

Just N-deal on his R-card

Manmohan Singh has led from behind and he comes upfront only when he is absolutely sure that a statement from him will not offend Sonia Gandhi and Left parties, says PR Ramesh

THIS may be an aside to the main quota story. Reports have been circulating for the past 72 hours that the Prime Minister would intervene to take the reservation issue off the boil. Though it goes against the grain of the prime minister's approach — Mr Manmohan Singh has always dodged controversial issues rather than grasped it — there were expectations of an intervention now that a compromise appears to have been worked out. But there is no confirmation from the government about the much-specified prime ministerial intervention to clear the mess. Nor is there any denial that some mischievous elements are conspiring against the prime minister by exposing him to the controversial quota issue — something that has ignited scores of bush fires all over the country.

As usual, he has asked defence minister Pranab Mukherjee to bring agitators to the negotiating table. With quota-freaks flexing muscles and political parties in no position to back the agitators, Mukherjee has a tough task at hand.

This is typical of the prime minister. He has always led from behind and he comes out only when he is absolutely sure that a statement from the prime ministerial pulpit will not offend two important players of the present regime — Ms Sonia Gandhi and the Left parties. Never mind this means waffle and timidity.

This is not to say that the prime minister has not taken 'just' positions in the past two years. The stand that he took on the Indo-US nuclear deal and New Delhi's vote against Iran were two such instances. But he did so after lining up support from the Congress president. And this support from the Congress gave him enough elbowroom to deal with the noisy corner in the Left.

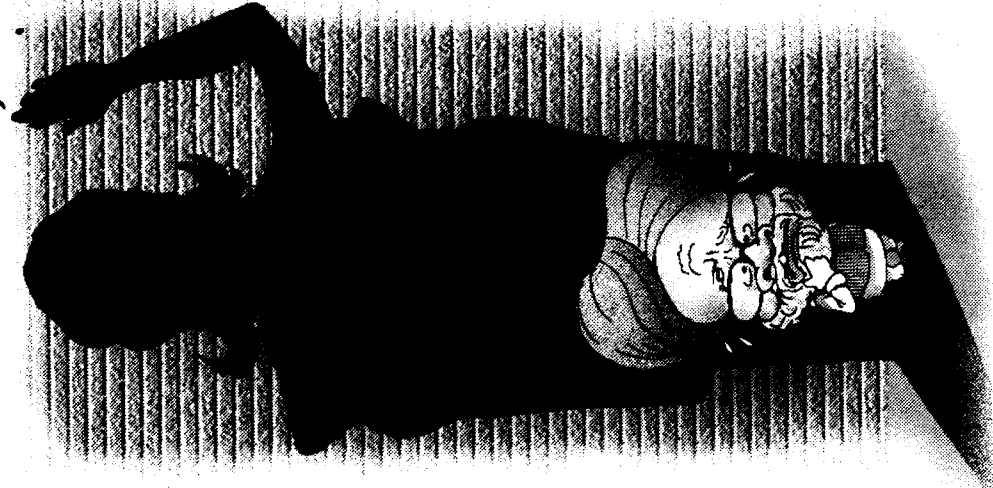
But on a host of domestic policy matters, his response has been far from encouraging. He can always explain that coalition pressures limit the scope for radical reform. But this excuse may not be available for him when confronted with questions about his inability to improve the quality of politics.

Mr Singh not just inducted men with criminal records into his government, he was in the forefront of defending these men. And just like other practitioners of the trade, he too mouthed the specious argument that no one should be considered guilty unless proven conclusively.

He did not display a different leadership mettle when the Supreme Court came down heavily on the government's reluctance to function within the constraints of institutional procedures and constitutional law. On the dissolution of the Bihar assembly, the Supreme Court endorsed the view that partisan interests played a major role in the decision — a cynical subversion of the rule of law. It also said that the government erred in accepting the recommenda-

tions of the governor. But the prime minister still defended the controversial action of the Centre by saying that the government acted on the basis of information available to it.

The Congress leadership does not appear to be worried about this approach. When Singh was selected by Sonia Gandhi for the top post, he was supposed to keep a low profile and handle the affairs of the prime ministerial establishment.



In any case, if one person who really understood that a modest tally of 145 seats for the Congress in the

2004 polls did not translate into a mandate, it was Sonia Gandhi. She knew that managing the Left would be a difficult task. It was the hatred for the BJP that prompted the Left to support the Congress. On economic and foreign policy issues, the two parties are poles apart. And compromise does not come naturally to the Left parties and its leaders.

But things have now reached alarming proportions. The Manmohan team has a HRD minister who is determined to push his quota promise. He thinks that it will help him establish his political relevance. The Congress party's fears of an upper caste backlash against it does not seem to bother him. Nor the suggestions that the Congress does not have a credible leadership to earn the political dividends from the controversial move.

Ministers manning economic portfolios are not making things easy for the prime minister. Commerce minister Kaman Nath pushed cement stocks into the red a few days back when he claimed that the government was planning to ban exports. The prime minister, who is known to be against coming in the way of market forces, remained silent.

Finance minister Chidambaram became the biggest votary of freebies by backing DMK's irresponsible promise of free colour TV and Rs 2/kg rice. This knocked the bottom of the Centre's arguments against populism. No one expected the prime minister to restrain the minister. For, he had backed cheap power promise of two Congress governments, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh. Even his admirers admit that all these have eroded his credibility as an administrator.

Although the leadership is not unhappy with the current arrangement, a signature campaign organised by senior Congress leader Ajit Jogi, pointed to the unbearable lightness of being Singh. Jogi organised signatures of 25 party MPs for a change in leadership at the top. The group wanted Sonia to take over.

Jogi is too seasoned a player and has always displayed an uncanny ability to be on the right side of the leader. Except for a brief period, when he went along with Arjun Singh, he has been a loyalist of successive Congress establishments.

But what was striking was the response of the leadership to Jogi's demand for the removal of the prime minister. Although 24X7 channels claimed that he was snubbed and scolded, it is a fact that the conversation that the leadership's man, Ahmed Patel, had with the former chief minister of Chhattisgarh was a friendly one. "This is not the time to do such things" was the friendly advice. In other words, it was more about timing and less about the act. Incidentally, Chandrasekhar Sahu, a minister in the Manmohan team, was a signatory to the memorandum that asked for the prime minister's removal. But no action has been taken against the minister.

Well begun, but not half done

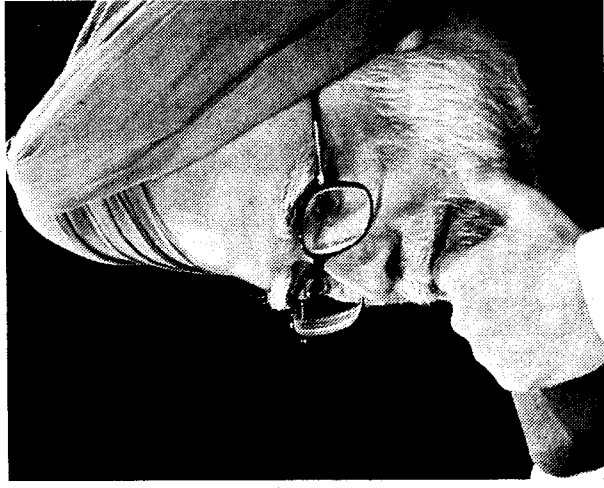
REAPING the multifarious benefits of the boom part of a business cycle and strong global growth while mercifully refraining from throwing any monkey wrenches in the works — this would be the average businessman's assessment of two years of the UPA government. The decision to hand over Delhi and Mumbai airports to private companies for modernisation and to place firm orders to purchase aircraft for the two state-owned carriers, ending years of political dither, would be assessed as the boldest move by the present government.

This perception is not wrong, but it is incomplete. What it misses out is not just the strengthening of the institutional framework of growth, whose impact would be felt slowly but surely, but also the implications of the present government's attempts to broaden the social base of India Shining.

The UPA government has built upon and extended the tax reforms initiated by the NDA regime. The present government mustered the political courage to go ahead with the Value Added Tax system in the states, even with 7 major states abstaining for political rather than economic reasons. The success of implementing VAT in the first year has encouraged the Centre to set a timetable for switching over to nationwide goods and services tax by April 1, 2010. This would be of fundamental importance in fiscal empowerment of the states as well as of the Centre and, therefore, of their ability to carry out meaningful investment in physical and social infrastructure.

Fiscal consolidation at both the Centre and in the states, a result of both sustained tax reform and effective expenditure management, is another achievement, whose benefit is not directly tangible. However, the combined fiscal deficit of the Centre and the states is around two percentage points lower than it was when the government took office in 2004.

This has served to reduce upward pressure on interest rates, even as demand for credit shot up as part of the investment boom. The government's policy of liberalising FII inflows into corporate debt has also helped, as also some significant opening up and rationalisation of foreign direct investment, even in stockish telecom. On the second anniversary of the UPA government, the stock market is troubled and turbulent but over these two years, it has witnessed the broadest and fastest rally in its history, the Sensex trebling without witnessing any ma-



for scams (the IPO scam is nasty enough, but minuscule in size). But the longest lasting contribution to sustained reform from this government would be its efforts, even now only unfolding and yet to be judged successful, to extend reform to the rural areas. The mandate to the banks to treble rural lending, the official support to microfinance and its successful expansion, the Employment Guarantee Scheme — these are designed to bridge the chasm that the reforms unleashed in 1991 have riven between urban India and the countryside. Only sustained growth can reduce poverty.

Sonia orders partymen to shake up UP organisation

CL Manoj
NEW DELHI

AFTER her recent call to the Uttar Pradesh cadre to begin the preparation for the upcoming Assembly elections here, Congress president Sonia Gandhi has placed an ambitious agenda before the party managers of the Hindi heartland — revamping the moth-eaten party machinery in the state.

The move is also aimed at chopping the deadwood and uprooting the entrenched power brokers who have been prospering in the party bureaucracy even when the state Congress fortunes have been declining over the past two decades.

The direction from the Congress chief, at a time when the Congress-Samajwadi Party (SP) war of words is at its peak, is being interpreted by senior leaders as her resolve to make a serious attempt to pump fresh air into the party organisation.

It has, however, defied all past token exercises to make it a presentable outfit after the Mandal and Kamadala waves swept away its rainbow constituency. This is also being interpreted as a signal of both Ms Gandhi and her son Rahul Gandhi stepping out to participate in the experiment to revive the state Congress, which is key to the grand old party's aspirations at the national level.

The focused attention on the organisational revamp, though belated, also signals the realisation that without the back-up of an active and well-oiled party machinery, the charisma of dynasty alone cannot spring miracles in the caste-driven dynamics of UP politics.

Following the direction from Ms Gandhi, Congress central election committee chairman Oscar Fernandes held a meeting with the AICC general secretary in-charge Ashok Gehlot and PCC president Salman Khursheed. It was decided to reconstitute the party committees from top to bottom at state, district and block levels.

First, 70 district Congress Committees (DCCs) and 42 city Congress committees will be recast, along with reconstitution of the PCC executive. Asom leader Pawar Gatwar, the central observer for the state, has been asked to get the list of probable candidates for the 112 district and city committees. Each of these committees comprises 30 to 40 members.

This ambitious brief presents both an opportunity for a new beginning, as well as the potential to trigger resistance from the deadwoods, occupying these committees for many unproductive years.

It includes a provision to change all the committee members who have completed two or more successive terms and replace them with new line of leadership comprising youth and women with the best social mix. A special focus will be on minorities and Dalits and a section of the upper castes.

The exercise, the leaders hope, will also help them to get a grass-root feed back on the controversial OBC quota proposal in higher education.

"We plan to complete the exercise of revamping all the district and city Congress committees along with the PCC executive shortly, so that the leadership could launch its election campaign as well its agitation plan against the all-round failure of the Mulayam Singh Yadav government with a renewed vigour by projecting a new line of leadership across the state," Mr Gehlot told ET.

Sources said Ms Gandhi's decision to make it clear that Mr Khursheed will not be changed in the



run-up to the Assembly polls is aimed at sending a clear message to the anti-Khursheed factions, often accused of being soft towards the SP regime, to close ranks. At the same time, the decision also amounts to asking Mr Khursheed, who has been accused by rivals of organisational failures, to get cracking by taking every group in the state Congress along.

Realising that the biggest challenge of the leadership is to create and maintain a momentum in the lethargic state Congress machinery till the Assembly elections, the AICC and PCC have worked out a series of agitation against the SP regime.

The designated party managers of the eight zones have been asked to organise protests to highlight the failure of the state government. The main election campaign of the state Congress will start from August 9, the Quit India day, by launching a 'Quit Mulayam Government Movement' across the state. Ms Gandhi and her son are expected to participate in some of these programmes.

Despite the AICC posturing about the state Congress 'fighting it alone' in the Assembly polls, sources do hint at the possibility of the party exploring some understanding with 'like-minded anti-SP forces' — VP Singh-anchored Jan Morch being a major attraction.

THE HINDU
MUMBAI
11/11/94

Injustice to Rae Bareli, says Sonia

Slams Mulayam for power cut

Atiq Khan

RAE BARELI: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Saturday accused the Mulayam Singh Yadav Government of according step-motherly treatment to her Rae Bareli parliamentary constituency and said injustice was being done to the people there.

Her criticism here suggests that the face-off between the Mulayam Government and the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime is snowballing into a Centre-State confrontation.

Even as Ms. Gandhi attacked the State Government, Mr. Yadav met Prakash Karat, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), over breakfast in Lucknow. The CPI (M) supports the UPA regime. Both leaders decided to continue their parties' joint struggle against price rise.

Only on Friday did Mr. Yadav assail the UPA Government, at the launch of a dole scheme in Lucknow, for "ignoring the needs of the educated unemployed."

Ms. Gandhi, who began a two-day thanksgiving visit to Rae Bareli after her re-election to the Lok Sabha in May, was besieged by her constituents with complaints, mainly about erratic power supply.

Complaints galore

Talking to mediapersons during her roadshow at Gurbaxganj, she said the State Government enforced unscheduled power

cuts after she was re-elected MP. "Is this justice?"

The UPA chairperson parried a question whether her son and Amethi MP, Rahul Gandhi, would be given an active role in politics, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, where the Congress is facing a challenge from the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Mr. Gandhi is accompanying his mother.

A major issue

Power supply to Rae Bareli is becoming a major issue, as before the May byelection there the State Government announced 24-hour supply in the VIP constituency.

But the order was withdrawn a couple of days after the poll result came.

The former Congress MLA from Sataon, Kamal Nayan Verma, told *The Hindu* that on paper power was being supplied to Rae Bareli for 14 hours. But not even eight-hour supply was being made. "The biggest impact is being felt by farmers," he said.

Curiously enough, there were no power cuts in Rae Bareli on Saturday.

Ashish Shukla, Congress in-charge of the Sataon Assembly constituency, said, "there will be no power cut for two days, but once Ms. Gandhi returns to New Delhi we will again have to contend with outages."

Union Power Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde received similar complaints on a visit to Rae Bareli earlier this week.

THE HINDU

Desperate Measure

Rahul Gandhi offers to lead Congress in UP

11-16
11/5

Dynasty sells. At least Congressmen believe so. Indira, Rajiv, and, to some extent, Sonia have proved that a significant number of Indians respond to the political legacy of the Gandhi family. So, it is not at all surprising that Congressmen look at Rahul Gandhi as the great hope for the party in UP. At present, Congress is not a player in the state; its strength is restricted to a few pockets in central UP. However, there is a sense of disaffection in the state over leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati. A vibrant Congress can benefit from this boredom among UP voters. However, the present leadership of the state Congress is a spent force. It can hardly enthuse people. But, a fresh face, with some charisma, may be able to catch the imagination of the electorate. The belief in Rahul stems from the hope that a Gandhi, who has not held office, can change the discourse currently trapped in the arithmetic of caste and subcaste, and redraw the political map of UP. Easier said than done since Congress has only 45 heads to count in an assembly of 403 seats. The years in the wilderness — Congress last held office in Lucknow in 1989 — have cost the party its organisation. As patronage withered away, people drifted away to other parties and the language of politics was transformed beyond recognition in the heady days of Mandal and masjid.

Congressmen hope that Rahul, who has won a Parliament election from UP, could change all this. His offer to lead the campaign in UP when assembly elections get underway was more a reaction than a predetermined response. Congress is yet to speak on the issue. To be a campaign manager in Rae Bareilly is not the same as heading the ruins of a party in a chaotic state like UP. Another drubbing here, despite Rahul and Sonia, would seal the fate of Congress in the Hindi heartland. The social churning that the state has undergone in the last two decades has thrown up new leaders and new political combines. Congress may need more than the charm of the family to connect with this new UP. The party needs a game plan that is political in content and leaders who can work at the grass roots. Even Indira Gandhi's charisma was built around social and political agendas.

01 MAY 2008

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Lazy lessons from comfortable loser

RADHIKARAMASESHAN

Rae Bareilly, May 6: Propped up against a mound of pillows in his hotel room, a contented Vinay Katiyar says fighting the Rae Bareilly bypoll against Sonia Gandhi has been a "great learning experience".

Lesson One, of course, is that with the Congress president sure to be a comfortable winner, the best option for him is to be a comfortable loser.

Therefore, the BJP candidate has conducted his campaign without sweat, even in the heat and dust of May. The time has been well spent reclining in his air-conditioned room at the tacky Ganesh hotel, with a bit of "jan sampark" (people contact) thrown in between noon and sundown.

The mornings have been lazy, kicking off with a rather spartan breakfast of tea and powdered *sattu* ("the best way to beat the heat", he says). Then, reclined on his bed, a little chit-chat with party workers.

The booked-up hotel with the securitymen around might look like a political beehive to the unwary, but it's nothing of that sort.

Like Rahul Gandhi and Mulayam Singh Yadav, Katiyar gets special security cover. The workers are mostly his kinsmen Kurmis. There's also Premalata Katiyar, an MLA from Vinay's hometown, Kanpur; Rajlaxmi Verma and Rajya Sabha MP Ram Baksh Singh Verma.

The last looks grim when asked what he thought of the elections. "The BJP is nowhere in the picture. We have to see if we come third or fourth," he says before setting out on a *jan sampark* mission.

Katiyar, the reluctant fighter dragged to the battlefield by

party bosses, doesn't mind at all. No regrets, no recriminations.

After all, it's a fight between a "*desi devar*" (indigenous brother-in-law) and his "*videshi bhabhi*" (foreign sister-in-law), he quips, making perhaps his most memorable contribution to the election.

But the feisty champion of the Ram temple feels a bit let down by the lack of enthusiasm from his brothers and sisters in the state unit and Delhi.

"I didn't want to fight, I had just been elected to the Rajya Sabha and Faizabad is my area of work," he says.

Of the three leaders who pressured him to "take up the challenge", two — L.K. Advani and Kalyan Singh — didn't show up. The third, Pramod Mahajan, died.

"Mahajan was the only one to show some involvement. He was on my side when I filed my nomination and he addressed the public. It was his last public meeting. Had he been alive, he would have come and helped me put up a fight," Katiyar declares.

Advani was preoccupied with his rath yatra while Kalyan had bypass surgery. BJP president Rajnath Singh, Katiyar said, was "gracious" enough to address four meetings in the midst of his own yatra, but state BJP chief Kesri Nath Tripathi gave Rae Bareilly a wide berth.

The BJP's "mascot" against Sonia, Sushma Swaraj, had been allotted two days for the constituency but kept away after Mahajan's death.

All this has given the candidate enough time and solitude to reflect on his "learning process".

Lesson Two, Rae Bareilly is a monarchy.

"From Indira Gandhi's

BROTHER HUGS AND LEAVES, SISTER POINTS AND SPEAKS



Rahul Gandhi is embraced by an elderly woman while campaigning for his mother Sonia Gandhi in Rae Bareilly. Rahul left the constituency on Saturday after giving finishing touches to the campaign. The Election Commission had asked leaders getting state security — Rahul is one of

them, they (the Nehru-Gandhis) perfected a system of subcontracting government works to local *thekedars* (contractors). These contractors made a lot of money, became powerful and controlled the votes in their areas," Katiyar

explains.

"Naturally, they delivered these votes to the Congress. The family was in trouble occasionally if one of these contractors got upset with them. There is no democracy in this *rajantra* (monarchy)."



them — to leave as soon as their campaign was over. (Right) Priyanka Gandhi instructs polling agents in Rae Bareilly. "I will say what everybody in this constituency knows. Whoever may come, Soniji will win. I welcome them," she said. (AFP)

To prove his point, he alleges money had to be paid to put up party flags and posters. The only BJP flags and posters visible were on Katiyar's hotel walls, though — an indication of lack of cadre support or Sonia's "undemocratic" ways?

The contented candidate smiles. "We have bought peace (with the Congress) and they have allowed us to put up a few things here and there."

As he leans back against the pillows, it's clear that the *devar* has thrown in the towel.



Katiyar

THE TELEGRAPH

07 MAY 2006

Priyanka in poll punch-up

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OUR BUREAU

BEHIND THE SMILE, FLASH OF STEEL



Priyanka at the Congress office in Rae Bareli on Saturday. (PTI)

Lucknow, May 7: Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has swept into the heat and dust of heartland politics, fighting a bare-knuckled battle with the Samajwadi Party that tried to get her thrown out of Rae Bareli.

"We have information that Priyanka's security guards are planning to rig the poll tomorrow," alleged Beni Prasad Verma, whose son-in-law Rajkumar Chaudhary is the Samajwadi candidate against Sonia Gandhi.

Verma marched to district magistrate Jitendra Kumar's office this morning to complain against Sonia's daughter and election agent. The complaint said she should be asked to leave Rae Bareli as she is accompanied by securitymen from Punjab and Haryana.

Priyanka, who threw a challenge on arrival last evening — "There is no force which can defeat Sonia Gandhi. I invite you (the media) to name a person who can defeat her" — hit back immediately. A counter complaint was sent to Kumar's office before noon alleging that ministers of the Mulayam Singh Yadav government were violating Election Commission directives and trying to terrorise voters.

Fifty ministers, 24 MPs and five dozen MLAs had campaigned in Rae Bareli last week, the complaint said. "Two ministers and two MPs have been hiding in the constituency and the police, being loyal to the state government, are not enforcing the Election Commission order asking them to leave the constituency."

All political functionaries receiving security from the state were told to leave once campaigning ended at 5 pm on Saturday. Brother Rahul, who

had been running Sonia's campaign, left Rae Bareli yesterday.

Priyanka also objected to the campaign slogan "More vote, more note" raised by Mulayam's brother Shivpal, a minister. The Samajwadis scrambled to deny the suggestion that Shivpal was trying to bribe voters.

District magistrate Kumar said no substance was found in Verma's complaint and the commission is not taking cognizance of it. But it has asked the superintendent of police to verify Priyanka's complaint — Beni Prasad is one of the four she has named — and will act once he files his report.

S.K. Mendiratta, legal consultant to the Election Commission, said in Delhi that an election agent could not be asked to leave the constituency even if accompanied by security guards. In the eyes of the commission, the agent and the candidate are one, he said.

This is not the first time the feisty Priyanka — unlike Sonia and Rahul, she takes to politics like a duck to water but would rather be mother to Rehan and Meera — has taken the battle into the opposition's court. Seven years ago in Rae Bareli, she had demanded to know how Arun Nehru, who had "backstabbed" her father and his cousin, was allowed to even enter the constituency. "Jawab deejaye," she told voters. He was routed as the Congress's Satish Sharma won.

Battle fought, Priyanka retired to the Munshiganj Guest House in nearby Amethi where Rahul, husband Robert and their children are staying. She will return tomorrow, hoping to help Sonia better her 2.5-lakh victory margin, the heat that could keep voters away her only worry.

■ See Page 6

08 MAY 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

RAE BARELI ■ Sonia's rival candidates lose deposits; win marks Rahul's emergence as astute leader

Sonia's win a comeback sign in state: UP Cong

ATIQ KHAN
LUCKNOW, MAY 11

UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi's win by a record margin of over four lakh votes in the Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha by-election has had an electrifying effect on the Uttar Pradesh Congress which is already nursing ambitions of replicating the outcome on a macro-scale in next year's Assembly elections.

Sonia steamrolled the candidates of the rival parties, making them forfeit their security deposits by garnering a whopping 80.49 per cent of the popular vote despite a low voter turnout of 43.35 per cent. Her nearest Samajwadi Party rival Raj Kumar Chaudhary secured a little over 57,000 votes and Vinay Katiyar of the BJP had to be content with only 19,657 votes. In fact, Katiyar's tally was better than Prabha, the Apna Dal candidate backed by Uma Bharati. Despite the hype generated by Bharati's forays into Rae Bareilly, Prabha got a mere 6,201 votes.

Sonia bettered her performance in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls when she had secured 3.78 lakh votes, accounting for around 59 per cent share in the popular vote. A 20 per cent increase in the popular vote in two years suggests that the Congress president's popularity is on an upswing.

Sonia's victory had been a foregone conclusion, as even her daughter Priyanka Vadra had said when counting started. However, the run-up to the election and its result has marked the emergence of Rahul Gandhi in UP. The Amethi MP was handed the charge of managing his mother's election campaign and he came out with flying colours.

Said the chief spokesperson of UP Congress Committee, Akhilesh Pratap Singh, "The credit for ensuring a cakewalk for Sonia in the face of misuse of official machinery by the Mulayam Singh Yadav government should go to Rahul. There was some concern following the low polling percentage but



(Left) Congress president Sonia Gandhi waves to people after her Rae Bareilly victory in New Delhi; (above) Priyanka Vadra, flanked by Rahul Gandhi and Robert Vadra celebrate the victory in Rae Bareilly.

the result proved the efficacy of measures initiated by the Amethi MP in the campaign trail."

In fact, notwithstanding the outcome, it was one of the most fiercely contested Lok Sabha by-elections in the state with the ruling Samajwadi Party, the BJP, and the Apna Dal in tandem with Uma Bharati's Bharatiya Janshakti Party, playing the caste card by fielding Kurmi (Chaudhary and Vinay Katiyar) and Lodhi (Prabha Singh) candidates against the UPA chairperson. While Katiyar was fielded by the BJP essentially to deter Bharati from getting a foothold in UP politics, the Samajwadi Party government had pulled out all stops to reduce Sonia's victory margin, though Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav may have known from the outset that it was extremely difficult to get the better of Sonia in her political backyard.

Yet, the ruling party poured in moolah and ministers in the VVIP constituency in a bid to upstage the Congress candidate and even managed to ensure that the voting percentage remained low. Congress sources alleged that the Rae Bareilly district adminis-

Rahul has a long innings ahead: Priyanka

► **RAE BAREILLY:** Much before the poll verdict was out, as the counting began, Sonia Gandhi's daughter Priyanka Vadra had said that victory was a forgone conclusion. After the results, celebrating the thumping win, Priyanka, who was the poll agent for the Congress president, also said that her brother and Amethi MP Rahul Gandhi had worked very hard during the campaign. Priyanka feels Rahul, the frontline campaigner for his mother, has a long innings in politics. "He (Rahul) will

be in politics for many years. He will face many tests," Priyanka said when asked whether the Rae Bareilly campaign was a litmus test for her brother.

Rahul had been camping in Rae Bareilly for over 10 days. Replying to questions from reporters on the "sibling factor", Rahul said: "In my immediate family there is no sibling factor. We are always one. We have always been one. We will always be one."

Rahul's brother-in-law Robert Vadra accompanied them. PTI

Rae Bareilly bypoll results; one-sided

	(party)	(votes)
Sonia Gandhi	INC	4,74,891
RK Chaudhary	SP	57,003
Vinay Katiyar	BJP	19,657
Prabha Singh	AD	6,201

There were 12 other candidates who also lost their deposits. Sonia's victory margin — 4,17,888 votes

tration impounded about 1.25 ration cards in April on the flimsy ground of issuing new ones. Since they had not been issued voter identity cards, the absence of ration cards meant that they were denied their voting rights as they could not establish their identity.

Meanwhile, Sonia's win triggered a wave of celebrations in the Congress circles here with the party-

men celebrating her triumph in style at the party headquarters and taking out a victory procession. Describing Sonia's victory as triumph of the politics of sacrifice, the Congress Legislature Party leader Pramod Tewari slammed the UP government for using unfair means. Tewari said the Rae Bareilly bypoll would mark the return of the Congress in the next Assembly elections in the state.

INDIAN EXPRESS

12 MAY 2006

Congress to study losses

Defeat can be attributed to many factors

Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI: The Congress on Friday said it would conduct a detailed analysis of its defeat in Kerala and West Bengal, adding that it would not be proper to attribute the defeat to any single factor.

To a question whether the decision to align with the Democratic India Congress (Karunakaran) had contributed to the poor showing in Kerala, party spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said, "We do not think it can be attributed to a single factor. We will have a comprehensive study of the results."

Though the Kerala results were a matter of concern, the party had improved upon its performance in the 2004 Lok Sabha polls.

In regard to West Bengal, he said there were structural and historical reasons. He described the re-election of the Left Front Government as a "remarkable global exception."

On the resignation of senior leader Pranab Mukherjee as the Pradesh Congress Committee

• Party has improved its performance in Kerala

• Structural and historical reasons for defeat in West Bengal

• Re-election of Left Front a "remarkable global exception"

chief, he said Mr. Mukherjee had taken moral responsibility for the showing. Mr. Singhvi was unable to confirm whether the party had accepted the resignation.

He said the poll results were a re-affirmation of the policies and programmes of the United Progressive Alliance and its supporters.

"The Congress is happy and proud that it bucked a 30-year-old trend in Assam and emerged as the single largest party and got majority through a pre-poll arrangement," he said.

Overall, the results were a "win-win situation" for the Congress and the Left, which was associated with the United Progressive Alliance, he said.

15 MAY 2006

THE HINDU

GHANI KHAN PASSES AWAY

Death Of Poll Star Unnerves Party, CPM Hopes To See Cong Infighting Raising Its Head Now

Our Bureau
KOLKATA/SILIGURI

IT'S quits now between the Congress and the CPI(M) in West Bengal. Both have lost one mega leader each before the Assembly polls.

But while Anil Biswas was cardinal to the CPI(M) as a strategist and a mediator par excellence, Abu Barkat Ataur Ghani Khan Chowdhury — who died on Friday morning in Kolkata — was a cult figure to legions of Congressmen in the state for decades. Biswas was never that.

Barkat Ghani Khan's death has, therefore, shattered the Congress locally, both in Kolkata and in Malda — which was his home district. There's a kind of numbness in Congress circles as they are still trying to figure out what the future strategy should be.

Barkatda, as he was popularly called, was important to Congressmen for various reasons. He was like Jyoti Basu of the CPI(M), a veteran in years, which made him a person to look up to for guidance.

The years as well as his huge experience in politics also made him the ideal person to turn to when the going turned tough. While the CPI(M) claims it works collectively and still has factions galore, the Congress makes no bones about the fact that several leaders do not see eye to eye with several others within the party.

Nowhere perhaps has this been as evident as in West Bengal, where the Congress hasn't been able to make the slightest dent in the Red bastion for 29 years at a stretch. The state party unit has, therefore, become increasingly grumpy, discontent and factional. It was Ghani Khan's job for decades to soothe some of the frayed nerves and tame the tempers that flew high. He was also instrumental in bringing together disparate forces within the party. And that's what had endeared him to Congressmen of all hues and age, always.

The last and, perhaps, the most significant role he had played as a 'leader' and a minister in the Union Cabinet was that of a good samaritan. People knew Barkatda as a friend in need. He had given jobs to countless people during his ministerial days and even later, by the sheer power of his influence. He had also worked untiringly for his constituency, Malda. That's why, in his own district the Congress had always meant Ghani Khan and not the other way round.



(From Left) Salman Khurshid, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Biman Bose and Md Salim pay their last respects to Ghani Khan on Friday. — Subhajit Pal

Ghani Khan's demise has suddenly thrown the party in a quandary, particularly the state level leaders. His illness over the last few years had rendered him almost immobile. But that didn't stop Congressmen from using his name or getting the benefit of his towering influence — specially around election time.

There have been innumerable instances when an ailing Ghani Khan was transported all the way from Malda for a single evening, just to be present in a Congress election meeting in Kolkata or somewhere else in the state. While local leaders thundered rhetoric, Ghani Khan used to sit almost immobile on the podium. His speech had slurred, but he would still take the microphone and say a few sentences for his party candidate. But even those few words would cast a spell and sway the vote bank. There are countless Congressmen in Kolkata and beyond who would vouch for this. And it's not just the Congressmen. The CPI(M) and the Trinamool Congress, too, do

the same.

The absence of that 'magic,' the Congress fears, might be disastrous for the party in the coming elections. Malda will be going to the polls on May 8. The CPI(M), too, seems to be missing him already, maybe for very obvious reasons.

"It's difficult to accept his absence here," said Jiban Moitra, district secretary of Malda CPI(M). "We do not want the Congress to ride the sympathy wave in the coming elections," Mr Moitra said.

"The death of Barkatda will definitely expose the inner party squabbles now and we hope to cash in on them, if they surface before the polls," said CPI(M) sources in Malda.

Seniors leaders in the CPI(M), however, use more tact. "I have known Ghani Khan Chowdhury for years now. He was younger to me and a friend of mine, though we believed in different political ideologies. He used to visit my home often. I, too, have gone to his Malda residence," said Jyoti Basu.

CPI(M) state secretary and

Left Front chairman Biman Bose had rushed to the hospital on hearing the news.

Ghani Khan was 79 years old. He had faced defeats only twice in his long career, but was elected eight times to the Lok Sabha from Malda. Such was his influence over Malda that the Congress high command never nominated anybody in Malda for any election without consulting Ghani Khan. He was elected six times to the Assembly.

But it was left to the unflappable Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress to have a last dig at the Congress. Still sore about the fact that the Congress chose to ignore her as an election ally, Ms Banerjee told ET from Bankura: "Barkatda's death will create a void in West Bengal politics. I used to respect him as my senior leader and Barkatda was one of the few Congress leaders in West Bengal who genuinely wanted to remove the CPI(M) from power in the state. He was very serious about forging an electoral alliance between the Congress and the Trinamool."

Adhir beyond Pranab 'diklat'

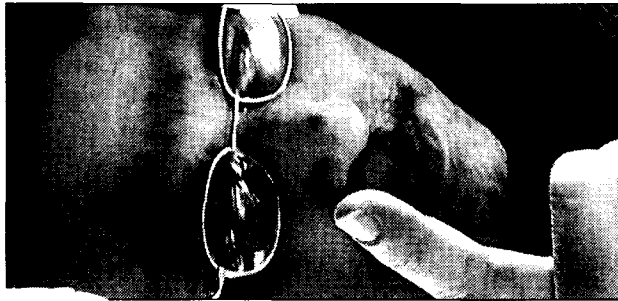
OUR BUREAU

April 9: Adhir Chowdhury today dared the Congress to "punish" him for fielding Independents against his own party nominees in Murshidabad.

"I don't know any leader in the party other than Sonia Gandhi," the Congress MP from Behrampore told a news conference in his Behrampore house, 200 km from Calcutta.

"I don't care for state leaders who have been encouraging factionalism in the party's Murshidabad unit to humiliate and marginalise me," he added.

Reminded that he was risking disciplinary action, Chowdhury took a dig at defence minister and state party president Pranab Mukherjee. "Let the PCC chief take disciplinary action against me.... I shall not cower before threats. It is not



Adhir: 'Punish me'

Dissident MP says only Sonia Gandhi is his leader

necessary that I should abide by his diklats."

In 2004, Chowdhury had spearheaded a month-long movement and had been on hunger strike in Murshidabad demanding Mukherjee's nomination from Jangipur Lok Sabha seat.

Once Mukherjee entered the fray, Chowdhury threw his organisational weight behind him to ensure that he sailed through. After Mukherjee won the seat, Chowdhury organised a public meeting in Jangipur to thank voters.

The scene reversed a year later. In May 2005, Chowdhury put up Independents against Congress candidates in Kandi and Murshidabad municipalities and Mukherjee publicly

resented the action and avoided campaigning in the areas. Observers said the episode left a deep scar in their relations.

Mukherjee said in Midnapore town today "the Murshidabad development has really posed a problem for us".

Chowdhury, also the Murshidabad Congress president, is backing Manoj Chakraborty in Behrampore, Mir Alamgir in Hariharpara and Apurba Sarkar in Kandi against party nominees Mayarani Pal, Niamat Sheikh and Atish Sinha.

He told a party workers' convention in Behrampore yesterday that he would campaign for the Independents, who are fighting on an axe symbol.

"The AICC re-nominated the AICC to take a decision."



Pranab: 'Problem'

Pal, Sheikh and Sinha on the basis of recommendations from the state leaders. I don't trust them... they have been promoting factionalism to strengthen the CPM," the Congress MP said.

The trio had not been part of the rallies in Chowdhury's support after his arrest and imprisonment in connection with a double murder last year. He also alleged that in 2004, some state Congress leaders had backed the trio under whose patronage dissidents had floated the Indira-Rajiv Manchha to run a "parallel organisation in the district".

In Calcutta, state Congress working president Pradip Bhattacharya said the AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal has been briefed about Chowdhury's activities. "We are keeping watch.... It is up to the AICC to take a decision."

Sonia: no backtracking

She is in Rae Bareilly to share her feelings with the people

Aarti Dhar

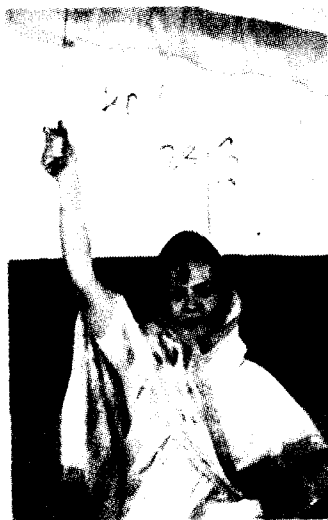
RAE BAREILLY (U.P.): Launching a scathing attack on her political opponents for targeting her in the 'office of profit' controversy, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Tuesday said she would continue her fight against injustice.

"I will neither lose nor back-track," she said addressing her voters here. This was her first visit outside the capital after she resigned from the Lok Sabha and as chairperson of the National Advisory Council (NAC) in the wake of the allegations that the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) Government was planning to bring in an ordinance to "protect" her.

In an emotional 20-minute speech in Hindi, Ms. Gandhi said she had always shared her happiness and grief with the people of Rae Bareilly and it was her responsibility to tell them the truth behind her resignation.

"Every stone is thrown at me, guns are trained at me and every arrow is aimed at me. I am even blamed for natural calamities that hit the country. And, when the 'office of profit' controversy came up, my opponents remembered Sonia Gandhi. I am their enemy number 1," she said evoking a thunderous response from the thousands of people gathered on the Government Inter College ground.

She said she had faith in the people of Rae Bareilly, with whom her family had maintained an emotional bond for the past five generations and hoped that they would give a fitting reply to those who levelled allegations against her. Ms. Gandhi said there was an eerie silence in the opposition camp after her resignation and



Congress president Sonia Gandhi holds aloft a sword at a rally in Rae Bareilly on Tuesday. - PHOTO: AP

all issues of morality had taken a backseat. "They are now trying to save each other and looking for a way out."

Ms. Gandhi said she was being targeted by those who had never been able to rise above the politics of "vested interest." The NAC was not an office of profit but was just a body that advised the Government on the implementation of the promises made under the National Common Minimum Programme. The NAC played an important role in the ambitious National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme. Earlier in the morning, Ms. Gandhi was given a rousing welcome at the Lucknow airport.

See also Page 4

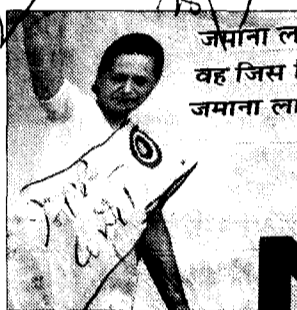
Sonia pats PM, attacks Oppn stand on N-deal

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

With the Congress leadership seeking ways to politically package the recent Indo-US civil nuclear deal ahead of Assembly elections, Ms Sonia Gandhi has come out in support of the Prime Minister's initiative and linked the deal to India's developmental needs.

As the deal faced major opposition from the Left, Samajwadi Party (SP) and many Muslim outfits, Ms Gandhi also chose the occasion to counterattack critics. She condemned their attempts to 'communalise the foreign policy' and rejected the charge that the Manmohan Singh regime had 'discarded' India's independent foreign policy. Asserting that strengthening of India's relation with the US on equal terms has enormous potential for the country, she said it would be wrong to project that Indian minorities are any less nationalist than the majority community in supporting the national causes.

Clearly keeping an eye on the recent mobilisation of Muslim hardliners by the Left and the SP against the Indo-US deal, Ms Gandhi has written in



the latest edition of the party organ *Sandesh*: "It is indeed sad that that some parties have tried to communalise our foreign policy for short-term electoral gains. This is above all an insult to our minorities and something that the Congress will never do. We do not think our religious minorities are any less nationalist than our majority. We do not think that religion can or should be matrix for national interest in a country as linguistically and religiously pluralist as India", she said.

Without naming the Left, she added: "India has always been wary of compromising its independence and the Congress party and its leaders have tried to ensure that its principled commitment to democracy and a multilateral world order is maintained. Those who accuse

the Manmohan Singh government of discarding India's independent policy need to look carefully at the enormous gains our new and equal relationship with America will bring our scientific, technical, agricultural, and trade sectors. For India to meet the needs of employment generation and infrastructure, we need to better integrate ourselves in the growing sectors of the world economy, the sectors that will power tomorrow's service sector, where India has an edge. This can only be done if we also have equal access to the achievements of scientific gains being made worldwide".

She said the Indo-US nuclear energy holds tremendous potential for the country. "This agreement is extremely important for India's future energy needs and for its access to high-end technology that had been denied to us for the past 20 years. The Prime Minister and his team have worked in the most positive atmosphere with President Bush and his team and have ensured that India did not compromise on national interests in signing the deal. Instead, India has gained enormously. India is indeed proud of her atomic energy scientists."

Jyotiraditya, MLAs bid to follow Sonia

But Cong Chief Prevents MP Flock From Quitting En Masse

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bhopal: Congress Lok Sabha MP Jyotiraditya Scindia and 26 of the 38 party MLAs from Madhya Pradesh on Saturday met AICC president Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi and expressed their desire to resign to express solidarity with her.

minister were holding offices of profit.

On the Congress' move, Chauhan quoting the MP Assembly Member (Prevention of Disqualification) Act 1967 (amended in 1982) said the state ministers could hold additional posts. The amendment was carried out in 1982 when Arjun Singh was the



MP Jyotiraditya Scindia with 26 MLAs meets Sonia Gandhi in New Delhi

They offered to quit despite the party leadership asking party members not to resign from their posts on the issue. Important among those who offered to quit as legislators are leader of opposition in MP Jamuna Devi, state party chief Subhash Yadav, deputy speaker Hazarilal Raghuvanshi and Ajay Singh, son of Union HRD minister Arjun Singh.

Sonia, however, advised them not to get emotional and did not permit them to resign. In the afternoon, the MLAs' delegation met President A P J Abdul Kalam in Rashtrapati Bhawan and raised the issue of chief minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan holding three posts.

They also submitted a memorandum alleging 11 ministers and the chief

CM, he argued.

After meeting the President, Jamuna Devi said, "We have submitted our memorandum to the President. According to the procedure, it will be sent to the EC and the rest will follow."

The MLAs had left Bhopal on Friday night. Sources said their main purpose of the Delhi visit was to meet the PM and the AICC president to seek additional financial assistance for farmers affected by hailstorms.

However, the plans changed just before the MLAs boarded the train. On the contrary, they submitted a memorandum to Sonia congratulating her for setting a "historic" example of high morality in public life. Following this, they offered to quit.

এ বারও নির্দল প্রার্থী দিতে চান অধীর, নেতাদের দ্বন্দ্ব নাজেহাল হাইকমান্ড

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা, নয়াদিল্লি ও কলকাতা, ২৪ মার্চ: সিপিএমের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াইয়ের প্রস্তুতি তো দূরের কথা, প্রার্থী বাছাই করতে গিয়ে এখন অভ্যন্তরীণ কোন্দলেই জেরবার প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্ব।

প্রদেশ কংগ্রেস সভাপতি প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়ের বাসভবনে মুর্শিদাবাদের প্রার্থী বাছাই নিয়ে বৈঠকেই অধীর চৌধুরী-অতীশ সিংহের কাজিয়া চরমে ওঠে। ক্ষুর অধীর গতকালই কলকাতায় চলে এসেছেন। মীমাংসা না হওয়ায় পুরভোটার মতো প্রয়োজনে এ বারও মুর্শিদাবাদে বিভিন্ন কেন্দ্রে নির্দল প্রার্থী দাঁড় করাতে চাইছেন অধীর। এই আশঙ্কায় উদ্বেগে রয়েছে কংগ্রেস হাইকমান্ডও। শুধু অধীরবাবু নয়, প্রার্থী বাছাই নিয়ে প্রিয়রঞ্জন দাশমুন্সি, সুব্রত মুখোপাধ্যায়, আবদুল মান্নান, শঙ্কর সিংহের মতো নেতারাও ক্ষুর। যেমন নদিয়া, হুগলি, হাওড়ার মতো জেলায় প্রার্থী-তালিকা নিয়ে রাজ্য রাজনীতিতে প্রিয়বাবুর অনুগামীরা দারুণ অসন্তুষ্ট। আবার তাঁদের অনুগামীদের অনেককেই প্রার্থী না করার খুশি নন প্রিয়বাবুদের বিরুদ্ধে গোষ্ঠীর সোমেন

মিত্ররাও। ফলে ভোটের আগে দলের মধ্যে এই টানাপোড়েন সামাল দেওয়াই এখন প্রধান মাথাব্যথা হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে কংগ্রেস হাইকমান্ডের।

এই পরিস্থিতিতে প্রার্থী বাছাই নিয়ে পুনর্বিবেচনাও চলছে। মুর্শিদাবাদ ছাড়া সব জেলার প্রার্থী বাছাই করে ফেলেছিল স্ক্রিনিং কমিটি। কিন্তু প্রথম তালিকায় ৮৩ জনের ঘোষণা করার পর আজ দ্বিতীয় তালিকায় মাত্র ৯ জন প্রার্থীর নাম ঘোষণা করল এআইসিসি।

জেলার প্রার্থী বাছাইয়ের সময় থেকেই অতীশবাবুর সঙ্গে অধীরবাবুর বিরোধ শুরু হয়েছিল। কয়েক দিন আগে দশ জনপথে সনিয়ার সামনেই অতীশবাবুর তীব্র সমালোচনা করেন অধীর। এর পর প্রণববাবুর সঙ্গে দেখা করে অধীর বলেন, “এ ভাবে মুর্শিদাবাদের কংগ্রেস সভাপতি পদে থাকার কোনও ইচ্ছা আমার নেই।”

মুর্শিদাবাদে তিনটে লোকসভা আসন জেতার পর দলের সমর্থকরা উদ্ভাদনায় টগবগ করছিল। অধীর জানিয়েছেন, বিধানসভা ভোটেও দল ভালো ফল করবে বলে তাঁদের আশা ছিল। কিন্তু প্রার্থী বাছাই এখনও না

হওয়ায় তাঁরা হতাশ হয়ে পড়ছেন। স্ক্রিনিং কমিটির আওতা থেকে মুর্শিদাবাদের প্রার্থী-বাছাইয়ের বিষয়টি এখন কংগ্রেস সেন্ট্রাল ইলেকশন কমিটিতে চলে যাওয়ায় আরও চটেছেন অধীর। কারণ সেখানে তাঁর বক্তব্য রাখার সুযোগ নেই। কিন্তু পরিষদীয় দলনেতা হিসাবে সেই সুযোগ পেয়ে যাবেন অতীশবাবু।

ক্ষুর অধীর মুর্শিদাবাদে নির্দল প্রার্থী দাঁড় করালে সেটা যে দলের পক্ষে ভালো হবে না তা বুঝতে পারছে কংগ্রেস হাইকমান্ড। কারণ, অধীরের হাত ধরেই মুর্শিদাবাদে পুরভোটে বিপুল সাফল্য পেয়েছে কংগ্রেস। তারপর পঞ্চায়েত ভোটে কংগ্রেসের জেলা পরিষদ দখল, আর শেষে জেলায় তিনটি লোকসভা আসনে জয়। এ সর্বের নেপথ্যেই রয়েছে অধীরের সাংগঠনিক ক্ষমতা।

শুধু অধীর-অতীশ গোষ্ঠীদ্বন্দ্বই নয়, মুর্শিদাবাদ বিধানসভা আসনটি নিয়েও গোলমালের আশঙ্কা রয়েছে কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন ইউডিএ জোটে। কারণ, ইতিমধ্যেই এই আসনটি প্রণববাবুর কাছে চেয়েছেন কংগ্রেস

জোটের শরিক জনবাদী ফরওয়ার্ড ব্লকের জয়ন্ত রায়। আবার ওই আসনটির দাবিদার মুর্শিদাবাদের সাংসদ মান্নান হোসেনের স্ত্রী বুলবুল। জয়ন্তবাবু কিন্তু পরিষ্কার জানিয়েছেন, মুর্শিদাবাদ আসনটি না পেলে সাংগঠনিক দিক থেকে তাঁদের সমস্যা হবে। অন্য দিকে, বুলবুলকে প্রার্থী করা নিয়ে আপত্তি আছে অধীরেরও। তাঁর বক্তব্য, মান্নান-পত্নী এমনিতেই জেলা পরিষদের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পদে রয়েছেন। তাঁকে বিধানসভায় প্রার্থী করলে জেলা পরিষদের একটি পদ খালি হবে। তাই জেলা পরিষদের কোনও সদস্যকেই প্রার্থী করতে নারাজ অধীরবাবু।

দলীয় কোন্দলের পরিণতিতে কংগ্রেস পুরো প্রার্থী তালিকা শেষ পর্যন্ত করে ঘোষিত হবে তা নিয়ে সংশয় রয়েছে। প্রণববাবু শনিবার রাতে কলকাতায় এসে দলীয় নেতৃত্বের সঙ্গে আরও এক দফা আলোচনা করবেন। তারপরে তিনি দিল্লি যাবেন। প্রদীপবাবু এ দিন জানান, ২৮ তারিখের আগে সম্পূর্ণ প্রার্থী তালিকা ঘোষণা করা সম্ভব নয়।

SONIA DOES IT AGAIN

■ Resigns As MP And NAC Chief, Takes Sting Out Of Oppn Attack Over Office Of Profit Ordinance ■ But Promises To Fight Polls Again

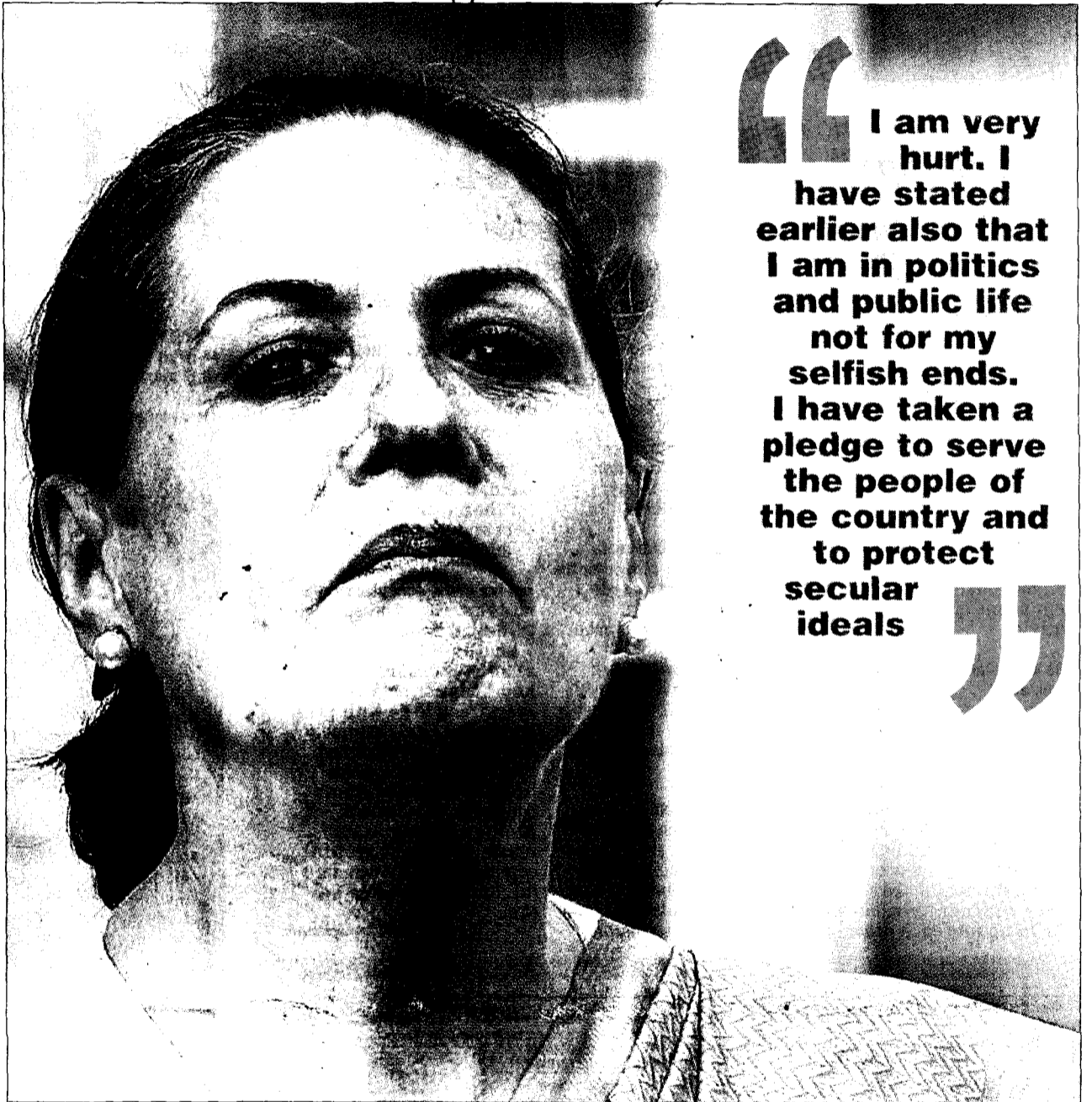
New Delhi: Taking the wind out of the opposition sails, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday announced her resignation from the Lok Sabha and as the chairperson of the National Advisory Council (NAC). This is her second act of giving up a politically important position after her refusal to take up prime ministership soon after the Congress-led UPA was voted to power in May 2004.

As the BJP-led NDA and the Samajwadi Party mounted a major political campaign against Sonia, the 59-year-old widow of Rajiv Gandhi sprang a surprise that could take away the sting from the opposition's attack that the government's move for an ordinance to redefine office of profit was aimed at saving her from "a certain disqualification" as MP.

The resignation came a day after the BJP petitioned President A P J Abdul Kalam seeking Sonia's disqualification from the Lok Sabha on the ground she held an office of profit as chairperson of NAC. The TDP had already petitioned the President last week in this regard.

Significantly, chief election commissioner B B Tandon had earlier said the law was the same for everybody and he would consider the petition against Sonia when it is referred by the President.

After consultations with top leaders, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Sonia came out with a brief statement in which she regretted that an atmosphere was being created by certain people in the country to project that the government and parliament were being used to protect her. "This has hurt me very much. I have stated it earlier also that I am in politics and public life not for my selfish ends. I have taken a pledge to serve the people of the country and to protect the secular ideals. So, in keeping with my public life and political principles and according to my own belief, I resign as a member of the Lok Sabha and chairper-



“ I am very hurt. I have stated earlier also that I am in politics and public life not for my selfish ends. I have taken a pledge to serve the people of the country and to protect secular ideals ”

son of NAC," she said in a statement read out to reporters at her 10 Janpath residence with son Rahul by her side.

Sonia was in the midst of her second term in the Lok Sabha. Maintaining that she had full faith in the people of Rae Bareilly from where she was elected and that the nation would understand her feelings, she said she would contest again from the same constituency.

With overnight indications that the government was keen on bringing an ordinance after getting parliament adjourned sine die, the Union cabinet met

on Thursday but the issue did not come up, apparently because of Sonia's reservations over including NAC in the list of office of profit sought to be exempted.

While Congressmen were keen that the NAC also be covered by the amendment to the Members of Parliament (Prevention of Disqualification) Act, Sonia was firm that she should not be seen as being benefited by any legal device. "I have done this because this is the right thing to do," she said.

With Sonia's resignation, interest will now centre around the strategy to

be adopted by similarly-placed persons.

Petitions have been filed for the disqualification of a number of others, including Lok Sabha speaker Somnath Chatterjee, over the issue. The speaker had even kept away from the House on Wednesday saying he did it as a matter of propriety after some members raked up issues against him.

Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan was disqualified last week on the ground that she held an office of profit by being chairperson of the UP Film Development Council. Agencies

১০ জেলায় প্রার্থী বাছাই

কংগ্রেসের জোটপন্থীরাও জোটে বিরূপ

নিজস্ব সংবাদদাতা: কংগ্রেস তাদের দলীয় সিদ্ধান্ত থেকে একচুল নড়ছে না।

এনডিএ না ছাড়লে তৃণমূলের সঙ্গে কোনও জোট নয় বলে কংগ্রেস হাইকমান্ড জানিয়েছিল। তাই, ৭০টি আসন কংগ্রেসের জন্য মমতা বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ছেড়ে রাখলেও বৃহত্তর প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায় স্পষ্টই জানিয়ে দিলেন, “আসন ছাড়াটা বড় প্রশ্ন নয়। বড় প্রশ্ন হল তৃণমূল এনডিএ ছাড়ছে কি? তৃণমূলের সঙ্গে সমঝোতা হতে পারে ওই এক শর্তেই।”

গত সোমবার তৃণমূলের প্রার্থী তালিকা ঘোষিত হয়েছে। গত বার যে ৩০টি আসনে কংগ্রেস জিতেছিল, সেই সমস্ত আসনে প্রার্থী দেননি মমতা। এমনকী, কংগ্রেসের জন্য আরও ৪০টি আসন ফাঁকা রেখে মমতা একটি ধারণা দিতে চান যে, তিনি সিপিএম-বিরোধী একটি জোটের রাস্তা খুলে রাখতে চেয়েছেন। কিন্তু, মমতার প্রার্থী তালিকা দেখে কংগ্রেসের মধ্যে জোটপন্থী নেতারা প্রচণ্ড খেপে যান। বিশেষ করে, প্রিয়রঞ্জন দাশমুন্সি, বরকত গনি খান চৌধুরী, সুব্রত মুখোপাধ্যায় থেকে শুরু করে আব্দুল মান্নান, শঙ্কর সিংহের মতো রাজ্য স্তরের নেতারাও বিরক্ত হন। কেননা, তাঁদের এলাকায় বিভিন্ন কেন্দ্রে মমতা প্রার্থী দিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের এক সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, মালদহের ইংলিশবাজার ও হবিবপুর আসন দু’টি তৃণমূলকে ছেড়ে দেবেন বলে বরকত গনি খান আশ্বাস দেওয়ার পরেও মমতা গাজল ও মালদহ (সংরক্ষিত) কেন্দ্রে প্রার্থী দিয়েছেন। এতে বরকত চটেছেন। উত্তর দিনাজপুরে ইটাহারে প্রিয়বাবুর ‘শত্রু’ বলে পরিচিত জয়নাল আবেদিনকে তৃণমূল প্রার্থী করেছে। এতে বিরক্ত প্রিয়বাবু। জোটের ব্যাপারে প্রথম থেকেই বিরোধিতা করছিলেন অধীর চৌধুরী। তাঁকে অনেক বুঝিয়ে জোটের ব্যাপারে রাজি করিয়েছিলেন মান্নান, শঙ্করবাবুরা। কিন্তু মুর্শিদাবাদের পাঁচটা কেন্দ্রে তৃণমূল প্রার্থী দেওয়ার পরে অধীর আবার জোট নিয়ে বেঁকে বসেছেন। তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে চৌরঙ্গিতে সুব্রত বস্তুকে তৃণমূল দাঁড় করানোয় ক্ষুব্ধ সুব্রত মুখোপাধ্যায়ও।

এ দিন প্রার্থী তালিকা তৈরি নিয়ে প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসে নির্বাচন পরিচালন কমিটির বৈঠক বসেছিল। সেই বৈঠকে এসে বরকত মালদহের ১১টি কেন্দ্রেরই প্রার্থী তালিকা প্রণববাবুর হাতে দিয়ে দেন। অধীরও মুর্শিদাবাদের ১৯টি আসনের সবকটিতেই কংগ্রেস প্রার্থী দেওয়ার সুপারিশ করেন। অর্থাৎ মমতা তাঁদের জন্য আসন ছেড়ে রাখলেও বরকত, অধীররা কোনও আসনই তাঁকে ছাড়তে রাজি নন। এই প্রসঙ্গে মমতা এ দিন অবশ্য কোনও মন্তব্য করতে রাজি হননি। তিনি বলেন, “আগে ওঁদের প্রার্থী তালিকা ঘোষিত হোক, তারপরে যা বলার বলব।” অবশ্য তাঁর ঘনিষ্ঠদের কাছে মমতা বলেছেন, “কংগ্রেস যে সিপিএমের বিরুদ্ধে গিয়ে কিছু করবে না তা তো জানাই ছিল। সিপিএমের চাপের কাছে ওঁদের নতি স্বীকার করা ছাড়া উপায় নেই।”

এত দিন প্রণববাবু জোট নিয়ে আগ্রহী ছিলেন না। এ বার দলের জোটপন্থীরাই জোট নিয়ে বিরূপ হয়ে ওঠায় দলীয় নীতি মেনে প্রার্থী তালিকা তৈরির কাজটা প্রণববাবুর পক্ষে সহজ হয়ে যায়। এ দিন থেকেই প্রণববাবুরা রাজ্য বিধানসভার ২৯৪টি আসনের প্রার্থী তালিকা তৈরি শুরু করেছেন। প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের এক সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে, কংগ্রেস ২৫৭টি আসনে প্রার্থী দেবে। বাকি ৩৭টি আসন কংগ্রেস নেতৃত্বাধীন সংযুক্ত গণতান্ত্রিক মোর্চা (ইউজিএ)-র শরিক দলগুলিকে ছাড়া হবে। এ দিনই কলকাতা, বাঁকুড়া, পুরুলিয়া, দুই ২৪ পরগনা, হাওড়া, হুগলি, জলপাইগুড়ি ও দুই মেদিনীপুরের প্রার্থী তালিকা তৈরি হয়ে গিয়েছে। এই জেলাগুলিতে গত বার তৃণমূলের জেতা আসনগুলিতেও প্রার্থী দিয়েছে কংগ্রেস। এই বিষয়ে প্রশ্নের জবাবে প্রণববাবু বলেন, “যদি ২৯৫টি আসন থাকতো তবে সেই ২৯৫টিতেই প্রার্থী দিতাম।” আজ বৃহস্পতিবার, বাকি জেলার তালিকাও তৈরি করে ফেলা হবে বলে দলীয় সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে।

তৃণমূলকে ছাড়াই কংগ্রেস যে লড়াইয়ের কথা ঘোষণা করেছে সেই বিষয়ে সিপিএমের রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাসের বক্তব্য, “ওঁরা আগে তালিকা ঘোষণা করুন। তারপরে যা বলার বলব।”

আগামী ২০ মার্চের মধ্যে কংগ্রেসের প্রার্থী তালিকা ঘোষিত হয়ে যাবে বলে প্রণববাবু জানিয়েছেন। তিনি বলেন, “১৭-১৮ তারিখের মধ্যে তালিকা তৈরি করে মানস ভূঁইয়া ও প্রদীপ ভট্টাচার্য দিল্লিতে যাবেন। তারপর দিল্লিতে দলের ক্রিনিং কমিটি তালিকা অনুমোদন করলেই তা ঘোষণা করে দেওয়া হবে।” ইতিমধ্যে তৃণমূল যদি এনডিএ ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে আসে তাহলে প্রার্থী তালিকায় রদ-বদল করা হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন প্রণববাবু।

● জোট অসফল, তাই ফের কাছাকাছি তৃণমূল-বিজেপি...পৃঃ ৭

Pranab rules out Trinamool alliance

Cong may make things easy for Left in state

Our Bureau
KOLKATA

WEST Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPC) chief and Union defence minister Pranab Mukherjee has made an official announcement on Wednesday that his party will not forge any alliance or share seats with Mamata Banejee's Trinamool Congress in the coming West Bengal Assembly elections beginning April 17.

Mr Mukherjee, who held a marathon meeting with WBPC officials during the day to prepare the preliminary list of party nominees for the polls, to be presented before the Central Election Committee (CEC) of his party, told newsmen: "Congress alone will fight all the 294 seats in West Bengal."

"Submission of nomination papers for the ensuing elections in West Bengal will begin on March 24. We will announce our list of candidates before that," the WBPC chief said.

Mr Mukherjee's announcement is being seen as a direct refusal to Ms Mamata Banejee's effort to forge an electoral adjustment with the Congress because Ms Banejee had left 93 seats open for both the Congress and the BJP to field their candidates to fight the CPI(M) in a united way.

Ms Banejee, who had released her party's list of candidates on Monday, did not field candidates in 93 seats probably to enable the Congress

and BJP to put up their nominees. Ms Banejee had also left 26 seats won by the Congress during 2001 Assembly polls vacant to broaden the prospects of a successful seat-sharing between the Congress and her party.

When asked whether Congress will put up its nominees to about 60 seats won by Trinamool Congress during the last Assembly elections, Mr Mukherjee said: "We will contest all the 294 seats."

Mr Mukherjee looked angry when reporters asked him why his party had been refusing Ms Banejee's plea for an electoral adjustment. "I have been asked the same question innumerable times and every time I told you it is not possible for the Congress to forge any alliance with any political party who have links with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). My reply will remain unchanged if you ask me the question in future."

Trinamool Congress sources said the party might not change its decision of not putting up the nominees against sitting Congress MLAs despite the latter's decision to contest the seats won by Trinamool Congress in 2001. "The decision taken by the Congress will expose them before the people of West Bengal. We had long been describing the Congress as a CPI(M) B-team. It is up to the electorate of West Bengal to judge our assessment about the Congress leadership," a senior Trinamool Congress leader said.



Tamal Sengupta
KOLKATA

MUCH before the CPI(M) gave "conditional support" to the Congress-led UPA government in New Delhi in 2004, the Congress in West Bengal had shown a sign of adopting a soft corner towards CPI(M) during the state Assembly elections in 2001.

The Congress did not field its candidates against any of the high profile CPI(M) ministers like Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and others during the 2001 As-



No PRESENTS FROM PAST: (From left) Nirupam Sen, Surya Kanta Mishra & Asim Dasgupta

sembly elections in West Bengal. The other CPI(M) ministers against whom the Congress did not contest the elections were industry minister Nirupam Sen, health minister Surya Kanta Mishra, labour minister Mohammad Amin — all CPI(M) heavyweights and members of the party's central committee. Finance minister Asim Dasgupta also did not face any threat from the Congress during the last Assembly polls.

Opposition Trinamool Congress and BJP had, however, put up their nominees in all the five Assembly constituencies

fought by heavyweight CPI(M) leaders. In fact, the BJP and Trinamool Congress had fought against each other in these five Assembly segments. There is no doubt that the Opposition Trinamool Congress and BJP could reduce the victory margins of CPI(M) heavyweights if they managed not to put up candidates against each other.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee won the elections in Jadavpur Assembly segment in 2001 by a margin of 29,281 votes. During 1996 Assembly polls, Mr Bhattacharjee got 36,184 ballots. The chief minister's victory margin had dropped by 6,903 votes in 2001 polls compared to that of the elections held in 1996.

Health minister Surya Kanta Mishra's victory margin at Narayanganj Assembly segment in Midnapore district also dropped by 12,741 votes in 2001 polls than the margin in 1996 elections. In 1996 polls, Mr Mishra had got 39,654 votes.

✓
193
Woman in command



CREATING HISTORY: *Wahida Prizm at the passing out parade at the Armed Forces Medical College in Pune on Monday. She is the first woman to command a passing out parade in the history of the Indian Armed Forces Medical Services. Her father was gunned down by militants in 2001. - PTI*

15 MAR 2006

THE HINDU

End Jaya misrule; Sonia to TN

By Swati Das/TNN

Tiruchirappalli: "It is the people of Tamil Nadu who have helped in creating the UPA government at the Centre," said AICC president Sonia Gandhi while wooing the electorate at the conclusion of the DMK conclave here on Sunday.

However, there was no mention of MDMK breaking away from Democratic Progressive Alliance (DPA) or if it would be allowed to continue in UPA.

Following the lines of DMK president M Karunanidhi, Sonia too listed out the achievements of the state government. "We have gathered here to ensure that the people of the state are free from the misrule of the Jayalalithaa government," she said. She also called upon the people to "elect an effective, responsible and caring government."

"Sonia is keen on strengthening the alliance. When Lalu Prasad is an embarrassment, Communists are a stumbling block and Telangana Rashtra Samiti is dithering, it is DMK she has to rely on as a trusted ally. Sonia herself would play a key role in the selection and announcements of seats for DPA candidates," said a source.

DMK leaders and cadres are angry with Karunanidhi "for allowing MDMK" to stab it in the back time and again. In 2001 also, Vaiko had left the alliance right



Sonia Gandhi arrives in Kochi on Sunday to attend a Kerala Congress plenary

on the eve of a joint public meeting because he did not want Karunanidhi to win, the source said.

"He is always worried about the Stalin factor. What

is wrong if Stalin becomes the chief minister? What experience did Jayalalithaa have when she came into politics? Vaiko is just paranoid. But we are relieved.

Karunakaran's return unlikely

Kochi: Congress renegade K Karunakaran is unlikely to be taken back to the party fold as AICC president Sonia Gandhi said on Sunday that the issue would be decided by the Kerala unit.

Sources, while ruling out his re-entry to the party fold, said it was now becoming clear that Karunakaran, who left Congress to form Democratic Indira Congress, may at best be accommodated as a minor partner of the Congress-led United Democratic Front.

Sonia was here for the plenary session of Congress in Kerala which was held after 18 years. During her two-day visit to the state she did not comment on the Karunakaran issue. TNN

"We can now get more seats," said DMK leader Velusamy from Villupuram.

"We know that Vaiko will campaign against us more than he would sing paeans to Jayalalithaa. Therefore, we would have to work very hard," said another leader.

Earlier in the day, chaos prevailed in the northern outskirts of the city following a traffic jam around a 2-km radius from the venue. Not a single police personnel was there to regulate the traffic. People had to abandon their vehicles and walk up to the venue.

Pranab shuts door on Mamata

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, March 5. — The defence minister and state Congress president, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, today virtually put the lid on speculation about a grand anti-Left alliance and informal seat adjustments between the Congress and the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine.

Announcing that the newly-formed United Democratic Alliance of the Congress and its seven allies would contest almost all the 294 seats, Mr Mukherjee ruled out further talks on seat adjustments with the Trinamul supremo Miss Mamata Banerjee. "We told her repeatedly that the Congress would not compromise its anti-BJP stance. There is no scope for an alliance with the

Trinamul unless it shuns the BJP and leaves the NDA," he said. "If there is any understanding, that has to be open and formal," he shot back when asked about the possibility of informal adjustments with the Trinamul.

Union parliamentary affairs minister Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, who is known to be pro-alliance, sounded more caustic after holding parleys with senior party MLAs. Referring to the Justice UC Banerjee Commission report on the Godhra train fire that had triggered communal riots in Gujarat, he said: "I hope good sense will prevail on the Trinamul now after the submission of the report and it will realise the folly of providing the BJP a piggy-back ride in the coming poll. Otherwise, it will only help the

CPM."

Mr Mukherjee declared that the 30 Congress MLAs including the four who had won as Independents would be renominated.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi is expected to finalise the party's election strategy in the state next month after discussions with Mr Mukherjee, Mr Das Munshi and other leaders.

Besides the Congress, the other constituents of the alliance are Mr Saifuddin Chowdhury's Party for Democratic Socialism, the Republican Party of India, Indian People's Front, a breakaway group of the Forward Bloc, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janashakti Party, the United Communist Party of India, Mr Shibu Soren's Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and the Jharkhand Party (N).

See also page 5

CE MAIL THE STATESMAN

Murli Deora gets oil in cabinet rejig

PM Retains External Affairs, Shinde Gets Power, Antulay Minority Affairs

New Delhi: Three heavyweights from Maharashtra —Sushil Kumar Shinde, A R Antulay and Murli Deora— were on Sunday brought into the Union cabinet in a major expansion and reshuffle of his ministry by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who stripped Mani Shankar Aiyar of petroleum and gave it to Deora.

The expansion involving the entry of seven new cabinet ministers, elevation of three and inclusion of 12 at the ministers of state level was overwhelmingly Congress-specific with the Prime Minister retaining the key external affairs portfolio and leaving untouched finance, home and defence.

Shinde, who was shifted out of Andhra Pradesh Raj Bhavan, has been given power while Antulay, the senior-most Muslim face gets minority affairs. Aiyar, the only one in the cabinet to lose a key portfolio, has been left with panchayati raj affairs and gets youth affairs and sports from Oscar Fernandes who now remains minister without portfolio. Urban development minister S Jaipal Reddy was relieved of culture portfolio which went to Ambika Soni.

Congress general secretary Ambika Soni, who has been entrusted with tourism and culture, J and K leader Saifuddin Soz (water resources) and JMM leader Shibu Soren, who makes a re-entry as coal minister, are the other new cabinet entrants who were all sworn in at a ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhavan by President A P J Abdul Kalam.

The PM hinted at a minor reshuffle after the three-month budget session and a full-fledged external affairs minister "in due course of time." A total of 22 ministers, including 10 with cabinet rank, were sworn in on Sunday. The exercise touched only



Murli Deora

Sushil Shinde



Ambika Soni

A R Antulay

three non-Congress ministers. RJD's P C Gupta (company affairs) was elevated to the cabinet rank alongwith Kapil Sibal (science and technology) and Santosh Mohan Dev (heavy industries and public enterprises).

Besides the re-entry of Soren, RJD's Kanti Singh was the other non-Congress minister who was shifted from women and child development in HRD to heavy industries. Kerala got representation in the cabinet after a long time with the entry of Rajya Sabha member Vayalar Ravi who gets overseas Indians affairs till now held by Fernandes.

Prominent among the new persons sworn in as ministers of state are TNCC president and late G K Mooppanar's son G K Vasan with independent charge of statistics and programme implementation. Agencies

► List of ministers, Page 8

গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অধিবেশন

হায়দরাবাদে এ আই সি সি বর্ধিত অধিবেশনের উত্তরে-
বাহিরে রাহুল গান্ধীকে লইয়া কংগ্রেস কর্মীদের একাংশের
মাতামাতি অধিবেশনের মূল আলোচ্য বিষয় হইতে
মনোযোগ বিক্ষিপ্ত করিয়াছে। 'রাহুল লাও দেশ বাঁচাও', এই
বালখিল্য শ্লোগানের পুনরাচরণে সংশয় জাগিয়াছে, চিত্রনাট্যটি
একটু বেশি মাত্রায় চলচ্চিত্রায়িত হইতেছে না তো? অথচ এই
বালখিল্যতার বাহিরে এবারকার অধিবেশন নানা কারণে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ।
অঞ্জের রাজধানীতে অনুষ্ঠিত এই অধিবেশন প্রতিবেশী কনটিকে
কংগ্রেসের জোট সরকারের পতনোন্মুখতার ছায়ায় অনুষ্ঠিত হওয়ায়
জোট রাজনীতি বিষয়ে আলোচনা গুরুত্ব পাইয়াছে। জোট-
শরিকদের প্রতি নমনীয়তার পাশাপাশি তাহাদের সম্ভাব্য
'ব্ল্যাকমেল'-এর অভ্যাস সম্পর্কে সতর্কবার্তাও উচ্চারিত। এই
সতর্কবার্তা যে কেন্দ্রীয় জোটের শরিকদের সম্পর্কেও প্রযোজ্য,
বামপন্থীরা নিশ্চয় তাহা খেয়াল করিয়াছেন। বেসরকারি ক্ষেত্রে
সংরক্ষণ প্রবর্তনের বিষয়টিও অধিবেশনে আলোচিত। তবে
সরকারকেই এ ব্যাপারে নীতিনির্নয় করিতে বলিয়া দল বুঝাইয়া
দিয়াছে, এখনই বিষয়টি দলের এজেন্ডায় নাই।

বিদেশনীতি বিষয়ক প্রস্তাবে মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সহিত ভারতের
বর্ধমান মৈত্রী লইয়া বামপন্থীদের প্রতিবাদকে আমল না দিয়া
কংগ্রেস বুঝাইতে চাহিয়াছে, ঠাণ্ডা লড়াই-উত্তর বিশ্বে বিদেশ
নীতিতে বাস্তববাদী বহুপাক্ষিকতা অনুসৃত হইবে। উপরন্তু এই
বহুপাক্ষিকতার মধ্যেও আমেরিকার সহিত দ্বিপাক্ষিক সম্পর্ককে
বাড়তি গুরুত্ব দেওয়া হইবে, কেননা ইহা ভারতের পক্ষে
লাভজনক। আগামী মাঠেই মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ ভারতে
আসিতেছেন। তাহার সফরের বিরুদ্ধে বামপন্থীরা নানা
'জাতীয়তাবাদী' প্রতিবাদ মঞ্চস্থ করার হুমকি দিতেছেন। সেই
প্রেক্ষিতে বিচার করিলে কংগ্রেসের প্রস্তাবে শরিকদের চাপমুক্ত,
স্বাধীন এবং জাতীয় স্বার্থসিদ্ধকারী বিদেশনীতি অনুসরণের সংকল্প
স্পষ্ট। জোট রাজনীতির ফলে যে মনমোহন সিংহের সরকার নিজস্ব
বিদেশনীতি হইতে পিছু হটিতে দিবে না, ইরান প্রক্ষে বামপন্থী চাপে
নত না হইয়া দলীয় নেতৃত্ব তাহাও বুঝাইয়া দিয়াছে। সীমা ছাড়াইলে
'গঠনমূলক সমালোচনা'ও যে জোটের ভাঙন ঘটাইতে পারে, তাহা
জানাইয়া পাল্টা চাপ দেওয়া হইয়াছে।

অর্থমন্ত্রী চিদম্বরমের পেশ করা অর্থনৈতিক প্রস্তাবে সরকারের
বিভিন্ন গণমুখী প্রকল্প, আর্থিক সংস্কারকে মানবিক অবয়বে মণ্ডিত
করার কথা বলিয়া বামপন্থী সমালোচনার পালের হাওয়া কাড়িয়া
লওয়ার প্রয়াসটি স্পষ্ট। সেই সঙ্গে খুচরা বিক্রয়ে প্রত্যক্ষ বিদেশি
বিনিয়োগ এবং শ্রম-আইন সংস্কারের উপরেও জোর দিয়া কংগ্রেস
সংস্কারের অভিমুখ সম্পর্কে আপন অবস্থান দৃঢ় ভাবে ব্যক্ত
করিয়াছে। দেশে বিনিয়োগের হার কমিতেছে, মোট জাতীয়
উৎপাদনের বৃদ্ধি ৮ শতাংশে তুলিতে বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ ছাড়া
উপায় নাই। বিমানবন্দর সহ পরিকাঠামো ক্ষেত্রের পাশাপাশি খুচরা
বিক্রয়েও বিদেশি বিনিয়োগ মঞ্জুরের দলীয় সিদ্ধান্তটি চিদম্বরমের
পেশ করা অর্থনৈতিক প্রস্তাবে স্পষ্ট। সেই সঙ্গে রফতানি বাণিজ্য,
কিছু-কিছু পাইকারি ব্যবসা এবং তেল ও প্রাকৃতিক গ্যাসের
পাইপলাইন নির্মাণের ক্ষেত্রগুলি বিদেশি বিনিয়োগের জন্য সম্পূর্ণ
উন্মুক্ত করিয়া দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্তও। অধিবেশন সাজ হইবার পরেই
কেন্দ্রীয় মন্ত্রিসভা এ বিষয়ে সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করায় আর্থিক সংস্কারে
কংগ্রেসের নিজস্ব দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিকেই অগ্রাধিকার দিবার সংকল্পটি স্পষ্ট
হয়। পশ্চিমবঙ্গের বাম মুখ্যমন্ত্রীও খুচরা বিক্রয়ে বিদেশি লব্ধি
আহ্বানে উদ্যোগী। শ্রম-আইন সংস্কারেও বামপন্থীদের ইউনিয়নগত
অবস্থান এবং তথ্যপ্রযুক্তি সহ বিভিন্ন জরুরি শিল্পক্ষেত্রকে 'ছাড়'
দিবার সওয়াল চিদম্বরমের নজর এড়ায় নাই। প্রস্তাবে বিদেশি
বিনিয়োগ প্রক্ষে চিনেব পথ অনুসরণের কথা বলিয়া তিনি সম্ভাব্য
বাম সমালোচনার গোড়া মারিয়া রাখেন।

28 JAN 2006

ANADABAZAR PATRIKA

2006

Sonia-Gowda talks inconclusive

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 24. — Somewhat overshadowed by the dramatic Buta Singh affair, the politically-crucial meeting between the Janata Dal (Secular) leader and former Prime Minister Mr HD Deve Gowda and Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi ended inconclusively tonight. Mr Gowda discussed the political crisis in Karnataka with Mrs Gandhi, tracing the events that had pushed the Congress-JD(S) government in the southern state to the brink.

Tagging the meeting "inconclusive", a JD-S source said another round could take place later but did not specify the date and time. The defence minister, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, and Congress general secretary, Mr Ahmed Patel, were also present at the meeting held at Mrs

Gandhi's 10, Janpath residence. CPI-M general secretary Mr Prakash Karat met Mr Gowda at the former Prime Minister's residence here.

Mr Gowda, who arrived here this morning, had apparently refused to meet the defence minister in the beginning, saying that he wanted a one-on-one meeting with Mrs Gandhi.

A hurt but combative Mr Gowda maintained that Congress leaders had humiliated him and his party over the past 18 months. Defending Mr HD Kumaraswamy's actions, Mr Gowda said yesterday that his son had been, in fact, trying to save the party.

Led by Mr Kumaraswamy, JD-S rebels had split the party last week and called on the Governor, Mr TN Chaturvedi, to submit a letter withdrawing support to the coalition government led by chief minister N

Dharam Singh. Mr Kumaraswamy had said then that he had the support of the BJP. Later, Mr Gowda wrote to the Governor requesting him not to accept Mr Kumaraswamy's letter, saying his son's actions was not authorised by the party and that he was not the leader of the legislature group.

The Speaker recognised Mr Prakash as the JD-SLP leader after the party sacked former deputy chief minister Mr Siddaramaiah from the post, following his revolt against Mr Deve Gowda last year. With 46 MLAs of the JD-S supported by 74 BJP legislators, Mr Kumaraswamy could well become the next chief minister of Karnataka. The Governor has given the incumbent — Mr Singh — till January 27 to prove his majority on the floor of the Assembly, a move vehemently opposed by the BJP.

THE STATESMAN

Leaders cannot be created: Rahul Gandhi

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“Youth should reach out to people in the country”

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: Amethi MP Rahul Gandhi is not convinced with the diagnosis that the emergence of parties, which practised caste or religion-based politics, eroded the Congress base in the north.

“I am not in agreement. I think we are not successful in these areas because we have stopped working for the people, [we] could not match their aspirations,” he said speaking at the AICC plenary here on Monday.

The leaders ignoring grass roots workers was another factor. Leaders could not be created but should be nurtured carefully, he said and suggested that workers spend less time in the corridors of power and more time listening to and understanding the people's concerns.

The Congress as the oldest party with the maximum number of young members was in a unique position on three counts. One, it had an experienced and capable leadership running the Government under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and party affairs under Sonia Gandhi. Second, it had grass roots workers in every colony of the country and finally a huge reservoir of young members.

Tap youth power

Mr. Gandhi urged the leadership in both the Congress and the Government to farm out tasks to this youth power for popularising the party's ideology. The younger generation in the party should reach out to people in every university, school, college, village, town and city... “Move away from the corridors of power and listen to people and understand because leadership is created by listening and understanding rather than through posts.” The Congress and the people had been together starting with the freedom struggle and the key was to engage them.

Adding a personal note, Mr. Gandhi said: “Once someone asked me what my religion was and I said ‘Indian flag.’ After his father's death, he promised himself that he would serve the people who represented this flag.

In response to the demand that he play a greater role in the party, Mr. Gandhi said he wanted to “understand my place among our people” by listening and learning.

“I appreciate your support and I assure you I will not let you down.”



MAKING A POINT: Congress MP Rahul Gandhi addressing the party plenary in Hyderabad on Monday. — PHOTO: P.V. SIVAKUMAR

We can create a new India, says Manmohan

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Despite difficulties, UPA Government has "made an enviable start"

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: In spite of the "difficulties and unnecessary hurdles" created by its opponents, the United Progressive Alliance Government has made an enviable start, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said on Monday. The important thing was to keep to this course.

"We need to be in power long enough to be able to make a visible impact," Dr. Singh said in his address on the final day of the 82nd plenary of the All-India Congress Committee here.

Spelling out some of the tasks before the party and the Government, he said the country must be rid of chronic poverty and steps taken to ensure that farmers, workers, weavers, minorities and the weaker sections had a bright future. Striking an optimistic note, he said, "With hard work, determination, selflessness and commitment, we are on

the verge of creating a new India".

Heard attentively by 12,000-odd AICC delegates and Congress president Sonia Gandhi, the Prime Minister said his Government accorded priority to employment generation through increased investment, especially in agriculture and infrastructure, to sustain a 7-8 per cent growth rate.

Besides, five other major ini-

tiatives would "transform the face of India and the lives of ordinary people."

These were the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, the National Rural Health Mission, the National Urban Renewal Mission, the Rural Electrification Programme and Bharat Nirman.

Referring to the success of Delhi Metro, he said, "We will make sure that massive invest-

ment comes into our cities in the next few years."

Dr. Singh sounded upbeat on infrastructure. Describing the position as "very promising," he said the road sector was buzzing with activity.

A sum of Rs. 1,70,000 crore was expected to be invested in national highways over the next seven years.

Airports were getting busier with more flights and were getting modernised. Hyderabad and Bangalore would soon get new airports. New ports were under development. The Railways, which was performing admirably, had an ambitious Rs. 25,000-crore freight corridor project.

Referring to the mandate in 2004, Dr. Singh said the measures taken by his Government in the past 20 months would have a lasting impact on the polity, society, the economy and on India.

I prefer to listen: Rahul Gandhi

K.V. Prasad

HYDERABAD: Amethi MP Rahul Gandhi on Monday expressed his disinclination at being pushed into taking up a greater political role in the Congress. He said he preferred to spend more time "listening

[to] and understanding" the ranks. Responding to repeated demands at the 82nd All-India Congress Committee plenary here that he be inducted into the party's Working Committee, Mr. Gandhi, however, promised that he would not let down the party.

DIN & BUSTLE AT PLENARY VENUE

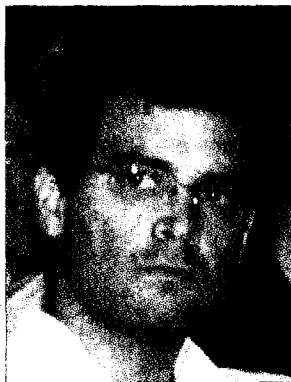
Partymen want Rahul in CWC

**Shahid Pervez in Rajiv
Nagar (Hyderabad)**

Jan. 22. — Mr Rahul Gandhi emerged as the "man of the match" on day one of the AICC conclave here as many party delegates, including Union ministers and senior leaders, hailed him as their "beacon of hope" and pleaded with Mrs Sonia Gandhi to induct him into the top rung of the AICC leadership.

The day's deliberations on serious issues were virtually overtaken by the rather predictable Rahul show. While the Congress rank and file made the clamour for Mr Rahul Gandhi's entry into the party big league, the Congress Working Committee, by shouting slogans during the day, the senior leaders and Union ministers like Mr Arjun Singh and Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi made the plea during their speeches while dealing with "substantive" matters.

The drama began right from the time the AICC session started. The applause and slogans expressed to greet Mrs Gandhi's appearance on the dais was only matched by Mr Rahul Gandhi's entry into the venue down below, where he was



Mr Rahul Gandhi at the Congress plenary session in Hyderabad.— AFP

Left warned

NEW DELHI, Jan. 22. — Often cornered by criticism from Left parties and even constituents of the UPA over government policies, the Congress today made a strong disapproval of their attacks, making it clear to them that they should not "cross limits of constructive criticism" but adhere to "collective responsibility". — SNS

Details on page 4

immediately surrounded by lower-rung Congress leaders.

The moment the Andhra Pradesh Congress chief, Mr K Keshav Rao, started delivering his welcome speech, the venue plunged into din and bustle as many restive participants began their slogan-shouting hailing Mr Rahul

Gandhi's leadership. It seemed pretty well-rehearsed and planned.

The AICC general secretary, Mr Janardhan Dwivedi, then requested the Amethi MP, dubbed widely as Mrs Gandhi's "successor", to come to the stage to pacify the gathering. Mr Rahul Gandhi went up, waved his hand, and told the crowd that he would deliver a speech tomorrow and that he would only sit below among the audience.

In the course of the debate on the Congress' political resolution, Mr Arjun Singh first touched upon the Rahul factor in an oblique manner, saying "the aspirations of the youth for their leader will be met from within the Congress and the leader, who has been identified, is to rise soon", barely leaving any scope for guessing whom he was referring to.

As if this was not enough, several other leaders irrespective of age and seniority vied with each other to pay their tributes to Mr Rahul Gandhi and press the central leadership for his appointment to top party positions.

Mr Das Munshi urged Mr Rahul Gandhi to lead modern India to fulfill Rajiv Gandhi's dreams.

More reports on page 4

Congress desperate to save govt

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, Jan. 22. — The beleaguered Congress chief minister of Karnataka, Mr N Dharam Singh, whose government is on the brink of collapse, arrived here this evening and held a meeting with the party top brass, including Mrs Sonia Gandhi, to discuss ways to tackle the crisis.

The high-level meeting was held on the sidelines of the ongoing AICC plenary session here, where the "consensus" was said to be in favour of "making attempts to save the government to keep the BJP at bay".

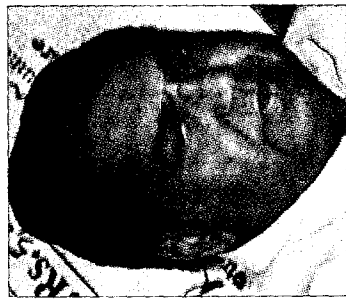
The possibility of such a scenario, however, now

increasingly seems remote as Mr Dharam Singh has to prove his majority on the floor of the Assembly on 27 January.

The meeting was attended by senior Congress leaders, including Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr AK Anthony and Mr Ahmed Patel, as well as Karnataka leaders. The meeting was said to have "authorised" Mrs Gandhi to take the final decision on the issue.

The JD-S president, Mr HD Deve Gowda, is likely to meet Mrs Gandhi in New Delhi after a couple of days following tomorrow's conclusion of the Congress session.

There is also a view in the Congress leadership



Mr N Dharam Singh and Mr HD Deve Gowda



The Karnataka crisis was sparked off after Mr Deve Gowda's son, Mr HD Kumaraswamy, led 46 JD-S MLAs to withdraw support from the Congress-led coalition government and joined hands with the BJP to stake claim to form a governmental chief ministership

that the party should let the rebel JD-S faction to form a government in collaboration with the BJP. "Such a government will be unstable and unprincipled that could enable the Congress to bounce back with a comfortable majority in the next elections," said a senior AICC leader.

deal.

BJP MLAs taken to Kodaikanal

BJP legislators from Karnataka, who had arrived in Chennai on Friday, were today taken to Kodaikanal, a hill resort in Tamil Nadu.

"We are leaving for Pondicherry on our way to Kodaikanal where we will be staying for two days," the BJP's Tamil Nadu general secretary, Mr G Kumaravelu said.

About their plans at Kodaikanal, he said it would depend on the instructions from Bangalore.

As many as 70 MLAs belonging to the BJP were taken to Chennai from Bangalore on Friday night and lodged in two city hotels.

Congress seeks power at the Centre on its own strength

Persistent demands for a "greater organisational role" for Rahul Gandhi

28/1
cont.
2311



FOR THE HAND: Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress president Sonia Gandhi and other AICC members raise their hands in approval of the political resolution at the Subjects Committee at the party plenary in Hyderabad on Sunday. — PHOTO: AP

K.V. Prasad

HYDERABAD: The Congress said on Sunday that while it remained committed to the politics of coalition it was also determined to increase its strength to seek a return to power on its own at the Centre.

This was the message it sought to send as it began deliberations at the 82nd plenary session of the All India Congress Committee at Gachibowli, renamed as Rajiv Gandhi Nagar for the occasion here.

Even as the party began serious debate on the four resolutions placed before the assembly, there were persistent demands from vociferous party members and a few senior leaders for a "greater organisational role for Amethi MP, Rahul Gandhi." Mr. Gandhi himself had to intervene twice to keep the deliberations on track and not to be sidetracked by person-

- Party to "aggressively confront and fight the Left parties"
- Against cutting subsidies for BPL families
- Call to review role of the Non-Aligned Movement

al loyalties.

The Hyderabad plenary is the first such exercise after the Congress returned to power at the Centre via the coalition route. It saw a measured response from the party to contemporary issues and an attempt to fine-tune some policies, which have been under attack from the Left parties.

In her brief remarks, Congress president Sonia Gandhi touched upon the various resolutions taken up for deliberations and preferred to hear the

views of the participants. She said the sentiments expressed by the participants would be taken note of by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his colleagues in the Government.

Dr. Singh who is scheduled to speak on Monday is expected to touch upon the broad theme that the success of the United Progressive Alliance Government would be the success of the party. He is also expected to elaborate on the achievements of the 20-month coalition Government he heads.

The day-long deliberations adopted resolutions such as Political; Economic; External Security and International Affairs; and Agriculture, Employment and Poverty Alleviation. These would now come up for discussion before the plenary on Monday.

In the political resolution, the party made the categorical assertion that it would "aggress-

sively confront and fight the Left parties" which are supporting the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance Government from outside. It sought to make a clear distinction on the party approach to its main political opponents, the Left in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura.

On the economic front, it said that while working to make the country an economic superpower and consolidate the reforms process, its commitment to the poor and the disadvantaged through Governmental intervention remained. On the public distribution system, it said the Government should not cut down subsidies for families below the poverty line, and maintain the level of quantity of foodgrains supplied to them.

The party said the Government should strengthen the 'navratna' public sector undertakings and "under no circumstance" privatise them. It should

not use the funds from PSUs to meet revenue expenditure, the resolution said.

On external affairs, the resolution made a case for reviewing the role of the Non-Aligned Movement in rapidly transforming international order and urged India to take a leadership role.

The relations with United States, it said, were based on reciprocity and transparency. On Iran, the party said it hoped that the current impasse would be resolved through a mutually acceptable solution in the interest of world peace and keeping in mind Iran's concern for freedom to use nuclear research for peaceful purposes.

Earlier, the party adopted condolence resolutions including a separate one marking the contribution of former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and former president K.R. Narayanan.

Deve Gowda to meet Sonia on January 25

Gowda denies setting down conditions

A. Jayaram

BANGALORE: A last-ditch effort to save the Congress-Janata Dal (Secular) Government in Karnataka will possibly come on January 25, when Congress president Sonia Gandhi and the former Prime Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, are scheduled to meet in New Delhi. This was revealed here on Sunday by a Janata Dal (Secular) spokesman.

The visit of President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam to the State on Sunday seemed to have put on hold the efforts to save or destabilise the coalition Government. But the crisis that has overtaken the Government cast its spell on the visit and it was uppermost in the minds of at least some of the dramatis personae. While returning here on Sunday evening from Shravanabelagola, where the Mahastakabhisheka celebrations were declared open by the President, Mr. Gowda, Chief Minister Dharam Singh and Deputy Chief Minister M.P. Prakash are reported to have discussed the issues that led to the crisis.

Denial

A news agency report on Sunday that quoted reports in a section of the press that Mr. Gowda had written to Ms. Gandhi on January 19 setting out nine conditions before the Congress if it wanted the save the Government, was refuted on his behalf. State JD(S) spokesman and party general secretary Y.S.V. Datta termed the report "baseless and nonsensical." "Mr. Gowda has not spoken to Ms. Gandhi even on

- Dharam Singh banks on Deve Gowda's intervention
- Congress cannot blame JD(S) for the crisis: Gowda

the telephone since the crisis broke, much less writing to her," he said. "However he is ready to meet Ms. Gandhi and discuss matters."

According to informed sources, Mr. Gowda has let the Chief Minister know that the Congress cannot blame his party for the crisis. It should realise that all along it had indulged in verbal attacks on him and tried to humiliate him. That was what forced many of his party MLAs to grow tired of the Congress and seek to join hands with the BJP, it was pointed out.

Congress sources say the Chief Minister is nursing hopes of Mr. Gowda being able to save the Government by bringing his son H.D. Kumaraswamy round to his point of view to continue the alliance with the Congress.

The question whether the Chief Minister will throw in the towel and resign before January 27, the date fixed by Governor T.N. Chaturvedi for the confidence vote in the Assembly is still a moot one. He will take the vote and come out triumphant, says a section of the local press towing the Dharam Singh line.

But it remains to be seen whether Mr. Gowda will be able to persuade the rebels to "return home."

Cong assures Left on reforms

HT Correspondent
Hyderabad, January 22

THE CONGRESS on Sunday sought to reassure the Left and other allies that the UPA government would address their concerns on economic issues.

In the draft resolution on economic affairs, introduced at the 82nd Congress plenary, the party patted the UPA government for "reversing the policy of indiscriminate and non-transparent privatisation of the public sector put in place by the previous BJP-led NDA government".

The party said that under no circumstances, the Navaratna companies would be privatised. They would be strengthened in every way so that they become globally competitive.

"The Congress is in agreement with the view that disinvestments in other cases should be undertaken selectively, on a case-by-case basis, so as to raise resources for the National Investment Fund that has been set up by the government to augment resources for social sector programmes," the draft noted.

The party further urged the UPA government to ensure that under no circumstances the fund from the public sector should be used for meeting the revenue expenditure. Viable public sector companies should be revived and, overall, the public sector must get the necessary managerial and commercial autonomy to function in a professional manner.

Later speaking to media finance minister P. Chidambaram refuted the charge that Left parties were impeding the growth of the country by opposing reforms. Stating that the viewpoints of 62 MPs had to be respected in a democracy, he



SHOW OF HANDS: Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi at the inaugural session of the AICC Plenary at Rajiv Gandhi Nagar in Hyderabad on Sunday.

said that the country had achieved nearly seven per cent growth, a record in itself, by following the Common Minimum Programme.

The resolution also asked the government to set up a special fund to correct regional imbalances immediately, which is seen as a move to mollify allies such

as the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, which is demanding a separate Telangana state.

Taking note of the initiatives taken by the UPA government to benefit the poorer and backward regions of the country, the party called upon the government "to evolve legislative, administrative and fiscal meas-

ures to ensure removal of inadequacies in the human and physical development of these regions and facilitate to bring inclusive development and the mainstreaming of the vulnerable areas and communities".

The Congress also urged the government to look at the economic dimensions of social con-

licts more carefully and take appropriate measures to deal with them. "Undoubtedly, conflict and violence must be combated through effective law-and-order machinery but in many cases, underlying socio-economic causes must also be addressed meaningfully", the draft resolution demanded.

Renewed focus on weaker sections

HT Correspondent
Hyderabad, January 22

THE FARMER, the *aam aadmi* and the poor remained high on the Congress agenda, as the party stepped out to demand that the government evolve "legislative and administrative support" for implementation of the policy on affirmative action for weaker sections in the private sector.

The subject finds mention in both the political and the economic resolutions adopted by the AICC delegates, which will be placed for ratification before the plenary session on Tuesday, with the Congress emphasising its pro-people commitment by focusing on the social sector in its political and economic resolutions as well as the resolution on agriculture, employment and poverty alleviation.

In view of the fact that Sonia Gandhi had put A.B. Vajpayee on the defensive by questioning his government's promise to deliver one crore jobs, the issue of employment, specially of the weaker sections, is high on the Congress-UPA agenda.

While the passage of the rural employment guarantee Act would not only provide 100 days employment to rural households at least Rs 60 per month but also expand rural infrastructure, it underlined that the time has come to have laws and regulations that accelerate growth in the organised sector.

The political resolution was more explicit on the subject of job reservations. "The growing participation of private sector in areas of maximum employment potential has raised the issue of opportunities for disadvantaged groups beyond the reservations available in public sector", it said, urging greater priority and sustained attention to this subject in order to quickly arrive at a "creative formulation".

It recalled that the party had, in its Bangalore resolution in 2001, urged the government to initiate a national debate on the role of the private sector in affirmative action programmes to fulfil the aspirations of the youths in the weaker sections of society. The point was reiterated in the economic resolution this time, with the Congress emphasising that such a role must be proactive and consistent with the imperatives of global competitiveness.

"Government policies must be tailored to give an incentive for affirmative action", the resolution said.

Congress plans to move ahead on economic reforms

Thrust of resolutions remains on party's commitment to secular politics

Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD: The Congress Working Committee on Saturday debated the draft resolutions to be unveiled before the All-India Congress Committee plenary session on Sunday.

For nearly five hours, the members of the extending Working Committee, that included leaders of the State units and legislature parties, participated in an exercise to fine tune the thrust of the four resolutions — political, economic, international and agriculture and rural development.

The meeting was attended by all the members of the CWC, including Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress president Sonia Gandhi, special invitees, permanent invitees and CLP/PCC chiefs. Prominent among those who were not present were Uttaranchal Chief Minister N.D. Tiwari, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Veerbhadra Singh and Karnataka Chief Minister Dharam Singh.

Briefing correspondents, AICC general secretary Ambika Soni said the resolutions cleared by the CWC along with suggestions for incorporation would be placed before the session.

She denied reports that Mr. Tiwari had stayed away as he was upset at not being included in the CWC and that he was not being consulted while preparing the draft resolutions.

Ms. Soni said Mr. Tiwari was one of the seniormost leaders whose guidance the party sought at all times. She said the Uttaranchal Chief Minister had said he would not be able to make it for the meeting.

The party did not share the contents of the resolutions. It merely asserted that the overall thrust remained on the Congress' commitment to promoting secular politics in the country. It was felt that priority should be given to expand the party's base. The manner in which it could be done without unsettling the current arrangement was to be considered.

Similarly, in the economic



THE STAGE IS SET: Congress president Sonia Gandhi preparing the groundwork for the All-India Congress Committee plenary session in Hyderabad on Saturday. With her are Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy. — PHOTO: RAMESH BABU

field the party plans to move forward on reforms while taking adequate care that the vulnerable sections are protected.

After the CWC, Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee made a presentation on the performance and achievements of the

United Progressive Alliance Government at the Centre.

Meanwhile, commenting on the developments in Karnataka, Ms. Soni said senior leaders were on the job and the Chief Minister himself was confident that the coalition Government

would survive the trust vote on January 27. She said the basic objective of coalition governance was to strengthen the secular forces. Even now the Congress MLAs in the State had not budged from their position. Hiccups in running a coalition

government was not unusual and the party was successfully having similar arrangements working in Maharashtra and Meghalaya, Ms. Soni said.

Another report on Page 10

THE HINDU

বফর্স-বিতর্কে বিজেপিকে মদত সনিয়াকে দুর্বল করতে সক্রিয় দলের একাংশই

জয়ন্ত ঘোষাল ● হায়দরাবাদ

২১ জানুয়ারি: মন ভাল নেই সনিয়া গাঁধীর!

কিন্তু কেন? কংগ্রেসের এই মহা-অধিবেশনে তিনিই তো শেষ কথা। দল আর সরকারের রথের রশি তাঁরই হাতে। আজ দুপুরে যখন দিল্লি থেকে এই শহরে উড়ে এলেন সনিয়া, তখন তাঁকে স্বাগত জানানোর উদ্দীপনায় কোনও খামতি ছিল না কংগ্রেস নেতাদের। তবু তাঁর ঘনিষ্ঠ মহল বলছে, সনিয়া ব্যথিত। কারণ বফর্স।

বফর্স নিয়ে বিরোধীরা নতুন করে জলখোলা করছে, রাষ্ট্রপতির কাছে গিয়ে নালিশ জানাচ্ছে— সনিয়ার ব্যথিত হওয়ার কারণ এটা নয়। কেননা, বিরোধীদের কাজ বিরোধীরা করবে। কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রীর ঘনিষ্ঠ মহল বলছে, দলের কিছু নেতার আচরণেই সনিয়া দুঃখিত ও ক্ষুব্ধ।

ইউপিএ সরকার গঠনের পর থেকেই বিরোধীরা আক্রমণের মূল লক্ষ্য হিসাবে মনমোহন সিংহের বদলে সনিয়াকে বেছে নিয়েছে। এবং সেটি কৌশলগত কারণেই। নটবর সিংহের ভোলকার কাণ্ড, অমর সিংহের ফোনে আড়ি পাতা ও সর্বশেষে বফর্স। একের পর এক আক্রমণের মিছিল। কিন্তু ১০ জনপথের কাছে খবর এসেছে, দলের মধ্যেই বেশ কিছু নেতা বিরোধী শিবিরকে প্রচ্ছন্ন ভাবে মদত দিয়ে চলেছেন। এর পিছনে আছে এক গভীর ষড়যন্ত্র। শাহি দিল্লি মুঘল সাম্রাজ্যের সময় থেকে ষড়যন্ত্রনগরী বলেই পরিচিত। সেই শহরের রাজনৈতিক ষড়যন্ত্রের ইতিহাসে এ এক অভিনব সংযোজন। কংগ্রেসের মধ্যেই এখন যেন দু'টি পৃথক শিবির। ১০ জনপথের ঘনিষ্ঠ শিবিরের নেতার মনে করছেন যে, দলের কিছু নেতা সনিয়াকে দুর্বল করে রাখতে চাইছেন। সনিয়ার নেতৃত্বকে চ্যালেঞ্জ জানানোর ক্ষমতা যে কারও নেই, তা আজ সকলেরই জানা। এক দিনেই, ধীরে ধীরে তিনি দলের মধ্যে নিজের কর্তৃত্বকে আরও অনেক বেশি শক্তিশালী ও সুসংহত করেছেন। বিজেপি'র অভ্যন্তরে অটলবিহারী বাজপেয়ী অথবা লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণীর যে কর্তৃত্ব, নিজের দলের মধ্যে তার চেয়ে কয়েকশো গুণ বেশি ক্ষমতা সনিয়ার। কিন্তু সনিয়ার নেতৃত্বকে দুর্বল করে কিছু নেতা সরকার পরিচালনায় ছড়ি ঘোরাতে চাইছেন বলে মনে করছেন সনিয়ার কিছু অনুগামী।

ইন্দিরা গাঁধীর জমানায় কিছু নেতা যেমন সিডিকোট গঠন করে দলনেত্রীকে চাপের মধ্যে রাখতে উদ্যত হয়েছিলেন, ঠিক তেমন ভাবে সনিয়াকে নেবেদ্যর চূড়ায় রেখে তাঁরা নিজেরা নিজেদের মতো করে রাজাপাট চালাতে চান।

সুযোগ এলে তাঁদের কেউ কেউ প্রধানমন্ত্রী হওয়ারও স্বপ্ন দেখেন।

আর এই ষড়যন্ত্রকে সফল করার



বরকতের জোট-প্রস্তাব উপেক্ষাই করছে দল

অগ্নি রায় ● হায়দরাবাদ

২১ জানুয়ারি: জোট রাজনীতির স্বার্থে কংগ্রেস কি নিজেদের ভাবমূর্তির সব থেকে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অংশটি বিসর্জন দেবে? এই অনুচ্চারিত প্রশ্নের জবাব মিলে গেল অম্বিকা সোনির সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে। জানালেন, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা দলের মৌলিক অবস্থান। তার থেকে বিচ্যুত হওয়ার প্রসঙ্গ নেই। মমতার ডাকা বাম-বিরোধী জোট গড়ার প্রস্তাবও এ ভাবেই খারিজ করে দিলেন অম্বিকা।

প্রশ্নটি বেশি করে প্রাসঙ্গিক হয়ে ওঠে এক জনের অনুপস্থিতির কারণে। ক'দিন ধরে পশ্চিমবঙ্গে বাম-বিরোধী মহাজোটের জন্য সমানে সওয়াল করেছেন বরকত গনি খান চৌধুরি। সেই জোটে বিজেপিকে নিতেও তাঁর দ্বিধা নেই। এই প্রসঙ্গে তাঁর কণ্ঠে শোনা গিয়েছে সনিয়া-বিরোধী সুরও। আজ এআইসিসি'র অধিবেশনে হাজার দশেক অভ্যাগতের মধ্যেও তাঁর অনুপস্থিতি চোখে পড়ার মতো।

সাংবাদিক বৈঠকে বরকত নিয়ে প্রশ্নের মোকাবিলাও করতে হয় অম্বিকা সোনিকে। তবে, নেত্রী এবং দলের ঘোষিত নীতির বিরুদ্ধে গিয়ে কথা বললেও বরকতকে কিন্তু কঠোর সমালোচনার মুখে পড়তে হল না। প্রবীণ এই নেতার প্রতি সৌজন্য রেখেই অম্বিকা বলেন, "জানি না কেন আসেননি উনি। তবে মার্গারেট আলভা

জন্য তাঁরা বিজেপিকেও অস্ত্রিজেন জোগান দিয়ে থাকেন। বিজেপি যদি নিশ্চিহ্ন হয়ে যায়, তবে দলের মধ্যে সনিয়া আরও শক্তিশালী হয়ে উঠবেন। তাই বিজেপির জুজু দেখিয়ে রাজনৈতিক সঙ্কট সৃষ্টি করে ক্ষমতার মধু আশ্বাদন করে বহাল তব্বিতে থাকতে চান কেউ কেউ। এমন অভিযোগও ১০ জনপথে এসেছে যে, ভোলকার বা আইনমন্ত্রীর চিঠি সংবাদমাধ্যমে ফাঁস হয়েছে কংগ্রেস শিবির থেকেই। আর বিরোধীরা যে তার রাজনৈতিক ফায়দা নেবে, তাতে অস্বাভাবিকতার কী আছে?

এ বার বফর্স-কাণ্ডে বিভিন্ন সংবাদপত্রে খবর ছাপা হয়, আইনমন্ত্রীর আচরণে প্রধানমন্ত্রী ক্ষুব্ধ। দলের মধ্যেও কেউ কেউ মনমোহন-সনিয়ার দূরত্ব বাড়তে সচেষ্ট হয়েছিলেন। কিন্তু মনমোহন সেটা টের পেয়েই অন্ধুরেই তা ঝিনুট করে দেন। ৭ রেসকোর্স রোডে যে দিন সনিয়া গিয়েছিলেন, সে দিন প্রণব মুখোপাধ্যায়, অর্জুন সিংহ ও আহমেদ পটেলের সামনেই মনমোহন সেটি বুঝিয়ে দিয়েছিলেন। বফর্স বিতর্ক সামাল দিতে সনিয়ার হয়ে সক্রিয় ভূমিকা নিয়েছিলেন প্রণববাবু। তিনি যুক্তি দেন, লন্ডনে কুট্রোচ্চির ওই দু'টি ব্যাঙ্ক অ্যাকাউন্টের সঙ্গে বফর্স তদন্তের কোনও সম্পর্ক নেই। মূলত তাঁর পরামর্শেই সে দিন ঠিক হয়ে যায়, অ্যাকাউন্ট থেকে নিষেধাজ্ঞা তোলায় সুপারিশের দায়িত্ব আইন মন্ত্রক নয়, সিবিআইয়ের কাঁধে তুলে দেওয়া হবে। সেই মতো দু'দিন পরে সাংবাদিক বৈঠক করে সিবিআই। অন্য দিকে, প্রধানমন্ত্রী সিবিআই-এর দায়িত্বপ্রাপ্ত ক্যাবিনেট মন্ত্রী হিসাবে একই কথা জানিয়ে দিয়ে সব ভুল বোঝাবুঝির অবসান ঘটান। বিরোধী শিবির প্রচার শুরু করে দিয়েছিল, ম্যাডামের নির্দেশে তাঁর ঘনিষ্ঠ আইনমন্ত্রী এই কাজ করেছেন। আর প্রধানমন্ত্রী কিছুই জানতেন না। প্রধানমন্ত্রী বিবৃতি দিয়ে সেই প্রচারে জল ঢেলে দেন। তাঁর অবস্থানের মধ্য দিয়ে প্রধানমন্ত্রী সনিয়াকে বুঝিয়ে দিয়েছেন, এই ষড়যন্ত্রে আর যেই থাকুন, তিনি নেই।

সনিয়া বিষয়টি নিয়ে কী ভাবছেন, তা জানা কারও পক্ষেই সহজ নয়। এ সব বিষয় নিয়ে সনিয়া দু'এক জনের সঙ্গে কথা বলতে পারেন। কিন্তু সাধারণ ভাবে কংগ্রেস নেতাদের সঙ্গে এই বিষয়ে তিনি কথাই বলেন না। তবু তাঁর একান্ত ঘনিষ্ঠ কিছু নেতার কাছ থেকে যা জানা যাচ্ছে, তা থেকে স্পষ্ট যে তিনি এই ঘটনাবলিতে যথেষ্ট ব্যথিত ও ক্ষুব্ধ।

কারা এই আধুনিক সিডিকোটের এর পর সাতের পাতায় ● এআইসিসি-র আরও খবর...পৃঃ ৫

Last Ditch Bid To Tackle K'taka Crisis

Sonia to meet Deve Gowda

Devesh Kumar
HYDERABAD 21 JANUARY

AFTER snubbing JD(S) president H D Deve Gowda by refusing to grant him an audience, Congress president Sonia Gandhi, in an attempt to contain the political crisis in Karnataka, has agreed to meet him after all.

With the fate of the Dharam Singh government still precarious, the Congress leadership, which is here to attend the party's 82nd plenary, has decided to make a last-ditch effort in Karnataka by impressing upon the former Prime Minister the need to check his recalcitrant son, H D Kumaraswamy. Sonia Gandhi is scheduled to meet the JD(S) chief after the session.

The 82nd plenary session, meanwhile, got off to a sedate start here this afternoon, with a section of delegates using the meeting of the extended working committee to renew the call to induct Rahul Gandhi, Lok Sabha member from Amethi, into the CWC



HIGH COMMAND: Manmohan Singh with Sonia Gandhi at the Plenary Session

ND Tiwari, Ghani missing

AS if the Congress party's woes in Karnataka and the Opposition's attack on it for allegedly trying to bail out Italian middleman Ottavio Quattrocchi were not enough, the session got off to a rough start with a sulking Uttaranchal chief minister N D Tiwari and former Union minister A B A Ghani Khan Chaudhary preferring to give it a miss.

Tiwari, who has been complaining of being slighted by the party leadership, has decided to register his protest by staying away from the three-day extravaganza. Efforts by Congress treasurer Moti Lal Vora, who is in charge of Uttaranchal, to get in touch with him proved futile as he was incommunicado in the state capital.

Meanwhile Chaudhary, one of the senior members of the party and the MP from Malda, decided to skip the session to protest the party's refusal to join the anti-Left 'mahajot' in West Bengal. Also missing from the session was the Karnataka chief minister, for obvious reasons.

and, even perhaps appoint him as a party general secretary.

The run-up to the crucial session, it may be mentioned, had seen a sudden increase in the tempo of the "induct Rahul" campaign. Early this morning, Haryana minister and former youth Congress president Randeep Singh Surjewala, accompanied by a group of young MPs, made a forceful pitch for entrusting Rahul Gandhi with greater responsibility. AICC general secretary Ambika Soni, later told newsmen that she would "neither confirm nor deny" these activities. "They all want younger people and Rahul to join the Congress to strengthen Gandhi's hands," she said.

The extended working committee, which was attended by 47 members, saw a detailed discussion on the party's political resolution, with Union HRD minister Arjun Singh presenting its salient points. As many as 25 amendments were moved by the participants.

Senior Karnataka Congress leader Veerappa Moily introduced the resolution on economic affairs.

Gowda woos own followers: P 2

8-day life support for Congress govt

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, Jan. 19: The Congress-led government in Karnataka received time until January 27 to prove its majority in the House as the toppling-game routine began to be played out by quarantining the group of rebel MLAs in a resort.

Chief minister N. Dharam Singh appeared confident in public, suggesting he would prove his majority on that day.

As of this evening, however, there was no reason to believe he would do so as the group of Janata Dal(S) legislators who had withdrawn support to the government moved to the captivity of a resort on the outskirts of Bangalore.

Yesterday, led by Kumaraswamy, former Prime Minister and JD(S) national leader H.D. Deve Gowda's son, they had walked out of the Congress-headed coalition ruling the state for the past 18 months.

Some 42 MLAs were said to be at the resort, and with the support of 76 legislators of the

BREAKAWAY BRIGADE



Kumaraswamy

BJP. Kumaraswamy easily clears the majority mark to form the government.

Gowda continued to insist he was behind Dharam Singh, but his stand was taken with much scepticism.

A party leader quoted him as telling the Congress high command: "I will make all possible efforts to find a solution to the ongoing crisis much before chief minister N. Dharam Singh faces a vote of confidence on January 27."

Former deputy chief minister Siddaramaiah, who was expelled from the party by Gowda, accused him of directing and producing the drama starring his son.

How MANY: At least 42 MLAs

WHERE: In a resort on the outskirts of Bangalore

Why: To prevent poaching
How LONG: Expected to be confined there for the next one week

Who LIAISES: Kumaraswamy. Only he can go out for a short while

"The fact that he has chosen not to take any action against Kumaraswamy or any of the rebels shows he supported the move in every way," Siddaramaiah said.

Observers believe Gowda has orchestrated the crisis to teach a lesson to the Congress which, he feels, has not treated him with respect.

Numbed by the sudden hammer blow from Gowda, Sonia Gandhi and other central Congress leaders were today trying to reconcile themselves to surrendering Karnataka to the BJP.

The Karnataka rank and file does not want the high command to patch up with the

JD(S) rebels. Delhi was still hoping, though, that Gowda would bring the rebels around.

Governor T.N. Chaturvedi's action in giving Dharam Singh time till January 27 was taken badly by the Kumaraswamy-BJP camp.

Central leader M. Venkaiah Naidu, camping here, accused the Congress of "running away from battle".

The Congress is postponing its defeat by a week, he said. "Though they may try to employ dirty tricks, they will not succeed."

Chaturvedi, a BJP member and appointee of the previous Vajpayee government, said he had ordered the floor test keeping the letter and spirit of the Constitution in mind. "I am convinced that this is the only way out," he said.

Chaturvedi said Dharam Singh had asked for time till January 30, but he had declined. The governor said 39 JD(S) MLAs and five Independents had come to him on Wednesday evening with signatures of support. He added that 76 BJP members signed today.

Cong kayoed in Karnataka

OUR BUREAU

Bangalore/New Delhi, Jan. 18: The Congress-led coalition in Karnataka appeared tonight to be on its way out after being stunned by a revolt in the Janata Dal(S), its partner, from which a large section broke away and staked claim to form a new government.

Sonia Gandhi's party was taken completely by surprise as the drama began to unfold rapidly in the evening and spun out of control.

Kumaraswamy, the son of former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda who heads the JD(S), led the revolt, meeting governor T.N. Chaturvedi with a group of over 40 MLAs.

One estimate suggested Kumaraswamy had as many as 50 of the 53 JD(S) members.

The same group first informed the governor of its decision to withdraw support to the 18-month-old Dharam Singh ministry.

Although Gowda sent a letter to the governor, saying Kumaraswamy was not the true representative of the party, observers found it hard to believe so many MLAs would have switched sides without the former Prime Minister's blessing.

Kumaraswamy was backed by the BJP, two of whose leaders accompanied him when he went to meet the governor. With 79 MLAs, the BJP's support is enough for Gowda's son to install a government by breasting the half-way tape at 113 in the 224-member Assembly.

Snatching Karnataka from the Congress will give the BJP a taste of revenge because Assembly elections in the state were held simultaneously with Lok Sabha polls in 2004



Sonia Gandhi

COUP IN THE SOUTH

ASSEMBLY LINE-UP

Total seats: 224

Majority mark: 113

BJP: 79

Congress: 64

Janata Dal (S): 53*

Janata Dal (U): 5

Ind.: 18

* After the expulsion of five members who are in a breakaway group now

• Why did Gowda's son do it?

He suspects partner Congress is courting rival Siddaramaiah to go for fresh polls

• Wasn't Sonia alerted?

She was told nothing would be done till February 8, when Gowda would have concluded a mood-gauging tour of Karnataka

THE CLAIM

BJP: 77

Janata Dal (S): 50

Ind.: 15

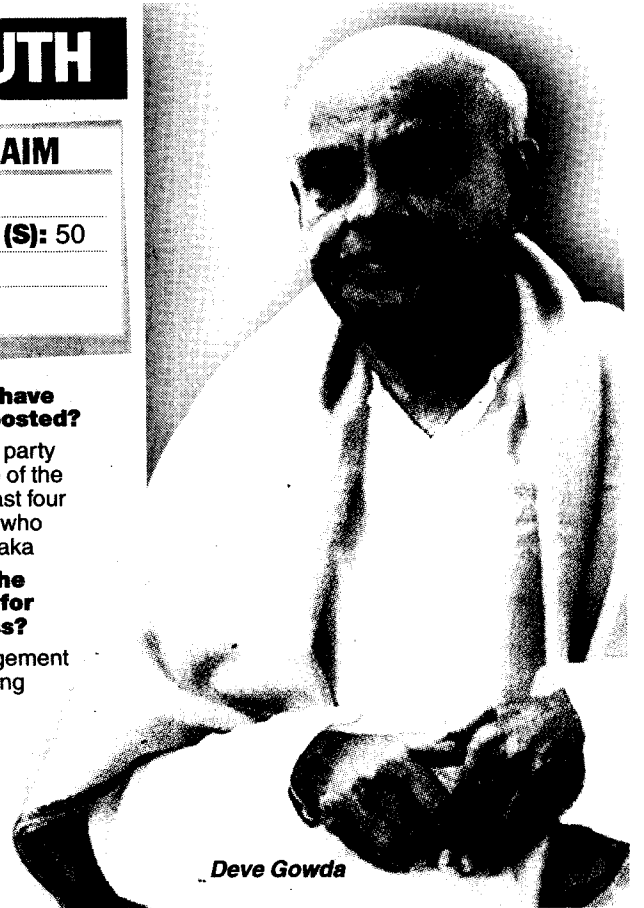
Total: 142

• Who should have kept Sonia posted?

A.K. Antony, the party leader in charge of the state. Plus at least four CWC members who are from Karnataka

• What does the crisis mean for the Congress?

Coalition management skill found wanting again, after the Jharkhand and Bihar setbacks. The crisis will sour the mood at the AICC plenary, two days away



Deve Gowda

when the party lost power at the Centre.

Besides, despite emerging as the single largest party in the state, it could not form the government as Gowda went with the Congress.

Gowda's numbers shrank with the expulsion of former deputy chief minister Siddaramaiah and four MLAs, the group with which the Congress has been hobnobbing.

Late tonight, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was meeting home minister Shivraj Patil and defence minister Pranab Mukherjee to work out the Karnataka strategy.

Sources said the Congress wanted to go to polls, allying with Siddaramaiah and ditching Gowda, with whom it has not quite hit it off.

In the recent zilla parishad elections, Siddaramaiah's group came third, after the Congress and BJP and ahead of Gowda.

The Congress seems to believe if Assembly polls are held now, it can win in a combine with Siddaramaiah.

It is possible that the JD(S) struck fearing such a move. Gowda may be working with his son as a front because he does not want to be seen to be

directly allying with the BJP, having picked "S" for secular to differentiate his party from numerous other Janata Dals.

In the letter to the governor, he said his party still backed the coalition. "I am the JD(S) national president. Your excellency should not take cognisance of the letters of support given by party MLAs through Kumaraswamy."

But BJP central leader M. Venkaiah Naidu, camping here, said the party had already worked out a power-sharing plan with Kumaraswamy.

Under the formula, Gowda's son will head the govern-

ment for the first 20 months and the BJP for the next 20. While one side holds the chief ministership, the other will have a deputy chief minister and the Speaker.

Caught on the wrong foot, the Dharam Singh cabinet met in the evening ahead of the Assembly session beginning tomorrow.

"Everything is okay," Dharam said after the emergency meeting, which was attended by only three of the JD(S)'s 14 ministers.

With the Assembly session starting tomorrow, a test of strength in the House looks a

more credible option before the governor, an appointee of the Vajpayee regime. In a strange coincidence, Chaturvedi, who as the comptroller and auditor general had authored the report that gave momentum to the Bofors controversy, is back in the news when the scandal is revisiting the Congress.

Not only is Chaturvedi unlikely to do the Centre's bidding, Manmohan Singh would also think twice before taking any step that invites further censure after the mishandling in Jharkhand and Bihar.

■ See Page 8

JD(S) BREAKS! Gowda son Kumaraswamy revolts against father & Dharam Singh, lands at Raj Bhavan with BJP Karnataka slipping: Congress to BJP-JD (Son)

**EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BANGALORE, JANUARY 18**

THE Congress-led government in Karnataka was tottering this evening after JD(S) working president and H D Deve Gowda's son H D Kumaraswamy decided to walk out and form a new coalition with the BJP in the state.

When reports last came in, Kumaraswamy, defying his father, had landed at the Raj Bhavan with state BJP leaders B S

Yediyurappa and Jagdish Shettar to stake claim. Some 40 JD(S) MLAs were said to be with him.

BJP sources said the party was ready to form a coalition government with JD(S) and the CM's post was likely to go to Kumaraswamy while the Deputy CM would be from the BJP under an arrangement worked out between the two parties, the sources said.

Chief Minister Dharam Singh, who had earlier in the day scotched reports about

threats to his government, went into an emergency Cabinet meeting after the developments this evening.

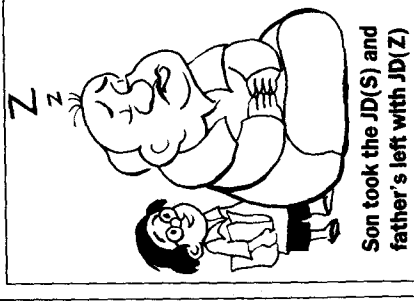
JD(S) president HD Deve Gowda, who returned from New Delhi last evening after he failed to meet the Congress top brass, seemed opposed to the tie-up



Kumaraswamy on Wednesday

with the BJP. Gowda said he had written to Karnataka Governor T N Chaturvedi not to give credence to the letter given by a section of his party legislators on withdrawal of support to the Congress-JD(S) coalition in the state.

In his letter, copies of which were released to reporters at his residence, Gowda said the group had not been authorised either by JD(S) legislature party leader M P Prakash or by the party national president.



Son took the JD(S) and father's left with JD(Z)

NUMBER GAME AGAIN

In a House of 224, this is how they fare:

BJP: 76 seats

JD(S): 58 seats

Congress: 65 seats

The Dharam Singh-led coalition has had an uneasy inrings since it came to power in May, 2004

Our Kolkata Bureau
17 JANUARY

At a time when the CPI(M)-led Left Front has already launched its campaign for the May Assembly elections in West Bengal, their rival political parties in the state — the Congress and the Trinamool Congress are still jostling for an electoral alliance.

After failure of preliminary talks regarding forging an alliance between them, the Congress and the Trinamool Congress will meet again on January 23 to hold talks on the issue.

Informing this, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee told newsmen on Tuesday that she will meet Pradesh Congress president and Union defence minister Pranab Mukherjee on January 23 to carry out the second round of talks regarding the alliance between the two parties.

The two leaders held a meeting early this month to chalk out strategies to combat the ruling CPI(M) unitedly in West Bengal. But the talks remained inconclusive as Ms

Cong, Trinamool yet to decide on tie-up



PRANAB MUKHERJEE

ing their talks in the first week of this month. But Ms Banerjee had refused to go by Mr Mukherjee's idea.

Ms Banerjee on Tuesday said she will not quit the NDA, but still hopeful for an alliance with the Congress. "I am not putting any condition before Mr Mukherjee for an electoral patch up with my party. In fact, the Congress is depending on the CPI(M) for running their government in Delhi. But I am not asking the Congress to snap their ties with the CPI(M) for fighting the elections in West Bengal, in collaboration with my party," she said.

"It will be absurd for both of us (Congress and Trinamool Congress) to forge an alliance if we put up conditions," Ms Banerjee observed.

Meanwhile, the All India

Congress said the AICC will take an effective step regarding electoral adjustment with the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal during the three-day session. "It is expected that our party high command will be able to guide us regarding the said alliance with Trinamool Congress, and Pranab Da will be able to guide us in this regard after the session," said Pradip Bhattacharjee, state Congress leader.

Meanwhile, CPI(M) politburo member and state party secretary Anil Biswas on Tuesday said: "We are not bothered about the alliance between Trinamool Congress and the Congress." "The Congress has taken our support to form and run the government in Delhi because the former wanted to remove the communal BJP from power. Now, it will be difficult for the same Congress to forge an alliance with Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, as the party is still part and parcel of the BJP-led NDA," Mr Biswas said when asked about the proposed patch up between the two Opposition parties in West Bengal.



MAMATA BANERJEE

Congress Committee (AICC) will meet for three days in Delhi from January 20, to chalk out their strategies for fighting the Assembly elections in West Bengal, Kerala and a few other states. Sources in the state

REVAMP | Sonia wants son's elevation with the sanction of popular pressure, may 'happen' at Hyderabad meet

CWC reconstituted, 'heir' Rahul kept out

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
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SOME eight months after she was re-elected Congress president, Sonia Gandhi announced the reconstitution of her core team today—most key functionaries have been retained, but the future role of her son and heir-apparent Rahul Gandhi is still a matter of suspense and speculation.

Contrary to widespread expectation, Sonia has made Rahul neither a general secretary nor a member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC). Five slots remain vacant in the party's most powerful body; sources in the party indicate that Rahul is to fill one of these after delegates at the All India Congress Committee plenary session at Hyderabad later this month have had the



Anthony, Vora and Sonia stay put; Satyavrat Chaturvedi dropped but permanent invitees to CWC

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Nora CWC invitee is UP leader Noor Bano—once on the party chief's wrong side for associating with Sonia's rival for the party presidency, the late Jitendra Prasad. Another Muslim who has been made a permanent invitee to the CWC is former Railways Minister C K Jaffer Sharief.

Sonia has dropped Satyavrat Chaturvedi—who developed serious differences with UP Congress general secretary Salman Khurshid—as a general secretary, but he has been made a permanent invitee to the CWC with charge of departments, cells and training. Moti Lal Vora remains the treasurer.

The new arrangement does not necessarily bring cheer to all who are its beneficiaries. Since the party revamp was connected to the Cabinet reshuffle, today's exercise sets the stage for

changes in the Union Cabinet as well. Soni, Dwivedi and Vora—known to be aspirants for ministerial berths—are now ruled out for induction to the Manmohan Singh cabinet. High profile Rajya Sabha members Jairam Ramesh and Karan Singh—appointed respectively as chairmen of the research and reference department and of the foreign affairs department—have had their hopes for ministership dashed as well.

Oscar Fernandes may have to return to the organisation from the government, given the increased load of party work on his shoulders—apart from his new temporary assignment, he is a permanent invitee to CWC and is in charge of the North-East. A K Antony's staying on as CWC member should hearten fellow-Mayali Vyalar Ravi, his rival for a ministership.

of State for Sports and Youth Affairs Oscar Fernandes, who, the sources say, is to keep the post warm for Rahul.

Among those retained in today's shuffle is Sonia's political secretary Ahmed Patel; continuing as general secretaries are Ambika Soni, Digvijay Singh, Ashok Gehlot, Janardhan Dwivedi, Margaret Alva and

Mukul Wasnik. They are joined by B K Hariprasad from Karnataka and V Narayanasamy from Pondicherry.

Others whose fortunes register an upswing are Jammu and Kashmir leader Saif-ud-Din Soz and MP tribal leader Urmila Singh, who have made it to the CWC. Placed in charge of Jharkhand and made a perma-