



# THE HINDU

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## V. P. Singh to be sworn in PM today

### 30 days to get confidence vote Dramatic choice at party meeting

From K. K. Katyal

NEW DELHI, Dec. 1.

The Janata Dal leader, Mr. V. P. Singh, will be sworn in as Prime Minister tomorrow at 12.15 p.m. — to head the second non-Congress Government in four decades. The President, Mr. R. Venkataraman, who invited Mr. Singh to form the new Government, stipulated that he seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha in 30 days. The date for oath-taking of the council of Ministers is yet to be finalised.

Soon after his election as the Janata Parliamentary party leader (as also of the National Front), Mr. Singh called on the President to stake his claim to power. A letter given to the President mentioned that the BJP and the Left parties — the CPI(M), the CPI, the Forward Bloc and the RSP — had extended "unconditional support" to the National Front, and that he (Mr. Singh) had the backing of majority of the members of the Lok Sabha.

A statement, read-out by the President's press secretary, Mr. Suryanarayana, said: "Since the Congress(I) elected to the Ninth Lok Sabha with the largest membership has opted not to stake its claim for forming the Government, the President invited Mr. V. P. Singh, leader of the second largest party/group, namely the Janata Dal/National Front to form the Government and take a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha within 30 days of his assuming office."

An official communique, issued later, said: "The President has invited Mr. V. P. Singh to form a new Government and has requested him to communicate to him the names of other ministers to be appointed to the council of ministers."

#### A surprise

The President's stipulation in regard to the confidence vote was somewhat of a surprise — it is the first time that the invitation for ministry-making was made conditional. This is, perhaps, because for the first time the party, which has been called upon to form the government, does not have majority and depends on the "outside support" of others.

In 1979, during the period of political uncertainty after the Janata Party's collapse, the President of the day, Mr. Sanjiva Reddi too put a similar condition on Charan Singh who was asked to form a government on July 28. This was what Mr. Reddi's communication to Charan Singh said: "I trust that, in accordance with the highest democratic traditions and in the interest of establishing healthy conventions, you would seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha at the earliest possible opportunity, say by the 3rd week of August 1979."

During his visit to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Mr. Singh was accompanied by leaders of the Front and the Janata Dal — Mr. N. T. Rama Rao, Mr. Devi Lal, Mr. Arun Nehru, Mr. K. P. Unnikrishnan, Mr. P. Upendra and Mr. Mahanta. Later, leaders of the Left parties, Mr. Jyoti Basu, Mr. E. M. S. Namboodiripad, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Mr. Indrajit Gupta, Mr. N. E. Balram, Mr. Chitta Basu and Mr. T. T. Chaudhary, met the President to convey to him their assurance of support to Mr. Singh. Similar assurances were conveyed on behalf of the BJP.

Mr. Singh will need all the skill and tact at his command to ensure that the formation of the Government is a smooth affair. The way in which he was "unanimously" elected leader of the Janata Parliamentary Party left a bitter taste. Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who at one stage was in the race, did not oppose Mr. Singh's choice but did speak — in unequivocal terms — of his reservations on the election process. He described it as a "last minute surprise." This was his view of the sequence of events at the Parliamentary Party meeting — Mr. Singh's action in proposing the Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Devi Lal's name for the leader's post (it was seconded by Mr. Chandra Shekhar) and Mr. Devi Lal, declining to accept the responsibility and instead suggesting Mr. Singh for the job.

#### Amity mission

This strategy was worked out earlier in the day during behind-the-scenes confabulations at the Haryana Bhavan, which had been the hub of Mr. Devi Lal's activities and the Orissa Bhavan, where Mr. Biju Patnaik, another Janata Dal senior, was having his sessions. The outlook was gloomy in the morning as overnight strenuous efforts to avert a contest had failed.

It looks stranger than fiction but the events could have taken a turn for the worse, from the Janata Dal's standpoint, had not two journalists close to Mr. Devi Lal visited him in the Haryana Bhavan in the morning. The Haryana leader was in a bad mood, bitterly complaining that he had been sidelined. A phone call to the house of Mr. Arun Nehru, the party's strategist, showed that he was engaged in consultations with other colleagues. The journalists went there — on the first leg of their amity mission.

They presumably spoke to Mr. Nehru of the importance of not giving Mr. Devi Lal a cause for complaint. The Haryana leader, they pointed out, had no ambitions for the top post and, as such, there should be no difficulty in working with him. They found Mr. Nehru in a positive mood. Back in the Haryana Bhavan, the two journalists reported to Mr. Devi Lal, who phoned Mr. Nehru.

and he in turn rushed there for consultations. After a candid exchange of views they contacted Mr. Singh who joined them.

The venue then shifted to the Orissa Bhavan where a larger group including Mr. Singh, Mr. Devi Lal, Mr. Nehru and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, U.P. Janata Dal leader, had a 90-minute session. Mr. Ajit Singh, party general secretary, participated in the talks after a while. It was here that the strategy, followed at the Parliamentary Party meeting subsequently, was finalised. Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who came there when they were about to disperse, was told only of the first part of the plan — that Mr. Devi Lal's name would be proposed — but, obviously, not of the second part — that the Haryana leader would opt out in favour of Mr. V. P. Singh.

The proceedings at the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party conformed to the plan. Mr. Devi Lal, who was asked why he declined the top post said: "Certain things belong to the heart and must remain in heart." He did not like to elaborate the "strategic decisions."

The outgoing Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, who met Mr. Venkataraman last night presumably informed him of the Congress(I)'s decision not to stake its claim to power. This was part of a well-considered strategy — the Congress(I), obviously, calculated that contradictions among the Janata Dal (and National Front) leaders would soon come in the open and that would be the time for it to work its way back to power. The Congress(I) could not but have found comfort from today's developments — the dramatic surfacing of the differences among the Janata leaders, as evidenced by Mr. Chandra Shekhar's reservations.

In his first press conference, after his election as the National Front leader, Mr. Singh spelt out the agenda of his Government. The urgent tasks he had in mind include steps to check the growth of money power in politics, electoral reforms and freedom of press, re-introduction of the Lok Pal Bill to check corruption in high places, national consensus to resolve the problems in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

The foreign policy, he said, would be guided by geo-political considerations, with stress on non-alignment, improvement of relations with neighbours, especially Nepal and Sri Lanka, solidarity with the developing countries and strengthening of the SAARC.

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Tasks before Govt.: Page 9

## Suspense before election

From Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, Dec. 1.

Suspense and high drama marked the election of Mr. V. P. Singh as the leader of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party in the Central Hall of Parliament House this afternoon. This, coupled with his election shortly afterwards as the leader of the National Front Parliamentary Party, paved the way for Mr. Singh staking his claim to form a new Government at the Centre.

The election was unanimous, but not without a sour note. Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who had earlier given enough indications of his intention to contest for the leadership, announced after Mr. Singh was declared elected that he had reservations about it. In comments to correspondents after the meeting, he alleged that he had become a victim of a fraud.

What imparted to the proceedings the overtones of a thriller was the suspense till the last moment about the *dramatis personae*. Most members did not quite know if there would be a contest or the choice would be unanimous; even minutes before the proceedings began, soon after 3 p.m., senior Dal members were not sure.

**All seats occupied:** Almost all available seats were occupied by Janata Dal MPs and workers and by journalists and lensmen. Excitement ran so high that two lensmen quarrelled trying to get vantage positions.

Shortly before the deliberations began, the Janata Dal President, Mr. V. P. Singh and the Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Devi Lal went round the hall greeting the MPs. Many persons walked up to Mr. Chandra Shekhar, who occupied a seat at one end of the third or fourth row and enquired about his health (he is suffering from an attack of malaria).

To restore order, the veteran Janata Dal leader, Mr. Madhu Dandavate, invited all members of the Dal's Political Affairs Committee to take their seats at the long table, just below the podium. He came round to Mr. Chandra Shekhar's seat to fetch him to join others including Messrs. V. P. Singh, Devi Lal, Ramakrishna Hegde, Biju Patnaik, George Fernandes, V. C. Shukla, Ajit Singh and S. R. Bommai.

**Devi Lal's name put up:** Mr. Dandavate explained briefly the purpose of the meeting and

invited the members to propose names. Hushed silence fell over the high-domed "third chamber of Parliament" as Mr. V. P. Singh proposed Mr. Devi Lal's name as the Dal's leader in Parliament. Mr. Chandra Shekhar promptly announced his full support. As no other name was proposed, Mr. Madhu Dandavate declared Mr. Devi Lal elected unanimously.

The announcement came as a surprise to most MPs barring of course to Mr. Chandra Shekhar. He had come out of his sick bed apparently on the understanding that Mr. Devi Lal would stop Mr. V. P. Singh from becoming the Prime Minister. While many had anticipated that the unpredictable Mr. Devi Lal might throw his hat into the ring, none expected Mr. V. P. Singh to step aside without a demur. But now it was the turn of Mr. Chandra Shekhar to be surprised.

**"For the more eligible":** The assembled MPs and journalists held their breath as Mr. Devi Lal took the microphone to make his acceptance speech. But he did not keep them in suspense for long. He was grateful for the confidence reposed in him but offered the office "to a more eligible" Mr. V. P. Singh. He advised the MPs to give a hand to Mr. Singh. Mr. Ajit Singh lost no time in declaring his support for the proposal. The entire House, barring a crestfallen Mr. Chandra Shekhar and his acolytes, burst into cheers. "V. P. Singh zindabad" and "Devi Lal zindabad" cries rent the air.

Mr. Dandavate presumably thought he would close the proceedings with his observation that with the election of the leader, the crisis in the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party had ended, but Mr. Chandra Shekhar intervened to add a rider: "I had supported Mr. Devi Lal but he proposed Mr. V. P. Singh. I did not know about the deal. I have my reservations."

Mr. V. P. Singh spoke briefly thanking the party for its confidence in him and on the tasks facing his Government. He hoped with the cooperation of all concerned he would be able to face the situation successfully.

**'A fraud':** In the interval between the close of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party proceedings and the commencement of the National Front Parliamentary Party meeting, a tense Mr. Chandra Shekhar had to field endless questions

from correspondents to explain his reservations about the election of Mr. V. P. Singh. He minced no words to declare that a fraud had been perpetrated on him.

Mr. Chandra Shekhar had agreed not to stake a claim, but to support Mr. Devi Lal on the understanding that the Haryana Chief Minister would head the National Front Government. But Mr. Devi Lal sprang a surprise by striking a deal with Mr. V. P. Singh, and he was kept in the dark. The hint was obvious: had he known about the deal, he would have contested the election.

"Would he join the V. P. Singh Cabinet?", "I am not used to receiving invitations through the press," was his curt response. What did he think of the future of the country? "As bleak as before." Realising perhaps that he might be accused of undermining the Government even before it was born, he hastened to add that he thought the future was bleak because of the enormity of the problems ahead.

The idea of a Government of national reconciliation was worth looking at he said.

Mr. Chandra Shekhar lingered on in the Central Hall until the meeting of the Front Parliamentary Party was nearly over, and garlands began to be showered on Mr. V. P. Singh, but left soon after Mr. Singh's election was announced.

**BJP, Left Front thanked:** There were no hassles at the Front Parliamentary Party meeting. Mr. N. T. Rama Rao, the Front chairman, made a congratulatory speech and briefly touched on the Front's priorities. He did not forget to express the Front's thanks to the BJP and the Left Front for their support.

Mr. Devi Lal was again at hand at the Front meeting to propose Mr. V. P. Singh as the Front's Leader in Parliament. Support came quickly from Mr. P. Upendra, leader of the Telugu Desam Parliamentary Party, and Mr. K. P. Unnikrishnan of the Congress(S). Mr. V. P. Singh accepted the accolade, and made a suitable response.

Soon after the National Front meeting at a crowded press conference, Mr. V. P. Singh reaffirmed his commitment to work on the Front's election manifesto. On the Bofors issue, he said the law of the land would take its own course.

Stunned silence: Page 9

## BJP to discuss National Govt. proposal

NEW DELHI, Dec. 1.

The BJP national executive will discuss tomorrow the proposed National Government of Reconciliation.

The party leader, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, had yesterday told newsmen that the idea has been mooted by some intellectuals and the "initial reaction" of the BJP was favourable. It had asked the intellectuals to work out the details.

Briefing newsmen on the opening day of the three-day executive meeting, the party general secretary, Dr. Murali Manohar Joshi, said 87 out of 110 members attended the meeting, presided over by Mr. L. K. Advani.

The executive is devoting the day to analysing poll results and reversals.

The party vice-president and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Mr. Bhairu Singh Shekawat, dis-

missed as "baseless and unfounded" the Congress(I)'s allegation that the BJP was responsible for the recent riots in Jaipur.

#### Mann party rejects preconditions

AMRITSAR, Dec. 1.

A meeting of the Akali Dal (Mann) working committee, district jathedars and newly elected Lok Sabha members today rejected the preconditions set by the All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) for the Akali MPs before they took oath in Parliament.

The AISSF condition, among others, were that the new PM should appear before the Akali Takt to seek pardon for the mistakes of the previous

government.

The Punjab Governor, Mr. S. S. Ray, today ordered the immediate release of four senior Akali leaders and recommended holding of Assembly election in the State.

Stating this here, he said the four Akali leaders to be released are: Mr. Prakash Singh Badal, Mr. Ujjagar Singh Shekhwan, Mr. Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Mr. Harminder Singh Sandhu.

**Didn't thank Rajiv:** The All India Sikh Students Federation president, Mr. Manjit Singh today denied that he had thanked the outgoing Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, for his decision to release Mr. S. S. Mann.

What he said was that Mr. Rajiv Gandhi had "realised" his mistake, he said. — PTL, UNI

See also Page 6



Mr. V. P. Singh being congratulated by Mr. N. T. Rama Rao after his election as the leader of the National Front and the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party. The Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Devi Lal, is on the left.

## Chenna Reddi elected leader

From Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, Dec. 1.

Dr. Marri Chenna Reddi, president of the Andhra Pradesh Congress(I) Committee, was today unanimously elected Leader of the Congress(I) Legislature party and is to take over as Chief Minister. The announcement was made at the legislators' meeting after 12 hours of consultations held by the three Central party observers, Mr. H. K. L. Bhagat, Mr. G. K. Moopener and Mr. K. Karunakaran, here today.

Dr. Chenna Reddi, who was Chief Minister between March 1978 and September 1980, was chosen by the party, which rejected the candidature of another former Minister, Mr. Nedurumalli Janardhan Reddi. The Central observers took down on a piece of paper the individual preference of each MLA and reported that the party preferred Dr. Chenna Reddi to Mr. Janardhan Reddi.

Dr. Chenna Reddi was backed by former Chief Minister, Mr. K. Vijayabaskara Reddi and Mr. Jalagam Vengala Rao and Dr. V. S. Rajasekhara Reddi supported Mr. Janardhan Reddi's candidature.

Dr. Chenna Reddi organised a signature campaign to establish his majority support in the party while Mr. Janardhan Reddi claimed majority support on the basis of MLAs calling on him pledging support. He was obviously misled be-

cause several MLAs supported both the candidates during the canvassing, but preferred Dr. Chenna Reddi when the final count was taken by the observers.

**"Natural choice":** The leaders supporting the candidature of Mr. Janardhan Reddi said that Dr. Chenna Reddi would not be able to steer the party to victory in a subsequent election, that he would not be accessible to the party MLAs and that his past record would stand against him. But several other party MLAs supported Dr. Chenna Reddi on the ground that he should be the natural choice for leadership because he had steered the party to victory in his capacity as president of the APCCO.

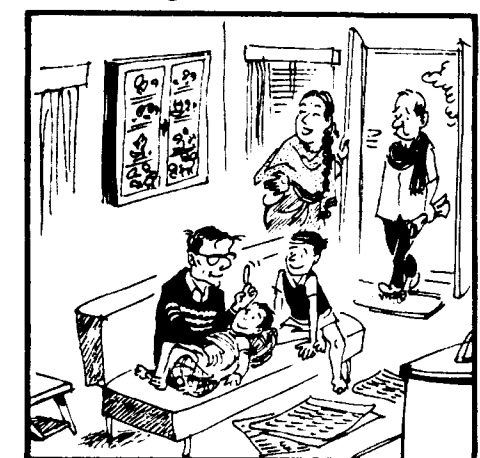
The day of hectic consultations began with the arrival of the observers from Delhi this morning and they heard the two contestants and their supporters at the Raj Bhavan guest house.

The party MLAs and MPs arrived at the Committee room of the new Legislative Assembly building before 10 a.m. and took their seats, but the observers did not come till noon. There was heavy bandobast near the Public Gardens, the road was barricaded and only MLAs and MPs were allowed into the compound. The observers, however, sat in a smaller adjacent room, and talked to each MLA individually.

At 2 p.m., the observers took a lunch break, and the MLAs and MPs had their lunch in the Assembly premises. They again sat in the Com-

mittee room without any work till the final announcement was made. The observers went to the Congress(I) Legislature Party Office and said they had spoken to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi on telephone before announcing their verdict.

#### All in the game



"They're fed up with once-upon-a-time stories — only politics holds them now. . . ."

## Coup bid fails in Philippines

From V. T. Sambandan

SINGAPORE, Dec. 1.

The President, Mr. Corason Aquino of the Philippines survived today the sixth coup attempt since she ousted late Ferdinand Marcos through people's power in February 1986.

The leader of the current coup is said to be the same cashiered Col. Gregorio Honasan, who led the fifth coup in August 1987, and escaped from custody in April last year.

The failure of the coup is partly due to the U.S. air force based in the Philippines, giving air support to troops loyal to Mrs. Aquino. This is the first time the U.S. has given open military support to Mrs. Aquino, on her request, to preserve democracy in a country known for dictatorship and corruption under Marcos, whom it gave airlift and asylum in Hawaii, till he died.

**AFP reports:** The U.S. President, Mr. George Bush, authorised the planes, stationed at Clark Air Base, to provide air cover at Mrs. Aquino's request.

In Valletta in Malta a Soviet official warned the U.S. against interference in the Philippines.

Coup bid details on Page 5

## Nadia on way to U.S.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1.

The Romanian gymnast, Nadia Comaneci, who fled her homeland for Hungary earlier this week, has been granted a request to come to the U.S. and was on her way to New York today from Vienna, U.S. officials said.

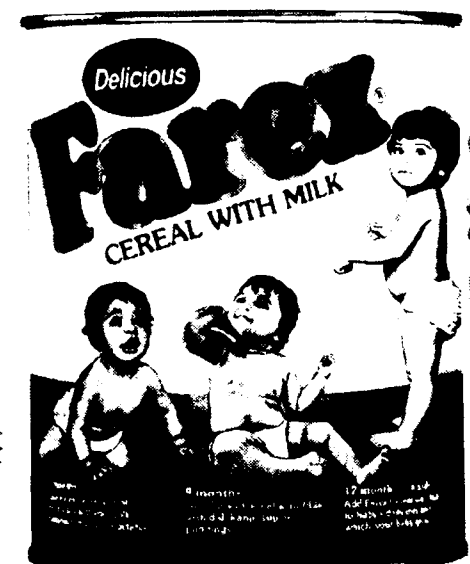
The officials, who asked not to be identified, said Ms. Comaneci, who complained of repression in her homeland, was granted refugee status by U.S. Consular officers in Europe. — AP

Earlier report: Page 15

To-day's issue has 20 pages, with a 4 page section containing Saturday Sports Special

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