something perhaps closest to his heart though it will disappoint the Muslim-Yadav sections driven away from Lalu. With this dilemma, Paswan may not be relishing his role of kingmaker.

The pollsters were right for a change. What they could not have anticipated was the U-turn Lalu is taking in speaking in respectful tones about the man whom he has described as enemy number one. There are signs of Lalu sending overtures to Paswan after dubbing him *goonda ka sardar* and the two being ushered in to see Sonia to mend a fractured verdict. Lalu claims the right to be called first — setting aside the claims of the pre-poll BJP-JD-U alliance that commands the largest number of 93 seats. The bottomline is that no one is within sight of a majority and that the battle-lines drawn before the election ensure that any quick and contemptible effort to put together a majority may have a foul smell. It will be a government of shameless convenience, to say the least, made up of power-hungry politicians. They should, instead, concede that the electorate has seen through Lalu's mischief and is no longer impressed by his comic exertions. But it will be a real tragedy if Congress and the Left become party to the mischief. For once let the truth survive!

THE STATESMAN

01 MAR 2005

Congress sweeps Haryana, Bihar verdict deadlocked, Jharkhand on razor's edge

By Our New Delhi Bureau


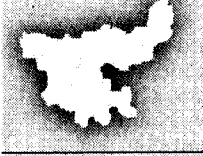
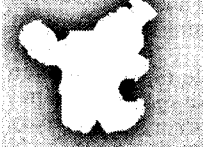
NEW DELHI, FEB. 27. The Congress today swept to power in Haryana with an absolute majority in the 90-member Assembly but all eyes are on Bihar where a hopelessly hung Assembly is the verdict. In Jharkhand, even as the Bharatiya Janata Party-Janata Dal (United) alliance emerged as the largest group and within striking distance of government formation, the secular parties are trying hard to cobble together a majority.

However, the arithmetic seems to favour a BJP-led government in Jharkhand where its alliance is just six seats short of a simple majority. In Bihar, the Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJP) of Ram Vilas Paswan with 30-odd seats could hold the key to government formation.

President's rule in Bihar?

Seasoned politicians, including Mr. Paswan, are openly talking of the possibility of a short spell of President's rule in Bihar. Till late this evening, Mr. Paswan was firm that he would support neither the BJP-JD (U) nor the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). However, he is likely to come here within two days to hold talks with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, who is said to be trying hard to get the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) parties to do business in Bihar.

The verdict is clear in Haryana with the Congress recording its best-ever performance since the State was carved out of Punjab in the mid-1960s. The landslide win — 67 seats in a

RESULTS	
Bihar	Total seats: 243
	BJP+ 93
	RJD+ 76
	LJP 30
	INC 9
	Others 32
Results declared till 12.30 a.m.	
Jharkhand	Total seats: 81
	BJP+ 36
	INC+ 26
	RJD 7
	Others 12
Haryana	Total seats: 90
	INC 67
	INLD 9
	BJP 2
	Others 12

Graphics by Varghese Kallada

House of 90 — brought the party back into office after nine years and also several aspirants for the Chief Minister's chair. The party high command has decided that the Congress Legislature Party will meet in Chandigarh on Tuesday to elect a leader.

Notwithstanding the handsome victory in Haryana, the mood in the Congress camp was rather subdued as it became evident that the UPA had botched its chances both in Bihar and Jharkhand because of the lack of any coherent alliance. In Bihar, the Congress-

LJP and the RJD went their separate ways and in neighbouring Jharkhand it was a similar picture of disunity and factional fights. In Bihar, the UPA was done in by Lalu Prasad and Ram Vilas Paswan although they were both in the UPA and had vowed to keep the BJP out.

No celebrations

The BJP also had nothing much to celebrate as it struggles to hold on to power in Jharkhand. It was routed in Haryana and in Bihar it has less than a fighting chance of forming a government. Some party leaders gave firm instructions to party workers: no firecrackers, no beating of drums and no distribution of sweets.

In Jharkhand, the situation is poised on a razor's edge as both the BJP-JD (U) and the Congress-Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) combines staked their claim to form the government. Smaller parties and Independent candidates, who have eight seats, could hold the key.

The BJP-JD (U) combine has won 36 seats and BJP leaders expressed the confidence that they could get the support of six MLAs to reach the simple majority mark of 42. The Congress and the JMM secured 26 seats and the alliance is banking on support from the RJD (7), the Forward Bloc (2) and the Nationalist Congress Party (1) to take its tally to 36.

BJP to wait and watch

Senior Congress leaders met informally at Ms. Gandhi's residence while in the BJP office, senior party leaders and those

of the JD (U) took stock of the situation in Bihar and Jharkhand. Apparently, no serious overture has yet been made to Mr. Paswan as "there were differences in the JD (U) camp on asking the support of Mr. Paswan," a very senior BJP leader said. "In Bihar, we have adopted a policy of wait and watch," the party general secretary and Bihar 'prabhari', Arun Jaitley, said after a meeting of BJP leaders that followed the joint meeting with the JD (U).

In Haryana, the Congress contested alone and won over two-thirds of the 90 Assembly seats. The BJP and the Indian National Lok Dal, contesting separately for the second time, won just two and nine seats. The two parties had parted ways in the Lok Sabha elections last year and between them could win just one out of 10 Lok Sabha seats. The election verdict was almost a repeat of the parliamentary polls.

CPI (ML) improves tally

Among the Left Parties, the CPI (ML) Liberation recorded its highest-ever tally of seven seats in Bihar. It was unable to cash in on the sympathy arising out of the killing of its sitting MLA in Jharkhand with only the slain leader's son managing to win. The Forward Bloc opened its account in Jharkhand winning two seats but the Communist Party of India and the CPI (M) drew a blank. In Bihar, the CPI won three seats but the CPI (M) was unable to win any.

Editorial on Page 10; BJP to stake claim in Jharkhand: Page 11



KINGMAKER IN BIHAR: Lok Jan Shakti Party leader and Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan holds the key to government formation in Bihar. Addressing a press conference in Patna on Sunday, he favoured President's rule "as one form of governance." — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar (Report on Page 11)

Fractured verdicts and a clear mandate



Railway Minister and RJD president Mr Lalu Prasad keeps track of the election results on TV at his Patna residence (left). JD(U) leaders Nitish Kumar, Sharad Yadav and BJP leader Arun Jaitley chalk out future strategy at an NDA meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI



Confusion in Laluland...

SNS & PTI

ATNA, Feb. 27. — Bihar appears to be in for yet another era of instability with the Assembly polls outcome throwing up a hung House, picking a snook at the ruling RJD president's Mr Lalu Prasad repeated remarks that it was going to be merely a "renewal" of Mrs Rabri Devi's contract for 20-year-rule.

RJD was clearly dealt a crushing blow after 15 years in power when his party was reduced to 75 in a House of 243. The NDA combine did reach close to the 100 mark emerging as the largest single pre-poll alliance but it was still 20 odd seats short of a simple majority. Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP emerged as the significant force with around 28 seats going in its kitty while the Congress suffered a major humiliation with a grand total of 10 seats.

What has given birth to the fear of instability is the expected firm stand of the LJP chief Mr Ram Vilas Paswan who today announced neither to support the "corrupt" RJD nor the "communal" BJP in the government formation but rather to sit in the opposition. Mr Paswan's stubbornness has caused worry in either camps, leav-

ing much room for the imposition of President rule in Bihar — for the eighth time since 1952.

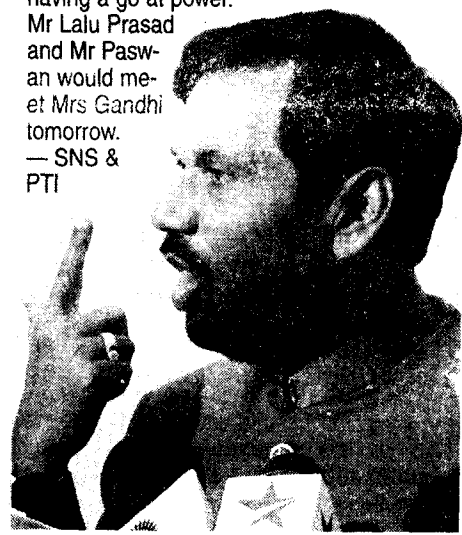
Moreover, he himself did not rule out the imposition of the President rule in Bihar. So, it all depends how the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre that is running with the support of 24 odd RJD MPs handles the overall situation and how its Governor, Mr Buta Singh who was appointed just on the eve of Assembly polls reacts to this development.

Chief minister Rabri Devi won comfortably from Raghapur. The ministers who lost the election include Mr Indradeo Prasad (Goriakothi), Mr Ravindra Charan Yadav (Kishanganj), Mr Udit Rai (Chapra), Mr Raghvendra Pratap Singh (Barahra), Mr Shivshanker Yadav (Darauli), Mr Rama Devi (Motihari) (all RJD) and Mr Vijay Shanker Dubey (Raghuathpur) of Congress. Bihar's first family suffered a loss when Mrs Rabri Devi's brother Mr Prabhunath Yadav and sister-in-law Mrs Indira Yadav contesting as Independents from Mirganj and Gopalganj respectively, lost. Indira is the wife of Mr Sadhu Yadav who is Lok Sabha member from Gopalganj.

Cong wooing Paswan

NEW DELHI, Feb. 27. — Despite receiving a huge setback in Jharkhand and Bihar, the Congress today sent out clear signals that it will make all attempts to stitch a "secular coalition" to form governments in the two states. Congress chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi took stock of the election results at a high-level strategy meeting at her residence. Mrs Sonia Gandhi's top aide Mr Ahmed Patel spoke to Mr Paswan today and told him about the need to keep NDA away from having a go at power.

Mr Lalu Prasad and Mr Paswan would meet Mrs Gandhi tomorrow. — SNS & PTI



...Soren's not any better

Statesman News Service

RANCHI, Feb. 27. — Even though the Jharkhand seems to be heading for a hung Assembly, the NDA is all set to return back to power in the state as it is just five short of the half way mark of 41.

The BJP-JD(U) combine bagged 36 out of the 78 seats declared so far out of 81 seats. The Congress-JMM combine got 26 seats, RJD bagged seven seats while others won 12. The others include United Goans Democratic Party with 2 seats, the All Jharkhand Students Union with two, Forward Block with two seats, the CPI(ML) with one seat with slain legislator Mr Mahendra Singh's son Mr Vinod Singh winning from Bagodar. JMM rebel Mr Stephen Marandi won from Dumka and BJP rebel Mr Madhu Koda won from Jagannathpur.

BJP sources said that the NDA will stake claim to form the government tomorrow and getting five more seats will not be a problem. "The NDA will tap the independents namely BJP rebel and former minister Mr Madhu Koda, the All Jharkhand Students Union which bagged two seats

and the United Goans Democratic Party which also bagged two seats. Sources also said that some of the independents might not want Mr Arjun Munda as the chief minister as they are in favour of Mr Babulal Marandi.



Mr Shibu Soren

For JMM chief Mr Shibu Soren it was a double setback as both his sons were humbled. While elder son and sitting legislator Mr Durga Soren lost to his BJP rival from Jama, younger son Hemant finished a dismal third from Dumka with JMM rebel Mr Stephen Marandi emerging victorious. Prominent winners include Jharkhand chief minister Mr Arjun Munda from Kharsawan, former Jharkhand speaker Mr Inder Singh Namdhari from Daltonganj, former union minister Mr Karia Munda from Khunti, ministers Mr Ravindra Rai, Mr Sudesh Mahto, Mr Dinesh Sarangi and state BJP chief Mr Raghubar Das and former Congress MP Mr Thomas Hansada from Rajmahal. Those who had to bite the dust include Speaker in the last Assembly, Mr MP Singh from Jamshepur (West), ministers Mr CM Prasad from Giridih and former ministers Mr S Singh and Mr B Singh.

Congress plan comes unstuck

Shahid Pervez in New Delhi

Feb. 27. — The Congress' election strategy in Bihar and Jharkhand came unstuck as today's election results dealt a severe blow to the party's standing in the two states besides damaging the prospects of its UPA allies.

The UPA's electoral reverses seem to be stunning, given that barely eight months ago, the alliance, fashioned by the Congress, swept the two states in the parliamentary polls.

But then there was barely a UPA working in Bihar and Jharkhand in these Assembly elections.

The Congress bungled its strategy thoroughly. It could not retain its UPA partners on board; it failed to forge a "grand alliance".

The UPA partners had been at each other's throat in both the states in addition to locking horns with the NDA nominees.

In Bihar, the Congress paid the price for its totally blurred focus — it worked out a bizarre and complicated alliance arithmetic with the RJD and the LJP, which confused even the party leaders, leave aside the people. The party did not want to support the incumbent government, run by Lalu Prasad's RJD in which the Congress itself had been a partner, nor wanted to oppose it.

The electorate of Bihar did not buy the Congress' "non-committal stand". On the other hand, the Congress struck a "proper" alliance with Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP in the middle of the election process.

ASSEMBLY 2005

Modispeak

AHMEDABAD, Feb. 27. — Gujarat "emerged victorious" in the Bihar polls as those who used the Godhra issue to woo voters have been taught a lesson, chief minister Mr Narendra Modi said today. — PTI

Left appeal

NEW DELHI, Feb. 27. — Left parties today asked all secular parties in Bihar to get together to prevent "communal" forces from taking over the reins of power, with the CPI-M suggesting that the Governor should call the single largest party to form government. — SNS

Massive swing

CHANDIGARH, Feb. 27. — The Congress' landslide victory in Haryana, its best ever performance in the state, was powered by a massive 6.61 per cent swing in the vote which translated into an additional 49 seats for the party, a majority a them from ruling INLD. — PTI

15th feather

NEW DELHI, Feb. 27. — With Congress storming to power ousting the INLD, Haryana today became the 15th state in the country to be ruled by the party which is also heading the UPA government at the Centre. — PTI

Ground beneath Chautala slips



Mr OP Chautala

Statesman News Service

CHANDIGARH, Feb. 27. — As per the predictions of political pundits, the Congress has wrested control of power in Haryana with a more than two-third majority. Riding on an anti-incumbency wave to dislodge the ruling INLD by bagging 67 of the total 90 seats, the Congress has returned to power after over a decade.

Mr Om Parkash Chautala-led INLD was virtually decimated as it even failed to hit the double-digit mark. Apart from his party's drubbing, chief minister Mr Chautala suffered the ignominy of losing to HPCC working president Mr Randip Singh Surjewala in Narwana by margin of 1,887 votes.

Mr Chautala, the only non-Congress chief minister to complete the five-year term, however, won from Rori constituency, humbling Congress nomi-

nee Jagdish Nehra by 26,578 votes. INLD's erstwhile partner BJP managed to get only two seats. Others got 12 seats.

Congress stalwart and former chief minister Mr Bhajan Lal won election from the Adampur constituency, whereas his son Mr Chander Mohan got re-elected from the Kalka constituency. Both the sons of former Haryana chief minister Mr Bansi Lal have also won.

With the Congress emerging the winner, the real power game has begun within the party and the scene now shifts from Haryana to Delhi for the selection of chief minister. And, there is no dearth of aspirants for top job with around 10 leaders eyeing chief ministership.

Although Congress stalwart Mr Bhajan Lal and the Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee president, are considered the front-runners.

However, aspirants other than Mr Bhajan Lal are unanimous in their opinion that he should not be chosen for the post by the high command. But, political experts feel that the claim of the Mr Bhajan Lal cannot be ignored. Considered a wily politician and an exponent of *jhor-tor ki rajniti* (politics of permutation and combinations) and the high command will have to take this factor into account.



Congress workers burst following the party's victory outside its headquarters, in New Delhi, on Sunday. — PTI

Advani strategy clicks for BJP in Jharkhand

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

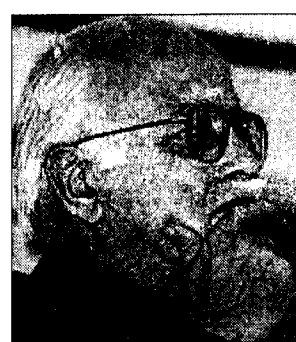
Feb. 27. — Brand Advani has clicked again for the BJP. While Jharkhand is nearly within the party's reach, the slide in Bihar has also been arrested. Of course, two of Mr Advani's trusted leaders, Mr Rajnath Singh and Mr Arun Jaitley, were his instruments for the bid to revive the party's sagging morale post-Lok Sabha polls.

Mr Rajnath Singh was responsible for the turnaround in Jharkhand and Mr Jaitley repeated the Karnataka feat in Bihar. There too the NDA emerged as the single

largest formation though it failed to form government. Considering that the NDA has improved its performance in Bihar despite heavy odds, Mr Jaitley's stock in the party is likely to go up.

However, the third general secretary, Mr Shivraj Singh Chauhan, did badly in Haryana. His strategy of going it alone in the polls proved fatal as the party witnessed an unprecedented downfall.

Senior BJP leaders privately said allowing Mr Bansi Lal to walk into the Congress camp was bad strategy. Now questions may be asked on the reason for such unfounded



Mr Advani

confidence. Mr Advani had given a free hand to all the three commanders. They got the feedback from states but formulated the strategy in Delhi in consultation with the party chief.

Mr Rajnath Singh ensured that neither Mr Arjun Munda nor Mr Babulal Marandi was projected as the chief ministerial candidate in Jharkhand. He even allowed informal projection of Mr Karia Munda. This helped both Mr Marandi and Mr Munda work together and recharge the cadre.

The division in the anti-BJP votes and the fear of Mr Shibu Soren becoming the chief minister brought back the party's traditional non-tribal votes. They form about 70 per cent of the population. A sizeable section was scared of the possibility of Mr Soren leading the Congress-JMM

alliance. The BJP's fortunes were also buttressed by the last minute division in JMM ranks due to the rebellion of Mr Stephen Marandi. The NDA which was expected to win not more than 20 seats towards the beginning witnessed a sudden upsurge after the announcement of the Congress-JMM alliance. Similarly, when Mr Jaitley was sent to Bihar, the NDA was expected to win only about 70 seats. The faction-ridden BJP unit of Bihar had at least half a dozen leaders with chief ministerial ambitions. They also shared a common abhorrence for Mr Nitish Kumar of the JD(U).

SPLIT WIDE OPEN

Kingmaker Paswan spurns RJD and BJP, can Sonia get him to support Lalu? PTI

Vinod Sharma & Saroj Nagi
New Delhi, February 27

THE FRACTURED mandate in Bihar and Jharkhand has turned the spotlight on Sonia Gandhi, who alone — as UPA chairperson — can hope to engineer a rapprochement between Lalu Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan to put in place a “secular” government and keep the BJP-JD(U) combine out.

While neither Lalu nor Paswan can give Bihar a government by himself, Paswan, who has received feelers from the RJD and the BJP during the day, holds the key to who will rule Bihar. The BJP is willing to give him the chief minister's post. But the LJP boss has played hard to get. He will neither support nor seek support from any of the contending parties. The JD(U), which is split on joining a government headed by Paswan, has decided to stake its claim. The RJD, too, snubbed by Paswan, will stake its own claim.

But all this might end in mere posturing when it comes to mastering the numbers. This is where Sonia Gandhi comes in.

Paswan has demanded President's Rule in Bihar. So, the Congress chief may not find it easy to make the two ends — Lalu and Paswan — meet.

The Jharkhand results would force the Congress-JMM combine to seek Lalu's support. For Lalu, the deal in Ranchi would come as a Patna quid pro quo.

His first comments after the result haze clearly drew the link: “The mandate is for secular forces. I will stake the claim to form the government in Bihar. We won't let the NDA in, be it Bihar or Jharkhand.”

Lalu claimed to lead the single largest party as also the single largest pre-poll alliance in Bihar with 92 seats — including the Congress. In addition, he stonewalled questions on Rabri Devi's continuation as chief minister and the role of Paswan.

Interestingly, the LJP leader's demand for President's Rule in Bihar suits the Congress, which seeks to buy time to reconstruct its base there. But that could cast a shadow on the central government; the RJD has 25 Lok Sabha MPs. Another problem is that such a move re-



Lalu Prasad Yadav and Rabri Devi at their home after the results were declared on Sunday.

quires ratification by both Houses.

So, the simplest solution is a Sonia-brokered peace between Lalu and Paswan. Not that the idea has been formally mooted. But “a give-and-take” could involve Paswan's return to the railway ministry, over which he fell out with Lalu after the Lok Sabha polls.

Given Paswan's belligerent stance, Sonia's task could be difficult. But a patch-up would enable the NDA, after mopping the support of Independents and smaller parties, to allow Governor Buta Singh to invite the NDA (with 91 MLAs) to form the government. It would be a throwback to 2000 when Ni-

tish Kumar was sworn in but failed to prove his majority.

The NDA has contacted Paswan. But the UPA is counting on the March 1 Co-ordination Committee meeting where Lalu and Paswan are expected to come face-to-face. To prepare the ground, back channel efforts are on, involving close Sonia aides, including Ahmed Patel. The Left is expected to help soften up Paswan. In Jharkhand, the Congress has established contact with Independents.

Various options are being debated in UPA circles. To keep the JD(U)-BJP out, some suggest stop-gap consensual arrangements. To consolidate minority

support, Paswan has floated the idea of a Muslim chief minister. Some feel the Congress could occupy the CM's office to let RJD and LJP tempers cool. But given the party's minuscule presence, this has limited value and lesser political legitimacy.

A silver lining for the UPA is Paswan's declared equidistance from the NDA and the RJD. A tie-up with the saffron party will destroy his base among the Muslims; such a power-sharing pact can't last long. An intelligent politician like Paswan wouldn't easily barter a stable Cabinet slot in Delhi for a chair that can be easily rocked in Patna.

Bleak house after great expectations

Vijay Swaroop
Patna, February 27

L ANNE MARG, the chief minister's residence, wore a downcast look as results of the election trickled in. Though the victory of Bori Devi from Raghupur came as a re-rite, the setting sun only deepened the gloom that had enveloped the CM's home since morning.

Apart from a crowd of mediapersons, the place was virtually deserted. Though the gates were kept open till the afternoon, there were few visitors. Railway minister and RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav sat glum before the TV along with a few party leaders, including Siwan strongman Mohammed Shahabuddin.

Rabri sat next to Lalu but was hardly interested in the proceedings. Whenever the telephone rang, she reduced the volume of the TV. She refused to comment to the media on the results.

Lalu broke his silence only to take calls from party leaders from across the state. The news was mostly bad. “To Taraiyan se bhi haar gaye, aur seats ka kya khabar hai (So we lost from Taraiyan too. What about other seats in the district?)” he asked even as his “informers” told him of one reverse after another.

He steadfastly refused to talk to the mediapersons, even though they kept badgering him. He just concentrated on the TV and watched with disdain as Ram Vilas Paswan kept attacking him.

Lalu kept a close watch on the party's performance. So well-informed was he that he snubbed one party candidate who had apparently lost but didn't know it. “Yeh log kaisa neta hai, apne chunav ka hi khabar nahin hai?” he said.

The railway minister was in constant touch with the returning officers of many constituencies, whom he called up directly.

As darkness fell, his mood changed from bad to worse. He asked the mediapersons gathered outside his house to leave. “Come later, when the full results are out,” he said.

Setback for NCP as Cong wins 2 seats in Meghalaya

Agencies
Shillong, February 26

9. NCP
bleeding
(2005)

HFC 2
27/2

Shot in the arm for Lapang, jolt for Sangma

THE CONGRESS won two of the three Assembly seats — Mawprem, Songsak, Selsella — in Meghalaya where bypoll was held on February 23.

Election office sources said Congress candidate Tonsing N. Marak won the Songsak Assembly seat by a margin of 630 votes, defeating his nearest Independent nominee Anderson A. Sangma. Marak polled 3,890 votes.

The United Democratic Party (UDP) earlier held the seat. Its candidate, Dolly Sangma, got 1,900 votes.

Clement Marak of the Congress emerged victorious in Selsella, defeating his nearest NCP candidate, Conrad K Sangma (son of former Lok Sabha Speaker Purno A. Sangma) by 182 votes. Marak bagged 2,745 votes.

Independent candidate Manas Chaudhuri bagged Mawprem by defeating his nearest Congress candidate, D.B. Gurung, by a margin of 1,318 votes. Chaudhuri, editor of *The Shillong Times*, bagged the Mawprem seat, earlier held by his brother Ardhendu. He polled 4,839 votes.

The three seats fell vacant after the legislators died in a helicopter crash on September 22. Though winning the two Garo Hills seats has come as a boost for the Congress, its defeat at Mawprem, somewhat, clouded the achievement.

The results also drubbed the BJP, which had been for long pinning its hope on Mawprem, a constituency that has a sizeable Bengali and Nepalese population. The party candidate, B.B. Chhetri, came third by bagging just 1,462 votes here.



D.D. Lapang (above) & P.A. Sangma



THE RESULTS of the by-elections in Meghalaya have strengthened the hands of chief minister D.D. Lapang, who was facing dissidence from some colleagues over his style of functioning. It was also a jolt to heavyweight Purno Agitok Sangma.

With Songsak and Selsella (both reserved) seats in its kitty, the position of the Congress in the 60-member state Assembly has gone up to 29 while that of the Nationalist Congress Party went down from eight to seven, after it lost the Mawprem seat. Also, the strength of the UDP went down from nine to eight with the Congress bagging Songsak. The number of Independents rose to six. The Garo Hills results came as shock to former Lok Sabha Speaker Purno A. Sangma, whose son Conrad's maiden venture into electoral politics was a non-starter.

The results also cast a shadow on the prospects of Sangma Senior, who was campaigning for NCP candidates in both the seats. Considering his political clout and charisma in the Garo Hills, an area he has represented in Parliament for decades, his son's smooth sailing was considered a foregone conclusion. But the Congress certainly, was not sitting idle as chief minister D.D. Lapang himself spearheaded the campaign there.

HTC, Shillong

লালুর জোট পিছিয়েই থাকল বিহারে

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: রামরথ আটকে রাজনীতিতে যাঁর দ্রুত উত্থান, সেই লালুপ্রসাদের রাজ্যপাট বজায় রাখতে এখন রামই ভরসা। এই রাম রামলালা নন, রামবিলাস পাসোয়ান।

কারণ, শেষ পর্যায়ের বুথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষার পরে দু'টি টিভি চ্যানেল জানাচ্ছে লালুর আরজেডি জোটের থেকে বিজেপি জোট এগিয়ে রয়েছে। রামবিলাসের লোক জনশক্তি পার্টি

এবং কংগ্রেসকে পাশে পেলে লালুর সমস্যা নেই। কিন্তু তা হলেও ত্রিশঙ্কু বিধানসভায় সরকার গড়া নিয়ে দড়ি টানাটানি চলবে। নির্দল সদস্যদের কেনাবেচার সম্ভাবনাও থাকছে।

ঝাড়খণ্ডেও বুথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষায় স্পষ্ট হয়নি কোন জোট সরকার গড়বে। কোনও জোট গরিষ্ঠতার অঙ্কে পৌঁছতে পারেনি। কংগ্রেস-জেএমএম-এর থেকে বিজেপি-জেডিইউ জোট এগিয়ে

রয়েছে। তবে অতীতে দেখা গিয়েছে, বুথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষা বহু সময় মেলে না।

বুথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষার ফল জানার পরে লালুকে যথেষ্ট স্রিয়মান লেগেছে। তিনি যেমন গরিষ্ঠতা পাবেন বলে দাবি করেছেন, তেমনই রামবিলাসকে 'কনফিউসন মাস্টার' বলে উল্লেখ করেছেন। অন্য দিকে, রামবিলাস বলেছেন, সরকার গড়ার ব্যাপারে তাঁর দল লালু বা বিজেপি জোটকে সমর্থন

জানাবে না। তা হলে কী করবেন তিনি? উত্তরে ধোঁয়াশা ছাড়া আর কিছু সৃষ্টি করেননি রামবিলাস।

কেন্দ্রের দুই শরিকের বিরোধ না-মিটলে বিহারের ভবিষ্যৎ অনিশ্চিত। সে ক্ষেত্রে সনিয়া গাঁধীর দায়িত্ব বাড়ল। শরিকদের ঝগড়া মিটিয়ে এনডিএ-বিরোধী সরকার গড়া যাবে কি না, তা অনেকটাই তাঁর উপরে নির্ভর করবে।

ঝাড়খণ্ডের ক্ষেত্রেও সনিয়ার একই দায়িত্ব। কারণ, সমীক্ষা অনুসারে লালুর দল ও বামপন্থীরা ওই রাজ্যে কম আসন পেলেও কংগ্রেস-জেএমএম জোটকে সরকার গড়তে হলে তাদের সমর্থনের প্রয়োজন হবে। যদিও শিবু সোরেনের দাবি, ঝাড়খণ্ডে তাঁদের জোট সরকার গড়ার পথে কোনও বাধা নেই। অন্য দিকে, বিজেপি নেতা সুশীল মোদীর দাবি, বিহার, ঝাড়খণ্ডে তাঁরাই গরিষ্ঠতা পাবেন। জেডিইউ নেতা নীতীশ কুমারের মতে, লালুর দল হারছেই।

বিহারে এ দিন ভোটের সময় দু'জনের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। তিন পর্যায়ের নির্বাচনে রাজ্যে মোট ৯ জন মারা গিয়েছেন। গত বিধানসভা ভোটে মৃত্যু হয়েছিল ৪৮ জনের। এ বার নির্বাচন কমিশনের কড়াকড়ির কারণে বাহুবলীদের দাপট ছিল অনেক কম।

ঝাড়খণ্ডে বোকোরার ঝুমরা পাহাড়ে এ দিন মাইন বিস্ফোরণে এক পুলিশের মৃত্যু হয়েছে। পোড়েয়াহাট বিধানসভা কেন্দ্রে গোলমাল থামাতে পুলিশ ২১ রাউন্ড গুলি চালায়।

কে কোথায় দাঁড়াল

সামগ্রিক বুথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষা

শেষ

দফার সমীক্ষা



বিহার

২৪২ কেন্দ্র

	স্টার নিউজ	আজ তক
জেডিইউ-বিজেপি	৯৮	১০১
আরজেডি-বাম	৮৩	৮৯
কংগ্রেস-লোকজনশক্তি	৩৪	২৮



ঝাড়খণ্ড

৮৯ কেন্দ্র

	স্টার নিউজ	আজ তক
কংগ্রেস-জেএমএম	২৮	২৮
আরজেডি-বাম	৫	৪
জেডিইউ-বিজেপি	৩৭	৩৯

বিহার ২৩ কেন্দ্র

	স্টার নিউজ	আজ তক
জেডিইউ-বিজেপি	৪২	৫৫
আরজেডি-বাম	৩৩	৩৫
কংগ্রেস-লোকজনশক্তি	১৩	১০

ঝাড়খণ্ড ২৮ কেন্দ্র

	স্টার নিউজ	আজ তক
কংগ্রেস-জেএমএম	১১	৮
আরজেডি-বাম	২	৪
জেডিইউ-বিজেপি	৯	১৯

* অন্যান্য দলের আসন সংখ্যা অনুল্লিখিত

EXIT POLL PUTS PASWAN IN POLE POSITION

Hung House for Bihar, Jharkhand

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Feb. 23. — An exit poll today predicted a fractured verdict in both Bihar and Jharkhand with the Lok Janshakti Party poised to play a crucial role in government formation in Bihar, while the BJP-JD(U) combine was set to do well in a neck-and-neck race in Jharkhand, but still likely to be short of a majority.

The exit poll conducted by AC Nielsen for the 243-member Bihar Assembly elections predicted 85 seats for the RJD and 96 for the BJP and its allies, leaving 26 seats for Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP, eight for the Congress and another 28 for "others", who can tilt the balance either way.

Counting from 8 a.m. on Sunday

Counting of votes for the Assembly polls in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana will commence at 8 a.m. on Sunday and a broad picture is likely to emerge within hours.

Briefing reporters here today at the conclusion of the three phases of polling in Bihar and Jharkhand, Election Commission spokesman Mr AN Jha said the Election Com-

Lalu 'overconfident'

PATNA, Feb. 23. — Claiming that neither the Congress nor the Lok Janshakti Party enjoyed "any base" in Bihar, RJD president Mr Lalu Prasad today said he was "overconfident" about the victory of his party which would return to power on its own. Mr Prasad rubbished that development was the key electoral issue in the state. On the other hand, claiming that his party together with the Congress would form the next "non-RJD government" in Bihar, LJP president Mr Ram Vilas Paswan today said the outcome of the polls in the state would be "astonishing". Talking to reporters here, Mr Paswan ruled out any post-poll alliance with the RJD in the event of a hung Assembly. "I will not align with the RJD in my lifetime," he said. — PTI

mission has made elaborate arrangements for the counting of votes which would be taken up simultaneously in all the three states. A clear picture of the eventual outcome was likely in four hours as the polling was conducted through Electronic Voting Machines.

The Election Commission has also set up live updates from the counting centres for the benefit of the media, Mr Jha told reporters.

Overall 55% turnout

An estimated 55 per cent of the nearly seven-crore voters exercised their franchise in all the three phases of Assembly polls in Bihar and Jharkhand, the EC announced today.

The overall turnout in Bihar was expected to be slightly less than 55 per cent of the total electorate of 5.21 crore.

The figure was likely to be more than 55 per cent of the 1.77-crore voters in Jharkhand, Mr Jha told reporters here on completion of the final phase of polling.

In the final phase, about 55 per cent of the 64.56 lakh voters turned out in Jharkhand while 50-52 per cent of the nearly two-crore electorate cast their votes in Bihar.

61% polling in Meghalaya bypolls

An estimated 61 per cent votes were cast in the bypolls to three Assembly constituencies in Meghalaya today which went off peacefully, a report from Shillong adds.

There was no report of any untoward incident. Counting will be held on Saturday.

Photographs, more reports, on page 4

THE STATESMAN

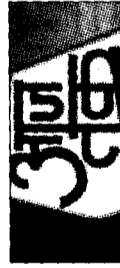
24 FEB 2005

HUNGHOUSES


241
RJD
98 (800)

Bihar


RJD	85
BJP+	96
Cong	8
LJP	26
Others	28



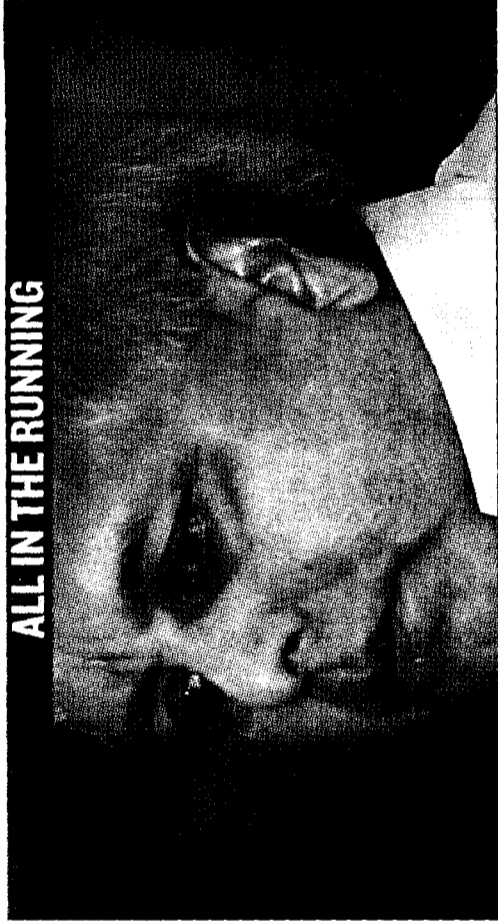
RJD	89
BJP+	101
Cong	7
LJP	22
Others	24



RJD	80
BJP+	80
Cong+	40
Others	43



RJD	83
BJP+	89
Cong+	38
Others	33




ALL IN THE RUNNING




(From top) Lalu Prasad Yadav, Ram Vilas Paswan and Nitish Kumar

Jharkhand


BJP+	37
Cong-JMM	28
RJD	5
Others	11



BJP+	39
Cong-JMM	28
RJD	4
Others	10



BJP+	33
Cong-JMM	37
RJD	4
Others	7



BJP+	35
Cong-JMM	33
RJD	5
Others	8

BJP & allies gain, Paswan could hold trump card

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 23

THE RACE for power in Bihar and Jharkhand neared its climax with staggered Assembly polls ending today and pollsters forecasting hung verdicts and political convulsions after votes are counted on Sunday.

An estimated 55 per cent of the electorate voted in the two states today, with 10 people killed in booth violence in Bihar.

Lalu Prasad Yadav's ruling Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar appears to be in trouble. Exit polls on four major TV channels predicted a fractured verdict in both Bihar and Jharkhand with Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party poised to play a crucial role in government formation in Lalu's state. As for Jharkhand, the BJP-JD(U) combine was set to do well in a neck-and-neck race but still might fall short of majority.

The Star News poll gave the BJP and allies 96 of Bihar's 243 seats and the LJP 26. Aaj Tak gave the BJP 101 and the LJP 22. In both cases, the LJP could in principle buttress a BJP government. The outcome of the polls is therefore crucial to the well-being of the Congress-led central coalition.

Lalu and Paswan, arch-rivals in spite of being allies at the Centre, individually exuded confidence that they would assume power, while the Opposition was buoyed by the exit polls that suggested major gains for them.

Lalu, who is said to rule Bihar by proxy through his chief minister wife Rabri Devi, dismissed doom forecasts and vowed to return to power on his own strength. "All exit polls are rubbish. Victory will be ours," he declared.

Not to be left behind, Paswan, seen in a casual T-shirt for most of the day, proclaimed: "The outcome will surprise everyone; the LJP-Congress will form a government in Bihar. I will not tie up with Lalu in this lifetime at least."

For the Congress, which used the strategy of contesting the polls with Paswan without completely letting go of the RJD, the battle may be over but the war will begin only after Sunday.

H-1

J. Venkatesan (18/2/05)

Election Commission dismisses allegations

20/2

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 19. The Election Commission has taken exception to the statement of the Chief Minister of Haryana and Indian National Lok Dal leader, Om Prakash Chautala, criticising the Chief Election Commissioner, T.S. Krishnamurthy for advancing the counting of votes to February 23 from February 27.

Mr. Chautala on Friday described as unconstitutional and wrong the Commission's directive to the returning officers in Haryana not to declare the Assembly results on February 23 without its prior permission in those constituencies where the margin of votes between the winning candidate and his/her nearest rival was less than the total number of postal ballots.

"Deeply pained"

The Commission said that while it had nothing to say about political parties, individuals or groups commenting on any decision taken by the Commission, "it is deeply pained and anguished at certain remarks which amount to character assassination and particularly singling out one of the members. Apart from the fact that such remarks bring down a constitutional authority in the public estimation, the same show lack of understanding of the Commission's functioning."

The Commission made it clear that all decisions relating to the conduct of elections in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana had been taken "jointly and unanimously" by all the members.

"The allegations made against the Commission as also against its officers are categorically dismissed as beneath contempt."

Regarding the counting of votes, it had been the uniform

practice in the past that whenever general elections took place in more than one State simultaneously, counting was taken up after the polling process in all the States was over.

The Commission said the counting for the current elections, initially fixed for February 27, was advanced in respect of Haryana as it was felt that the counting would not have any adverse effect on the polling in Bihar and Jharkhand even if the results were announced on the evening of February 23. It was in view of these considerations that the date of counting was advanced.

It must be clarified that the direction issued on the counting of postal ballot papers fully met the requirements as explained by the Supreme Court in a catena of decisions, the Commission said.

The Commission had given directions to the returning officers yesterday to count all postal ballot papers which were received up to 4.00 p.m. on February 23.

Clarification

Today it clarified that it had directed the returning officers not to declare the result in any constituency where the number of postal ballot papers expected to be received back by 8.00 a.m. on February 27, might materially affect the result of election and to wait for the declaration of result in such cases up to 8.00 a.m. on February 27.

Mr. Chautala had on Friday criticised the Commission for advancing the counting of votes and said this would deprive 1.60 lakh defence personnel of exercising their right to vote as all of them were earlier given time up to 8 a.m. on February 27. Considering this, sources said the Commission decided to wait till 8 am on February 27 where it was essential to wait up to this period.

ELECTION COMMISSION ADVANCES DATE

Counting in Haryana on February 23

*9-
Election
(Delhi)*

NEW DELHI, FEB. 17. Realising a long gap, the Election Commission today decided to advance to February 23 the counting of votes in the Haryana Assembly elections held on February 3.

The counting, originally scheduled for February 27 along with the third phase of the Bihar and Jharkhand Assembly elections, would start at 4 p.m., the Commission said in a press note

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this evening. The rescheduling was felt necessary in view of the long gap between the polling and counting.

It was also felt that the security forces could be utilised during counting in Bihar and Jharkhand, Commission sources said.

The delayed counting had come under attack from the Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala, saying it

18/2
hampered the developmental and routine works. In the case of polling stations where re-poll has been ordered for February 23, counting would be taken up at the last round of counting of votes in the Assembly constituencies concerned after the repoll was completed and the electronic voting machines (EVMs) were sealed as per procedure, the press note added. — PTI

PASWAN LIKELY TO BE KING-MAKER

No clear verdict in exit polls

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Feb. 15. — With elections to majority of the Assembly seats in Bihar and Jharkhand over after the second phase of polling today drew a turnout of 55 per cent, exit polls by Zee News and Aaj Tak TV channels gave the RJD-Congress-JMM alliance a majority in Jharkhand while Star News and Aaj Tak channels forecast a hung House in Bihar. The Lok Janshakti Party, led by Union minister Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, was emerging as a key player in government formation in Bihar, the polls projected.

Zee News gave the RJD-Congress a slender majority in the two states. Projections by Zee and Star showed the RJD was poised to suffer substantial losses in terms of seats in Bihar. While Zee News gave RJD-Congress 122 seats in Bihar — the magic figure in the 243-member Assembly — Star News projected the alliance bagging 100 seats.

According to Zee, the RJD is likely to get 76 seats and the Congress 46. The BJP and its allies are poised to bag 76 and others, including the LJP, 41. It did not specify how many seats the LJP will get.

The Star News exit poll shows the RJD getting 91 seats and the Congress just nine. The BJP and its allies are projected

to get 90 seats, the LJP 29 and others 20. The projections were for 239 seats as polling has been postponed in four constituencies due to certain irregularities.

In the second phase of balloting in 82 seats in Bihar, Zee News pegged the RJD at 31, the Congress at 13, the BJP at 28 and others at 10. Star News said the RJD was likely to get 21 seats and Congress 6. It gave BJP 33 seats, LJP 9 and others 7.

For the 81-member Jharkhand Assembly, Zee News predicted 38 seats to JMM-Congress and 4 to the RJD, 34 to the BJP and 5 to others. Star News, however, gave 39 seats to JMM-Congress-RJD, 36 to the BJP and 6 to others.

The Aaj Tak-ORG Marg exit poll said RJD-Congress will earn 104 seats in Bihar, as against 89 by the BJP and the JD (U). LJP is likely to get 29 seats.

For Jharkhand, the Aaj Tak exit poll showed the Congress-JMM winning 34 seats, the BJP-JD(U) combine getting 28 seats and the RJD settling for seven seats.

Lalu confident

Mr Lalu Prasad claimed tonight that Congress and LJP were eating into the NDA's vote share, benefitting his party in Bihar. "It has always been all against me and the lantern has always emerged the strongest," the RJD supremo said.

More reports, photographs on page 4

R. B. S. (2005) 11-1

RJD gets EC notice over CDs on Gujarat riots

But Lalu Says CDs Contained Qawalis For Poll Campaign

Patna: The Election Commission (EC) on Saturday served a notice on the ruling RJD in Bihar over the screening of CDs allegedly containing footage of the post-Godhra riots in Gujarat.

However, RJD president and railway minister Lalu Prasad said his party had nothing to do with the CDs and the EC was free to get the matter inquired into. "We sent CDs containing qawalis for canvassing support after securing the EC's permission," he said.

Earlier, Lalu had stated that there was nothing objectionable about the CDs and the RJD had the permission of the state election commission to play them.

However, Bihar chief electoral officer K C Saha issued a notice to chief of the RJD's state unit Abdul Bari Siddiqui seeking to know the "factual position" about the use of the CDs in Purne and Kishanganj districts by February 14. "Saha has asked the RJD to explain its position as to whether the CDs are being shown for electoral publicity and also if the party has taken prior permission from the commission for it," deputy chief electoral officer S H Mintoo said.

The RJD has already been embarrassed by the EC's strictures over Lalu distributing money during a poll rally at Bihta in December.

Taking strong objection to Lalu's U-turn on the CD

Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train on the cards

New Delhi: In the rail budget for 2005-06, railway minister Lalu Prasad may announce a high speed corridor to in-

troduce bullet trains between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, with a speed of 250 to 300 km per hour. This project is being launched after

getting the green signal from the Prime Minister. Two long-distance trains between Delhi and Howrah and Delhi and Chennai with speeds of up to 150 km per hour are also expected to be announced. Agencies



issue, NDA's chief ministerial candidate Nitish Kumar and BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley demanded that the EC take stern action against the RJD for "exploiting religion for electoral purposes".

"The showing of the CDs on Gujarat riots by the RJD is in blatant violation of the EC directives as it is aimed at fomenting communal tension. The ec must immediately ban it," Kumar said, adding, "Lalu is in the habit of reneging on his statements after being caught on the wrong foot. The RJD is becoming a habitual offender." Agencies

Sonia, Soren share Jharkhand dais

Agencies
Ghatshila (Jharkhand), Feb 11

CONGRESS CHIEF Sonia Gandhi and JMM chief Shibu Soren shared the stage for the first time in Jharkhand at an election rally at Moubhandar near the copper town here on Friday.

Speaking at the rally, Sonia lashed out at the state government for lack of development and appealed to the people to throw it out as starvation deaths, unemployment and corruption had increased in Jharkhand. The NDA, she said, had lost the May Lok Sabha polls due to its 'misrule'.

"NDA is self-interest oriented government and was worried only about its chair," she said adding the alliance's four-year-rule had crushed the aspirations of the tribal masses of the state.

"The UPA government has always worked for the welfare of the *adivasi* community. Indiraji and Rajivji had a special soft corner for the *adivasis* and were always prepared to do something good for them," she said.

Continuing her tirade against the NDA government, she said it had failed to hold panchayat polls and assured that it would be held if the UPA government came.

Sonia said the efforts would be made to improve the irrigation facilities and welfare measures for small farmers and labourers. The Centre has already identified 150 backward districts and initiated steps to provide jobs to one

member of each family for at least 100 days a year.

Soren in his turn said communal forces were now ruling the state and creating disturbances to hold on to power. "Jharkhand is rich in minerals but its people are poor because power has fallen into the wrong hands," he said.

"Soniaji has sacrificed the PM's chair and formed the UPA to defeat the communal forces," he said while appealing to the people to vote for the Congress-led alliance ignoring 'small issues' like controversies over seat sharing.

Sonia was accompanied by senior Congress leaders Ambika Soni, R.K. Anand, Imran Kidwai and JMM MP Sunil Mahato.

Later addressing another meeting at Simdega, 65 km from Ranchi, Sonia said Congress was keen on decentralising power at the grassroots level for which former Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi had initiated the Panchayat Raj bill.

"The Congress wants to empower the poor, the *adivasi*, dalits and the women at the grassroots level which can accelerate development. But unfortunately the government in Jharkhand has failed to hold panchayat elections, depriving democratic rights to these sections," she said.

Attacking the NDA government for failing on all fronts, she alleged that the BJP-led NDA government was anti-people and sought to divide the society and trying to create divisions among the *adivasis*.



MAIN HOON NA Sonia Gandhi interacts with supporters at a rally in Ghatshila, Jharkhand, on Friday.

Sonia assured me of CM's post: Shibu Soren

JMM CHIEF and Union coal minister Shibu Soren has claimed that Congress chief Sonia Gandhi had assured him of support to be the chief minister after the Assembly polls.

"Soniaji has promised me support in wiping out poverty in Jharkhand. I have a good rapport with her and I trust her completely," he told an election rally at Tundi, 40 km from here, on Thursday. He said that BJP had insulted the people of Jharkhand by getting him moved from the Union cabinet involving him in false cases like the Chirudih massacre.

PTI

Violence marks elections in Bihar, Jharkhand

65 per cent polling in Haryana ● Six policemen killed in landmine blast

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 3. Thirteen persons were killed in incidents of sporadic violence in the first phase of Assembly elections in Bihar, Haryana and Jharkhand today. While six persons, including two women, were killed in Bihar, six policemen were killed in a landmine blast in Jharkhand.

The Deputy Election Commissioner, A.N. Jha, told reporters here that polling was held for all the 90 Assembly seats in Haryana, 64 of the 243 seats in

Bihar and 24 of the 81 seats in Jharkhand. While Haryana recorded a turnout of 65 per cent, it was between 52 and 55 per cent in Bihar and around 45 per cent in Jharkhand.

Mine blast

In Jharkhand, five District Armed Police personnel, the station in-charge in Palamu district (under Chattarpur police station) and their civilian driver were killed when suspected Maoists triggered a landmine explosion early today.

"No major incident was re-

ported in Haryana," Mr. Jha said. However, group clashes were reported from a few places. Polling was suspended in a booth in Hazaribagh district of Jharkhand after a polling official died following a heart attack. Another polling officer died after a heart attack in Elanahbad constituency of Haryana.

Mr. Jha said the Commission would decide by tomorrow on repolling. Repolling would be held wherever the Electronic Voting Machines were damaged. He said EVMs were dam-

aged in eight polling stations in Bihar and one in Haryana.

Six killed in Bihar

Our Patna Special Correspondent reports:

Two Home Guards and a voter were killed in an attack by naxalites in Shankarpur village under the Banke Bazar police station of Imamganj constituency in Gaya district. An injured Home Guard was admitted to hospital. The naxalites took away three rifles.

In another naxalite attack on a booth in Jhagari under Ghosi

police station of Jehanabad district, one person was killed and two others were injured.

Police opened fire at a booth in Narayana village under the Chenari police station of Rohtas district to stop the exchange of fire between two warring groups. Two women were killed and another was injured in the police firing.

One person was killed in an exchange of fire between two groups in Karhasi village under Dinara police station of Rohtas district. In the same district, three Janata Dal (United) sup-

porters were injured in a clash with Bahujan Samaj Party workers.

Two Rashtriya Janata Dal supporters were injured in a bomb explosion allegedly triggered by Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) supporters in Aurangabad district.

A polling officer, Badri Narain Prasad Singh, was injured when anti-social elements fired at a booth in Rustampur under Nawada police station of Nawada district. The polling process was disturbed in about half a dozen booths by anti social ele-

ments. The voters boycotted the poll process in 10 booths in protest against development issues.

The Bharatiya Janata Party claimed that the vehicle in which its vice-president, S.K. Modi, was travelling was attacked by a group of people in Bhagalpur.

Police arrested about 100 people during the day on various counts and even seized arms from them.

Advantage Congress in Haryana, say exit polls: Page 12

THE HINDU

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হরিয়ানা দখল করছে কংগ্রেস, বিহারে অবশ্য ত্রিশঙ্কুর সম্ভাবনা

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার: প্রথম দফার ভোটের পরে সনিয়া গান্ধী মৃদু হাসি হাসতেই পারেন। কারণ, বৃহস্পতিবারের বৃথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষা থেকে স্পষ্ট, হরিয়ানায় একক সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা পেয়ে কংগ্রেস সরকার গড়তে চলেছে। বিহারে লালুপ্রসাদের আরজেডি-র আসন সংখ্যা কমলেও তাদেরই বৃহত্তম দলের মর্যাদা পাওয়ার সম্ভাবনা। কিন্তু সরকার গড়তে হলে লালুকে কংগ্রেস তো বটেই, রামবিলাস পাসোয়ানের লোক জনশক্তি পার্টির উপরেও নির্ভর করতে হবে। ঝাড়খণ্ডে কোন দল শেষ পর্যন্ত এগিয়ে থাকবে, সেটি খুব স্পষ্ট হল না। কংগ্রেস-ঝাড়খণ্ড মুক্তি মোর্চা (জেএমএম) জোটের সঙ্গে বিজেপি-জেডিইউ জোটের লড়াই হাড্ডাহাড্ডি। তবে এ দিন ঝাড়খণ্ডে ভোট হয়েছে মূলত নকশাল এলাকায়। ভোট পড়েছে খুবই কম। তাই পরবর্তী পর্যায়ের নির্বাচনের আগে ধন্দ কাটবে বলে মনে হয় না। তা ছাড়া ইতিহাস বলছে, বৃথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষা বহু ক্ষেত্রেই ভোটের ফলের সঠিক পূর্বাভাস দিতে পারে না।

স্টার নিউজ, আজতক এবং এন ডি টিভির বৃথ-ফেরত সমীক্ষায় আসনের ক্ষেত্রে কিছুটা হেরফের হলেও হরিয়ানা সম্পর্কে পূর্বাভাসের অভিমুখ মোটামুটি একই। তিনটি চ্যানেলের সমীক্ষাই স্পষ্ট ভাবে বলেছে, এ রাজ্যে কংগ্রেস একক সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা নিয়ে সরকার গড়তে চলেছে। হরিয়ানায় আজ সব ক'টি, অর্থাৎ ৯০টি আসনেই ভোট হয়েছে। বৃথ ফেরত সমীক্ষায় বলা হয়েছে, ওমপ্রকাশ চৌটারালার দল ইন্ডিয়ান ন্যাশনাল লোক দল (আইএনএলডি) থেকে মানুষ মুখ ঘুরিয়ে নিয়েছেন। বিজেপি'র হালও বেশ খারাপ।

ঝাড়খণ্ডের ক্ষেত্রে তিনটি চ্যানেল কিছুটা ভিন্ন মত। এন ডি টিভি-র মতে, প্রথম দফায় যে ক'টি আসনে ভোট হল তাতে কংগ্রেস-জেএমএম জোট ১২টির মতো আসন পেতে পারে। বিজেপি-র আসন দাঁড়াতে পারে ৮-এর কাছাকাছি। আর লালুর দল পেতে পারে চারটি আসন। স্টার নিউজ ও আজ তকের সমীক্ষা অনুসারে ছবিটা আবার উল্টো। আজ তক বিজেপিকে ১১টি আসন দিয়েছে। কংগ্রেসকে ও আরজেডিকে চারটি করে। আর স্টার নিউজ বলছে, বিজেপি ১৪টি আসন পাবে। কংগ্রেস ৬টি আসন। আরজেডি ৩টি।

তবে বিহারে যতটা ভাবা হয়েছিল, ততটা খারাপ হাল নয় বিজেপি-জেডি (ইউ) জোটের। ক্ষমতায় যাওয়া কঠিন হলেও লালুর আরজেডি-র পিছনেই তাদের থাকার

কে কোথায় দাঁড়িয়ে

প্রথম দফার ভোট বৃথ ফেরত সমীক্ষার ফল



বিহার ৬৪ কেন্দ্র	স্টার নিউজ	আজ তক	এনডিটিভি
জেডিইউ-বিজেপি	২১	২১	২১
আরজেডি-বাম	২৮	২৬	২৩
কংগ্রেস-লোকজনশক্তি	৬	৬	১১
ঝাড়খণ্ড ২৪ কেন্দ্র			
কংগ্রেস-জেএমএম	৬	৪	১২
আরজেডি-বাম	৩	৪	৪
জেডিইউ-বিজেপি	১৪	১১	৮
হরিয়ানা ৯০ কেন্দ্র			
কংগ্রেস	৫৮	৬৪	৬০
আইএনএলডি	১৫	১৪	১৩
বিজেপি	৭	৩	১০

অন্যান্য দলের আসন সংখ্যা হিসাবে নেই

সম্ভাবনা। অন্য দিকে, লালু-বামপন্থী জোট (পুরোপুরি না হলেও) সবচেয়ে বেশি আসন পেতে পারে। কিন্তু নিজেদের জোরে সরকার গড়া হয়তো তাদের পক্ষে সম্ভব হবে না। সমীক্ষা বলছে, লালুর আসন কমছে। এর মূল কারণ লোক জনশক্তি পার্টির উত্থান। এমন ইস্তিতও মিলেছে যে, মুসলিম ও দলিতদের একটি অংশ লালুর বিরুদ্ধে গিয়ে রামবিলাসকে সমর্থন করেছেন।

পুলিশ মেরে ভোটই করতে দিল না জঙ্গিরা

দেবজিৎ ভট্টাচার্য • রাঁচি

J. B. S. (8/2/04)

৩ ফেব্রুয়ারি: আশঙ্কাই সত্যি হল। গোটা ভোট প্রক্রিয়াই কার্যত তছনছ করে দিল মাওবাদী জঙ্গিরা। নিজেদের এলাকায় ভোট করতে দিল না তারা। মাওবাদীদের হুমকির মুখে পিছু হটতে হল প্রশাসনকেই। দিনের শেষে গোটা রাজ্যে ৪৭ শতাংশ ভোট পড়েছে দাবি করা হলেও ২০ শতাংশেরও কম ভোট পড়েছে মাওবাদী প্রভাবিত গ্রামেগঞ্জে। উল্টে জঙ্গিদের পাতা ল্যান্ডমাইন ফেটে সাত পুলিশের মৃত্যু হয়েছে পলামুতে। বেশ কিছু এলাকায় কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনীর সঙ্গে গুলিযুদ্ধের খবর এসেছে রাজ্য প্রশাসনের সদর দফতরে। অসমর্থিত সূত্রের খবর অনুযায়ী, পলামুতেই কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনীর গুলিতে চার মাওবাদীর মৃত্যু হয়েছে।

কাল থেকেই পুলিশি পাহারায় বুথে যেতে শুরু করেন ভোটকর্মীরা। মাইন বিস্ফোরণের আশঙ্কায় সরকারের সতর্কবার্তা ছিল, গ্রামের রাস্তায় গাড়ি নিয়ে ঢোকা যাবে না। সেই কারণে ভোটকর্মীদের কাছে সাইকেল পৌঁছে দিয়েছিল সরকার। সাইকেল দেওয়া হয় পুলিশকেও। কিন্তু সেই সতর্কবার্তা না মেনে রাতের অন্ধকারে বুথ পরিদর্শন করে থানায় ফেরার পথে মাইন বিস্ফোরণের শিকার হন পলামুর ছত্তরপুর থানার পুলিশ। ল্যান্ডমাইন ফেটে ওসি-সহ সাত পুলিশের মৃত্যু হয় ঘটনাস্থলে। পুলিশের দাবি, পলামুরই ছসেনাবাদে কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনীর গুলিতে চার মাওবাদীর মৃত্যু ঘটেছে। রাত পর্যন্ত অবশ্য কোনও মৃতদেহ মেলেনি।

সকাল থেকেই উত্তপ্ত হয়ে ওঠে ঝাড়খণ্ডের প্রথম দফার নির্বাচন। আজ ২৪টি আসনে ভোট হয়েছে, অধিকাংশই মাওবাদী অধ্যুষিত এলাকায়। আগে থেকেই সেখানে ছিল ভোট বয়কটের ডাক। মাওবাদীদের হুমকির মুখে ভোট করতে গিয়ে রক্তাক্ত হয়ে ওঠে গিরিডি, পলামু, লাতেহার ও চাতরার বিভিন্ন এলাকা। রাজনৈতিক দলগুলির মধ্যে অবশ্য কম বুথেই গোলমাল হয়েছে। প্রতিবন্ধকতা যা এসেছে, তা মাওবাদীদের তরফেই। তার জেরে কোথাও বুথ ফাঁকা ছিল সারা দিন, জঙ্গিরা কোথাও বুথের দখল নিয়েছিল, কোথাও বা ভোটযন্ত্র নিয়ে পালিয়ে গিয়েছে। এমন উত্তপ্ত পরিস্থিতির আশঙ্কা ছিল প্রশাসনেরও। তাই নকশাল প্রভাবিত এলাকা থেকে আজ রাতে ভোটযন্ত্র নিয়ে সদরে রওনা হয়নি কোনও ভোটকর্মী। বিভিন্ন বুথে বা ব্লক অফিসে সারা রাত সেগুলি পাহারা দেবে আধাসামরিক বাহিনীর জওয়ানেরা।

সিমারিয়া গঞ্জ থেকে কতই বা দূরে লাওলাং? টেনেটুনে দশ কিলোমিটার। সিমারিয়া-চাতরা সড়ক থেকে বাঁ দিকে বেঁকে যে কাঁচা রাস্তা গিয়েছে লাওলাং ব্লকের দিকে, তার সঙ্গে মিল নেই সদর এলাকার। ফাঁকা ধূ ধূ প্রান্তরে বেশ খানিকটা তফাতে বিক্ষিপ্ত জনপদ। মাঝেমধ্যে দু-একটি বুথ।

ভিতরে ভোটকর্মী, বাইরে অস্ত্র হাতে আধা সামরিক বাহিনীর জওয়ান। তবু, বেলা ১২টাতেও লোকের দেখা নেই।

লাওলাংয়ে সারি দিয়ে একের পর গ্রাম কাটিয়া, মানাতু, ঘুটিয়া ও লামটা। আর পাঁচটা দিনের মতোই শান্ত, নির্জন। ভোটের দিনেও রাজনীতির আঁচ পড়েনি দৈনন্দিন জীবনে। একই পরিস্থিতি খাপ, গোরহাই, ভাং ও হারদির। কোথাও ব্যস্ততা নেই, নেতা-কর্মীদের ছোট্ট ছুটি নেই, অভিযোগের বালাই নেই। ভোটও নেই। কারণ একটাই, ওই সব গ্রামে রয়েছে নকশালদের ভোট বয়কটের ডাক। সেই নিষেধাজ্ঞা এড়িয়ে গণতান্ত্রিক অধিকাররক্ষার তাগিদ দেখাননি কেউ।

এই ছবি কেবল সিমারিয়ার নয়, পলামু, লাতেহার, গিরিডি ও চাতরার সমস্ত নকশাল-এলাকারই। বহু চেষ্ঠাতেও আজ সেখানে ভোট করতে পারেনি রাজ্য প্রশাসন। বলা ভাল, ভোট করতে দিল না নকশালেরা। অথচ, আয়োজনের কোনও ত্রুটি ছিল না। সব বুথেই ছিল কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনী। তবু, ভোট বয়কটের রাঙাচোখ উপেক্ষা করে নকশাল প্রভাবিত বহু গ্রামে ভোট দিতে আসেনি স্থানীয় মানুষ।

লাতেহারেও ছিল নকশাল-ছায়া। সকাল থেকে কপ্টারে নজরদারি শুরু করে পুলিশ। উড়ান থেকে খবর পেয়েই বালুমাথে কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনী চ্যালেঞ্জ করে নকশালদের। ঘটনা চারেক দু'পক্ষের গুলি যুদ্ধের পরে এলাকা শান্ত হলেও খুব কমই ভোট পড়েছে বালুমাথে। মণিকাতেও ভোট পড়েছে ধীর গতিতে। দিনের শেষে পুলিশের হিসেবে ১৮ শতাংশ ভোটযন্ত্রেও বাধা পেয়েছে ভোটের গতি। কোডারমা, গাণ্ডে, ভবনাথপুর, গিরিডি ও বগোদরের মতো বেশ কিছু এলাকায় ভোটের শুরুতেই বিকল হয়ে গিয়েছে ভোটযন্ত্র।

ভোট দেয়নি নকশাল অধ্যুষিত চৈনপুরের একাধিক গ্রাম। চাট্টিবাড়ি, ভারগাঁওয়া, সিমরা ঘুরে কাল রাতেও নকশালরা মনে করিয়ে গিয়েছেন ভোট বয়কটের কথা। তাই, বাড়ি থেকে বুথে নিয়ে আসা যায়নি গ্রামের অধিকাংশকে। পুলিশই কবুল করেছে, গ্রামগুলিতে দেখা পাওয়া যায়নি বহু মানুষের। অনুমান, ভোটের আগে পাহাড়-জঙ্গলের 'নিরাপদ আশ্রয়' বেছে নিয়েছিলেন তাঁরা। ভোট দিতেই শুধু নয়, ভোট নিতেও বেঁকে বসেছিলেন ভোটকর্মীরা। প্রশাসন জানিয়েছে, কেন্দ্রীয় বাহিনী দেরি করে পৌঁছনোয় চাতরার হাট্টারগঞ্জের গ্রামে যেতে অস্বীকার করেন ভোটকর্মীরা। ফলে, দিনের শুরুতে ভোট নেওয়া বন্ধ ছিল সেখানকার ১০টি বুথে।

নির্বাচন কমিশনের নির্দেশ ছিল, উপড়ে ফেলতে হবে ভোট বয়কটের পোস্টার-ব্যানার। ঝাড়খণ্ডের মুখ্যসচিবকে ডেকে জানিয়েও দেওয়া হয়েছিল সে কথা। তবু, ভোটের পরেও প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামেগঞ্জে জ্বলজ্বল করছে সেগুলি। ঝাড়খণ্ডে মাওবাদীদের শাসন যে এতটুকু কমেনি, এই ভোট তা চোখে আঙুল দিয়ে দেখিয়ে দিল।

04 FEB 2005

None-of-the-above option on ballot valid: EC

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Jan. 24. — In a significant development, the Election Commission today supported a petition before the Supreme Court seeking a right for the voter to cast "negative vote" in an election so as to enable him to say that none of the candidates in the fray were worth his vote.

This statement was given by Election Commission counsel Mr S

Muralidhar before a Bench (coram: Lahoti, CJ, and Mathur, J) which in a lighter vein said: "EC is hand-in-glove with the petitioner."

The Bench also issued notice to Attorney-General Mr Milon Banerjee and postponed the matter for further hearing after four weeks.

The court asked Mr Muralidhar to bring on record materials pertaining to provi-

sions on negative vote adopted in other countries so as to assist the court in forming an opinion on the issue.

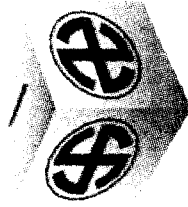
The petition filed by the People's Union for Civil Liberties through advocate Mr Sanjay Parikh stated that at present, the voter who wanted to exercise the right not to vote had to tell the returning officer, who would register his name and address in an elec-

The EC supported a petition before the Supreme Court seeking a right for the voter to cast 'negative vote'

tion book, thus violating the code of secret ballot.

Keeping this in mind, the Election Commission had written to the Centre, once in 2001 and later in 2004, suggesting amendments to the Representation of People Act so that provision could be made in the ballot papers and the electronic voting machines (EVMs) allowing casting of negative vote.

Election run-up reports on page 5



TELEPHONE NO. 2333333

EC warns of tough action

SI-1
Statesman News Service

J. B. K. (Rab)
'I am free to use Godhra report'

PATNA, Jan. 20. — The Election Commission today hardened its stand and sought to dispel the impression that it had been reduced to a "warning institution". "Tough action will be taken against those who violate the model code if our patience is tested too much. Political parties must realise this and not drive me to take action," the chief election commissioner, Mr TS Krishnamurthy, told a press conference here today.

Answering questions, he iterated that the Banerjee report should not be used for political purposes. Neither should it be given a communal colour. "Everyone will have to abide by the code of conduct and the law of the land. If the assurances are only on paper,



PATNA, Jan. 20. — Mr Lalu Prasad today ridiculed the NDA for seeking a ban on the use of the Banerjee report on the Godhra train fire. Nor for that matter had the EC placed any restriction on him, he said. "I will place the report in Parliament soon," he told a press conference after releasing his party's manifesto. "I have not said anything on my own. I have only quoted facts from the press release issued by Justice Banerjee in New Delhi," he remarked. — PTI

we will take serious action at the proper time. We hope the parties learn the lesson and act with wisdom." He clarified that the EC did not believe in issuing warnings only. "Orders have been given to lodge FIRs against those violating the code," the CEC added.

The CEC also said that the demand for a one-day poll in Bihar was turned down after a review of the situation.

He said he has asked the state government to engage *Shiksha Mitras* to conduct the polling in view of the continuing strike by nearly three lakh non-gazetted state employees.

The EC has also directed the Bihar government to book offenders under the SC/ST Atrocities (Prevention) Act if they force the weaker sections not to exercise their franchise.

More reports on page 4

Lalu okays Cong plan on 80 seats

Press Trust of India
Patna, January 14

RJD PRESIDENT Lalu Prasad Yadav today said his party had "no objection" to the Congress fighting 80 seats in the Bihar Assembly polls, forcing friendly contests in many seats. He added that this wouldn't have any negative impact on the UPA's health.

"The RJD will not field its candidates for the 14 seats having sitting Congress MLAs, but for the rest, we have no objection to friendly contests," Lalu told reporters. While the Congress had won 12 seats in the last Assembly polls, two independents — Ravindra Kumar Mishra and Aditya Singh — had later joined the party.

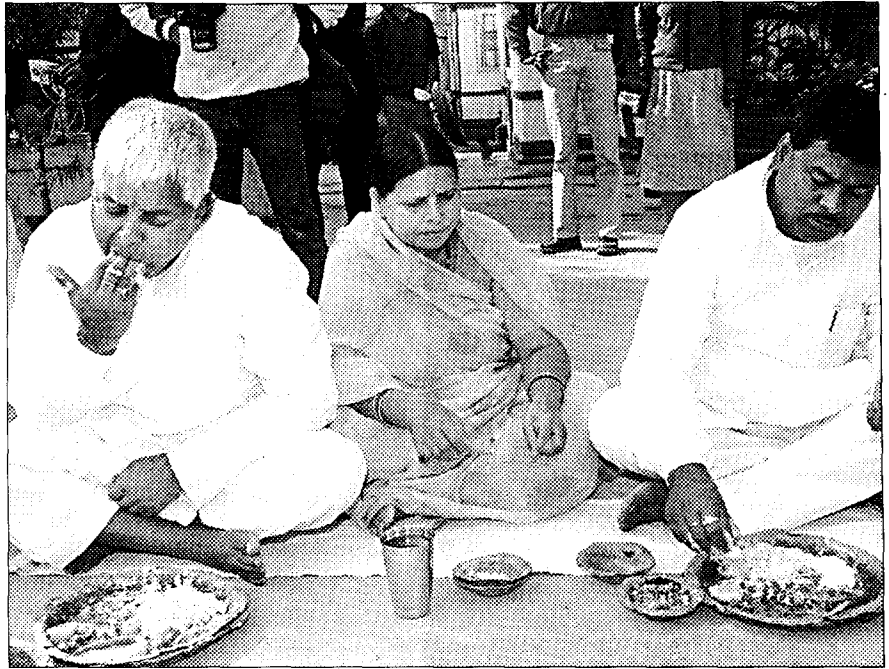
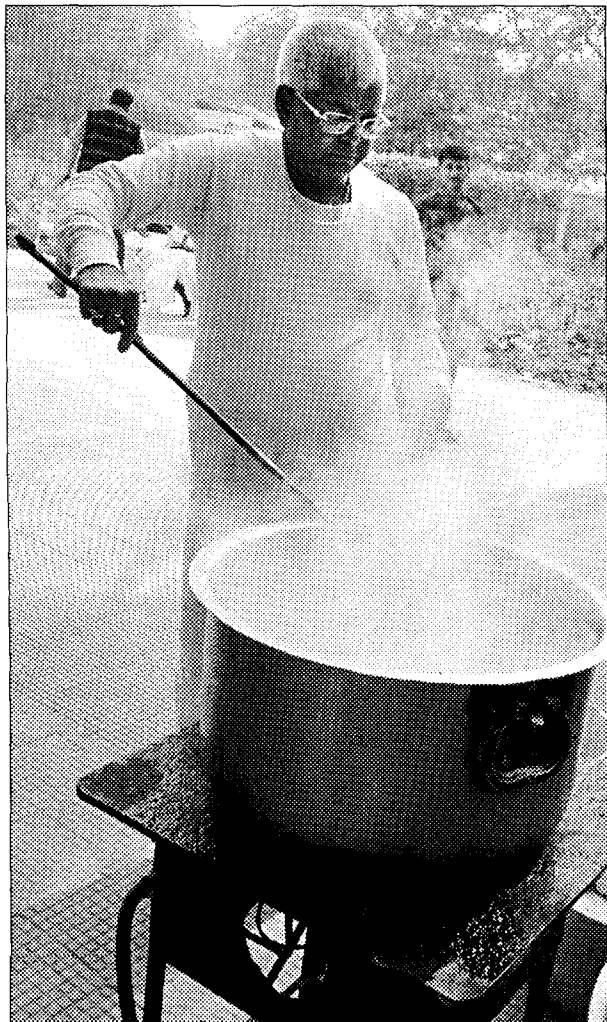
Asked if the talks with the Congress had broken, Lalu replied in the negative and said RJD representatives were still in touch with the party leadership to "remove the irritants".

He made it clear that their priority was to defeat the "communal" NDA. "This, I have conveyed to Congress president Sonia Gandhi during my recent meeting with her," he said.

Lalu evaded a direct reply on how many seats the RJD would contest, saying, "The talks are on... adequate number of seats will be spared for the allies in accordance with their strength."

The RJD leader said his party would have seat adjustments with the NCP, the CPI and the CPI(M). "I will also even campaign for Congress nominees in 14 seats," he said. The Congress had yesterday indicated that it would fight 80 seats in Bihar and would have friendly contests with the RJD on several seats.

Taking a dig at his bete noire Lok Janshakti Party chief and Union minister Ramvilas Paswan, Lalu said: "He (Paswan) is surrounded by gangsters —



PTI PHOTOS

WHAT'S COOKING? RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav (left) cooks for the traditional Makar Sankranti *bhoj* at his Patna residence on Friday. (Top) Lalu enjoys the feast of *chura-dahi* and *tilkut* with wife Rabri Devi and her brother, Subhash Yadav.

each of whom is demanding 50 seats for his supporters."

Asked if he would invite Paswan to join the RJD-led alliance, he said, "Paswan seems to have taken a vow to oppose us. There is no question of extending an invitation to him to join the secular alliance."

While asserting that his party would be voted to power for the fourth consecutive term, the RJD boss said, "There is no vacancy for the chief minister's post in Bihar and the electorate will renew our contract with them for another five years with Rabri Devi as the chief minister."

Lalu has the edge

WITH OR without the Congress, Lalu Prasad Yadav is comfortably poised for the polls, unlike the divided Opposition. Although the alliance with the Congress has not materialised the way he would want it to, the division in the Opposition ranks has strengthened his hands.

Though BJP and JD(U) have agreed on seat-sharing, their decision to issue separate manifestos is indicative of the division in their ranks. The RJD believes the anti-Lalu votes will get divided among the BJP, the JD(U), the LJP and even the Congress. IANS, Patna

JMM decides to fight RJD

Press Trust of India
Ranchi, January 14

A SPLIT in the anti-BJP votes appeared likely in Jharkhand, with the JMM today saying it would contest against the RJD in the Assembly elections.

"We will contest in all the 35 seats we have got (after an electoral understanding with the Congress)... But, we will also contest in places where the RJD fields candidates against us," Durga Soren, son of JMM supremo Sibu Soren, said.

Under the seat-sharing agreement, the JMM will contest 35 of the 81 seats and the Congress 33, leaving 13 for the RJD and Left parties — all UPA allies at the Centre. The Congress had yesterday released its first list of six candidates, including Ajay Dubey, son of party MP C.S. Dubey, for

Mrigendra Pratap Singh has been with the BJP for over 25 years. "How can such leaders become secular overnight?"

CPI-ML(LIBERATION)

Bishrampur seat in Jharkhand. The other candidates are Manoj Kumar Yadav (Barhi), Mahesh Singh (Hazaribag), Sanjay Paswan (Chatra-SC), K.N. Tripathi (Daltonganj) and Anant P. Dev (Bhawnathpur).

The RJD is unhappy over the "unilateral" pact between the JMM and the Congress, and has already shortlisted its candidates for Jharkhand, though it has

put on hold distribution of symbols hoping that an understanding could be reached at the last minute.

Meanwhile, the CPI-ML(Liberation) hit out at Lalu, alleging that he had embraced at least six leaders whose politics was based on "communal lines".

"Joining hands with Mrigendra Pratap Singh is startling... Singh had been associated with the communal BJP for over 25 years," CPI-ML(Liberation) state unit secretary Subhendu Sen said. "How can such leaders become secular overnight? Who is fooling whom?" Singh joined the RJD after quitting the Jharkhand Speaker's post. His resignation followed denial of a BJP ticket.

Earlier, five JD(U) leaders who had supported the NDA government joined the RJD.

Paswan defers LJP list to help Cong



SWEET AND SOUR: LJP chief Ramvilas Paswan offers the traditional sweet, *tilkut*, to a Muslim party leader on Makar Sankranti, while (right) unhappy ticket-seekers block the main gate of the party office in Patna.



PTI PHOTOS

Press Trust of India
Patna, January 14

LOK JANSHAKTI Party (LJP) leader Ramvilas Paswan today deferred the release of his party's list for next month's Bihar polls saying he was awaiting the Congress' list so as not to harm its nominees' chances. The move is significant as seat-sharing talks between the Congress and the RJD seem to have hit a roadblock.

"I don't want to harm the Congress nominees. So, I am awaiting the release of its list of candidates to avoid friendly contests. We would like the Congress to win every seat where we support it," Paswan, who

had offered chief ministership to the Congress recently, told reporters.

In an apparent bid to curry favour with the Congress, which earlier appeared keen on having an electoral pact with Lalu Prasad's RJD, Paswan said, "The LJP parliamentary board has finalised the names of the candidates, but I have deferred the announcement to have an idea of the Congress nominees."

"If need be I will even campaign for the Congress candidates," he said, but did not "absolutely" rule out the possibility of friendly contests at some places.

"My priority is to defeat the NDA and RJD candidates and I will leave

no stone unturned towards achieving this," he said.

In his talks with Congress leader Ahmed Patel, Paswan had requested him not to field candidates in the six seats that the LJP had won in the last elections and the seats of four MLAs who later joined his party. "If this does not come about we may have friendly fights in some seats," he said.

Replying to a question, Paswan said the LJP's list will be announced "in good time". The LJP parliamentary board was in a huddle till late in the night yesterday and Paswan was expected to announce the list today.

The last date for filing nomina-

tions for 64 seats going to polls in the first phase of polls (February 3) is January 17.

Earlier in the day, RJD supremo Lalu Prasad said he had no objection to the Congress fielding 80 candidates in Bihar, which would make friendly contests inevitable in many constituencies.

Lalu, however, declared friendly fights would have no "negative impact" on the health of the UPA. He added that his party would not field candidates in the 14 constituencies held by the Congress.

Lalu said talks were still on with the Congress and his party's other prospective allies — the CPI, CPI(M) and the NCP.

BSP to go it alone in three states

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 14

THE BSP will go it alone in the Assembly elections in Bihar, Haryana and Jharkhand. While announcing this today, BSP chief Mayawati even ruled out the possibility of "friendly contests" in the three states.

Talking to the media ahead of the party's national executive, Mayawati said the main reason her party was supporting the UPA government was to "keep the BJP out of power". She said the national executive would review the organisational strength and performance of the party in various elections over the past year, apart from taking stock of the latest political situation. "We'll go it alone in Bihar, Jharkhand and Haryana. There'll be no external or internal understanding or any friendly contest", she told reporters ahead of her party's national executive meeting here.

About her "closeness" with Sonia Gandhi, she said she had extended support to the Congress keeping in mind the interests of the downtrodden sections.

Cong jumps gun, to contest 80 seats in Bihar

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 13

THE BRINKMANSHIP between the Congress and its ally Rashtriya Janata Dal over the Bihar polls continued today, with Sonia Gandhi's party jumping the gun and letting it be known that it would contest 80 seats.

RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, whose talks with Sonia had broken down yesterday because he wouldn't give the Congress more than 27 constituencies, was unfazed. He insisted that seat-sharing talks were still in progress among the UPA partners, but hinted that some constituencies could now see "friendly" contests.

The Congress, too, took care to signal that its alliance with Lalu was alive: It said it would not field candidates in the remaining 160-odd seats, where the RJD, the NCP and the Left

have sitting legislators.

The Congress hasn't officially announced its decision; but with party leaders openly talking about it, the party is clearly trying to exert pressure on Lalu, who had said the RJD, the NCP and the Left would announce the distribution of seats on Friday in Patna.

The Congress decision, however, came as a shock to senior RJD leader and Union minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who was informed of the development by reporters. He had earlier spoken of the possibility of Lalu returning to Delhi in the evening for seat-sharing talks with Congress leaders.

Sources said the Congress move, in effect, means that the RJD and other allies would not put up nominees in the 25 seats where the Congress has sitting legislators or came in second



BATTLE OF NERVES: Sonia Gandhi and Lalu Yadav

last time. As for the remaining 55 seats, which include constituencies where the RJD came in second to the NDA, the field is wide open.

The seat-sharing talks between the two parties had been deadlocked over the Congress's demand for 85 seats in Bihar and Lalu's reluctance to cede more than 27 on the basis of the Con-

gress's performance in the 2000 Assembly elections. But the Congress leadership, who had fielded over 200 candidates in 2000 when the party fought the elections on its own, is under pressure from ticket-seekers to demand a larger share.

Sources said the Congress has been talking to the RJD-Left-NCP combine on the one hand

and with Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti on the other.

The Congress's central election committee met in the evening today to clear the party's candidates for the first phase of the elections, involving 64 seats in Bihar. The Congress, which has only one sitting legislator, will contest 22 of these seats.

The Congress decision is the second successive shock it has given the RJD, Left parties and NCP within a week. Last week, the Congress and JMM announced an electoral pact for the Jharkhand Assembly polls, covering 68 of the 81 seats in the newly-formed state. An angry Lalu and his Left allies had rejected it, saying they had been given a raw deal. Under the agreement, Congress was given 33 seats and the JMM 35, with a mere 13 left over for the RJD and the Left parties.

g. b. verma (hau)

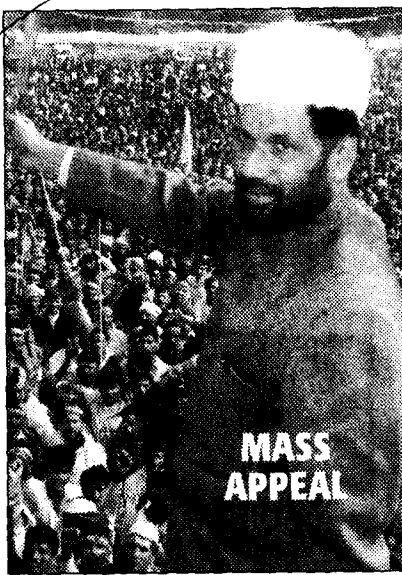
Failure of Lalu-Sonia Seat-Sharing Talks Raises Hopes For LJP Chief

Paswan casts alliance net on Cong

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 JANUARY

If there was one who was keenly awaiting the outcome of the seat-sharing talks between Congress president Sonia Gandhi and RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav, it was Ms Gandhi's next-door neighbour, Ram Vilas Paswan. With reports of the failure of the discussions between the two sides trickling in, the Lok Janshakti Party chief moved fast to throw the alliance bait at the Congress. Mr Paswan drove to Ms Gandhi's residence at 10 Janpath within an hour of his bete noire Lalu Prasad Yadav's departure after the conclusion of the Congress-RJD seat-sharing talks, and remained closeted with her for about an hour.

Mr Paswan, during this meeting, reiterated his desire to forge an alliance with the Congress for the coming Assembly polls, and said he was willing to go any length to clinch the deal. "I told her that the people of Bihar want a change in the state as they're fed up of the present government," the LJP chief told newsmen later in the day, adding that, "I appealed to her to respect the sentiments of the people, in general, and the Congressmen in particular." The Union steel and chemicals and fertiliser minister claimed that if his party



and the Congress join hands, the alliance would "sweep" the polls. "Congress' prospects in the state will receive a massive boost and it'll be on the upswing," Mr Paswan asserted.

At the root of Mr Paswan's calculation is his assessment that an LJP-Congress seat-sharing

deal would ensure a steep erosion in Lalu's support base. The M-Y (Muslim-Yadav) combine, which forms the core of RJD's socio-political base, would collapse, with the Muslims flocking towards the new "secular" arrangement. An LJP-Congress alliance, LJP supporters argue, would also provide an attractive destination to the upper castes, who have no love lost for the RJD strongman. They would switch their allegiance overnight, the argument goes, from the JD(U)-BJP combine to the LJP-Congress grouping.

When combined with Mr Paswan's traditional support base, the new social coalition comprising Muslims-upper castes-Dalits has the potential, LJP loyalists claim, of emerging as the rallying point for all anti-Lalu forces.

Mr Paswan sought to lure the Congress by offering them as many seats as they wanted to contest in Bihar, as well as the chief minister's chair. "I am not in the running for the post. We want to anoint a Congressman on the chair," he said.

To prove his sincerity, Mr Paswan offered to withdraw his party's candidates in Haryana in favour of the Congress nominees. "We'll contest a minimal number of seats. Our main aim is to ensure the defeat of all communal and anti-Congress forces."

RJD, Cong may part in Laluland

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 JANUARY

THE alliance talks between the RJD and the Congress for the Bihar Assembly elections was tottering on the brink of collapse on Wednesday after Mr Lalu Yadav refused to upgrade his offer of 25 seats to the Congress in the 243-member Bihar Assembly. Sonia Gandhi who joined the negotiations is learnt to have insisted on at least 50 seats for her party.

Even though both parties are sticking to their respective positions, the Left parties are making a last-ditch effort. The secular alliance in the state seems heading for a split with the RJD looked set to form a front with the CPI, CPM and NCP. This could prompt the

Congress to accept the isolated Ram Vilas Paswan as an ally.

The alliance between the Congress and Mr Paswan will not suit Mr Yadav as it will, for the first time in many years, provide the minority community with an alternative secular platform. Although there is nothing tangible yet to suggest that Muslims are once again flocking towards the Congress, Mr Yadav may not like the coming election to offer a barometer for the Congress to assess its standing among the community.

The talks hit the roadblock on Wednesday when Sonia Gandhi told Mr Yadav at a meeting at 10 Janpath in the presence of her managers Arjun Singh and Ahmed Patel, that the formula mooted by the RJD was not acceptable to her state unit. She told

the RJD strongman that she cannot overlook the views of the PCC. Even as the alliance appeared unravelling, Mr Yadav persisted with the "solidarity" sound bytes. "No force on the land can break relation between me and Soniji and the alliance between our parties in the UPA. We may have differences over the seat-sharing formula in Bihar and Jharkhand, which we would try to sort out. But even if it fails, the alliance in UPA at the Centre would remain intact to defeat the communal forces," Mr Yadav told reporters outside 10 Janpath.

Within minutes of Mr Yadav leaving 10 Janpath, Ms Gandhi held a meeting with Ramvilas Paswan, making it clear that the Congress was now looking options beyond the RJD. After the

meeting Mr Paswan said: "I have been always for an alliance with the Congress to help the people of Bihar who desperately want to oust the RJD regime. I would welcome if the Congress accepts my offer." Later Congress spokesman Jayanthi Natarajan said the party "is keeping all options and talks with Mr Paswan is part of it."

On the other side, Mr Yadav was quickly firming up a new front with the CPM, CPI and NCP at the CPM headquarters. He has offered the CPI 12, CPM 7 and NCP nearly four seats by the virtue of which he party would be able to contest over 200 seats. As the Congress-RJD talks are failing, the Left and the NCP are trying to use their new-found utility for a bargain.

NDA FORGES AHEAD OF UPA ON UNITY FRONT

Cong, RJD strike tough postures on poll alliance

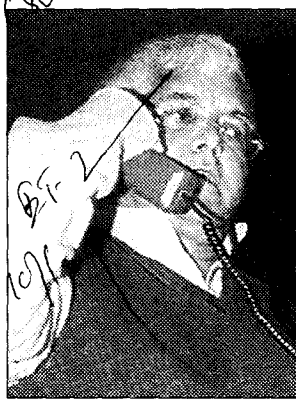
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 9 JANUARY

THE Congress and the RJD on Sunday returned to the negotiating table after the former agreed to allot three more seats to Lalu Prasad Yadav's outfit in Jharkhand. At the same time, the Congress, which may have to part with the three seats from its kitty, slapped a claim of over 70 seats in Bihar — something that is unacceptable for Mr Yadav.

At the end of a two-hour meeting at the residence of Arjun Singh, both the sides were engaged in a war of nerves, trying to see who will blink first. At the same time, both sides announced that talks for arriving at an amicable solution would continue.

The Congress' hard bargain on the Bihar front signals the party's determination to try and revive the party base, even by risking a rift with its ally, RJD. The Congress camp thinks that with it leading a government again at the Centre, the time is ripe to experiment with its revival plank in Bihar.

The party seems to be thinking that the Muslims in the state, who have crossed over to the RJD, may be in a rethinking mood now. The Congress seems all the more keen to make its electoral revival at this polls be-



LALU: READY FOR BIG FIGHT

cause otherwise it may have to wait for another five years. Even as the Congress is taking on Mr Yadav, who has over 20 MPs in Lok Sabha, it's also reportedly warming up to Mayawati, who has close to 20 MPs.

But on the other hand, Mr Yadav finds the Congress demand unrealistic for many reasons. Besides his unwillingness to give the Congress a foothold to revive itself at the cost of his Yadav-Muslim vote bank, he is also hard-pressed to accommodate the CPI and the CPM demands for 20 and 10 seats respectively.

However, the RJD's weakness in snapping the ties with Congress in Bihar, some thing that it had threatened to do on Satur-

day, was evident on Sunday when Mr Yadav resumed his talks with Mr Singh and M.L. Fotedar, notwithstanding his stated reservations about them on Saturday. He returned to the negotiation table after Sonia Gandhi on Sunday conveyed to the RJD and Left camps that the talks have to be at the level of her two deputed representatives.

Though both the sides agreed to carry on with the talks along with the CPI, they are still playing around the bush. Though the RJD camp said on Sunday night it was offered three more seats from the Congress kitty in Jharkhand, the Congress is yet to formally acknowledge it as it is trying to get a Bihar package for itself from Mr Yadav in return. "There has been no talk of reopening the Jharkhand formula yet," said Mr Singh when asked pointedly on that.

However, both Mr Singh and Mr Yadav spoke about the need to carry on with the talks in the coming days. Trying to make up for his public criticism of Mr Singh on Saturday, Mr Yadav said on Sunday he considered the senior Congress leader "as a senior leader and a guardian".

When asked about his "threat" on Saturday, the wily Mr Yadav quipped: "What threat? We are talking."

Cong, JMM finalise Jharkhand poll pact

Agencies
New Delhi, January 7

THE CONGRESS and the JMM on Friday reached an electoral understanding for next month's Assembly polls in Jharkhand. As per the pact, the JMM would contest 35 seats and the Congress 33.

The remaining 13 seats in the 81-member House have gone to RJD and Left parties. "Under the agreement, JMM will contest 35 seats and Congress 33. The remaining 13 will be shared by other allies," JMM chief and Union minister Sibu Soren told reporters here after meeting UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi.

Senior Congress leader and Union minister Arjun Singh, who was negotiating with JMM leaders, was present when Soren met Sonia. To a question as to who

Decision 'unilateral'

THE CPI(M) on Friday expressed reservations about the Congress-JMM electoral pact.

"It is a unilateral announcement and not in line with our thinking," CPI(M) polit bureau member Sitaram Yechury said. Yechury, however, said his party and other Left parties would continue discussions on the matter with the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the Congress.



LONG ROAD AHEAD:
Yechury and Soren

PTI, Ranchi

would be the chief minister in the event of the combine getting majority, Soren said the issue would be decided after the polls. Such a decision, he added, would be taken by Sonia. Arjun Singh concurred. As for the reported demand by RJD for mo-

re seats, Soren said he would discuss the matter with RJD leader and Union minister Laloo Prasad Yadav.

Congress and RJD leaders were scheduled to meet again on the seat-sharing arrangement for the forthcoming Assembly polls.

BJP to tie up with JD(U) for Bihar, Jharkhand polls

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 4. The Bharatiya Janata Party will enter into an alliance with the Janata Dal (United) for the Assembly elections in Bihar and Jharkhand. The announcement was made today after a meeting of the party's Parliamentary Board.

However, the JD(U) camp is divided over the issue of alliance. The Lok Janshakti Party of Ram Vilas Paswan had stated that the JD(U) could have an alliance with it only if the latter severed its ties with the BJP.

In the last Assembly elections in Bihar, the BJP contested 84 seats, leaving the rest to the JD(U), but now it wants to contest more seats. In the year 2000 the BJP's seat share was larger in what is now Jharkhand while the JD(U) contested the majority of the seats is what is now left of Bihar.

"*Pandrah saal, bura haal, sarkar badaliye, Bihar badliye.*" (Fifteen years and it is a mess. Change the Government, change Bihar). That is the BJP's slogan for the election and

posters conveying this have been pasted all over the office of the party's 'prabhari' (in-charge) in the State, Arun Jaitley.

The major question before the BJP now is whether the JD(U) will remain intact in the run-up to the elections. While former Defence Minister, George Fernandes, is firmly in favour of seat sharing with the BJP, some other leaders — Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav — do not share his antipathy towards the Congress.

In Jharkhand, the BJP fears that it will be an uphill task to regain the voters' confidence. Corruption has become a major issue and there is a strong anti-incumbency factor working against it. Party leaders and workers themselves admit that the Jharkhand Chief Minister, Arjun Munda, has been most ineffective.

The BJP central election committee will meet on January 8 and 9 to begin the process of selection of candidates but it is highly unlikely that the seat-sharing exercise would be completed by then.

Patna DM resigns

Statesman News Service

PATNA, Dec. 31. — The Election Commission's warnings notwithstanding, high-profile Patna DM, Mr Gautam Goswami, today chose to bid adieu to the outgoing year by resigning from the IAS.

His resignation, sent to chief secretary Mr KAH Subramaniam citing "personal reasons", will be effective from 2 January 2005. Mr Goswami is the third Lalu-loyalist in the past few years to have either resigned from the IAS or left Bihar. "I have personal reasons", he told The Statesman.

Sources close to him however, said, that the management of the Sahara Group, of which he had been invited to join as vice-president, had told Mr Goswami to inform them about his decision by 2 January. It was this message that apparently pushed him to resign.

Earlier, he had sought permission from the government to go on leave to do the job he was offered in this non-banking company.

When government didn't respond to his request, he proceeded on a casual leave on 24 December. The EC reacted by directing the DM "not to go on leave till the completion of the poll process". According to sources, the EC spared Mr Goswami, who, prima facie, was found to have ignored a blatant violation of the model code by RJD.

He resumed duty on 25 December. However, the "lucrative offer" appeared to have weighed heavily as he ignored the consequences of violating the EC guidelines.

On asked what made him want to quit, he said: "Everyone wants to learn more".

Mr Goswami isn't the only Lalu-loyalist to have quit. Some years back, Dr Ajay Kumar, a senior IPS officer, who managed to get postings of his choice, resigned to join Tata. Mrs Rajbala Verma, who was one of the few DMs to have occupied the chair in Patna for a long time, on the other hand, opted for the Jharkhand cadre. IPS officers Mr Ajit Joy and Mr Rituraj have sought voluntary retirement.