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Rao tenders resignation

BJP stakes claim, NF-LF to contest it

From Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, May 10. The focus today shifted to Rashtrapati Bhavan with the leaders of both the Bharatiya Janata Party and of the National Front-Left Front combine wanting to manoeuvre the President, Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma into inviting them to form the next Government after the exit of the Narasimha Rao Government.

With almost all the political leaders, belonging to all the political parties, congregating in the capital, the political atmosphere suddenly heated up. Any number of political parleys were taking place, almost all aimed at preventing the BJP from walking away with an presidential invitation to form the Government. The balance of political advantage appeared to be rested with the three regional parties — the DMK, the Tamil Maanila Congress and the Telugu Desam (Naidu).

The Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao tendered the resignation of his Council of Ministers this evening. A Rashtrapati Bhavan communiqué noted that "the President has accepted the resignation and has requested Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao and his colleagues to continue in office till alternative arrangements are made."

The quest for "alternative arrangement" becomes incumbent upon Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma as Article 74(1) envisages "a Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister at the head to aid and advise the President" in the exercise of his powers. With Mr. Narasimha Rao's resignation, the President found himself having to decide which leader and political party could have the best chance of commanding a majority support in the Lok Sabha.

The BJP became the first party to throw its hat in the ring once it became reasonably clear that along with its allies, it would have available to it the support of the largest — though not necessarily the majority — number of Lok Sabha members. After a day long consultation among the BJP leaders, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee (who is expected to be formally elected as the leader of the parliamentary party) called on the President.

Courtesy call

However, Mr. Vajpayee insisted that his was a "courtesy call" though there were indications that the BJP also gave the President his perception of the post-poll situation. The BJP strategy

Rao not averse to truck with NF-LF?

From B. Muralidhar Reddy

NEW DELHI, May 10. The caretaker Prime Minister and Congress(I) president, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, appears not averse to the proposal of a coalition government led by the National Front-Left Front which would include the Congress as well. There are however several imponderables to such a proposition in view of the diametrically opposite views taken by the NF-LF and the Congress on continuation of Mr. Rao as party leader.

Mr. Rao tonight submitted his resignation to the President, Mr. Shankar Dayal Sharma and the latter accepted the resignation and asked him to continue as "caretaker Prime Minister" until a new Government assumed charge at the Centre.

Mr. Rao is believed to have given indications to this effect when some senior leaders of the Congress called on him and discussed the futility of the idea of the Congress sitting either in the Opposition or extending support to the NF-LF combine from outside.

That the senior Congress leaders are veering round to this view became evident when the party spokesman, Mr. V. N. Gadgil, announced at the AICC headquarters that it would be the endeavour of the "Congress Party to obtain a secular and stable government at the Centre."

Not only did Mr. Gadgil avoided talking about the option but also he parried all queries about who would lead such a government and maintained that a decision on the issue would be taken at the meeting of the newly-elected members of the party along with members in the Rajya Sabha on Sunday at 11 a.m.

The AICC general secretary, Mr. Janardhan

appears to be persuade the President to invite Mr. Vajpayee to explore the possibility of forming government — without formally staking its claim to such an invitation. Later in the evening, in a television interview Mr. Vajpayee added that he was in touch with various smaller parties but refused to reveal their names.

On the other hand, efforts were on to checkmate the BJP from stampeding the President into extending an invitation to Mr. Vajpayee. Both the Left Front and the National Front leaders have sought separate appointments with the President; most likely these leaders will be meeting the President on Saturday. However, while the BJP has firmed up the support of at least two of its allies, the Shiv Sena and the Haryana Vikas Party, the NF-LF support circle remained somewhat hazy.

NF-LF not to back Cong.

The Left Front and the National Front with their respective allies, present and putative, remained determined to ensure that the BJP did not get an invitation to form the Government. At the same time, these parties also reiterated their commitment not to support the Congress as long as Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao remained the party leader.

However, the non-BJP and non-Congress forces were no where near cobbling together a cohesive bloc of members of Parliament. Nor was there any agreement on the choice of leader to head a non-BJP, non-Congress Government. Though the two most talked about names remained that of Mr. V. P. Singh, the former Prime Minister and the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu; but, Mr. V. P. Singh was reported to be firmly disinclined to accept any leadership responsibility.

On its part the Congress party — which finds itself reduced to third slot in the national reckoning, behind the BJP and the "Third Force" combine — played cool, pretending that the burden of preventing a BJP Government was less on it and more on the National Front-Left Front. The whole idea was to blunt the demand of the non-BJP political groups that the Congress should jettison the leadership of Mr. Narasimha Rao before any kind of working arrangement can be worked out with it. Mr. Narasimha Rao's loyalists propose to go ahead with their plan to get him elected as the leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party on Sunday.

Poojary, announced that a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) has been convened for May 12 in the Central Hall of Parliament to elect leader of the CPP and all members of Rajya Sabha and the newly-elected members have been invited to attend the meeting.

Pilot demands CWC meet

The announcement of Mr. Poojary came hours after the Union Minister of State and a member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), Mr. Rajesh Pilot, demanded convening of a meeting of the CWC to chalk out the strategy the party should adopt on formation of the new Government. Mr. Gadgil made it clear that the various options before the party would be debated at the meeting of the CPP and maintained that there was no proposal at the moment to convene a meeting of the CWC. "We are clear that there will be no truck with the BJP and there is no question of change of leadership," Mr. Pilot however disagreed violently with the view expressed by Mr. Gadgil on the leadership issue and asserted that no one had the right to decide on the issue which was the prerogative of the CPP. "If the CPP wants Mr. Rao to continue, we can adopt a resolution."

The discernible shift in the position of Mr. Rajesh Pilot on the leadership issue in the last 24 hours assumes added significance as he is believed to have called on Mrs. Sonia Gandhi earlier in the day. He was busy throughout the day meeting the available CWC members in the capital and discussed the emerging situation. Mr. K. Vijayabhaskar Reddy and Mr. Sharad Pawar are among the senior leaders Mr. Pilot met in the course of the day.

A lesson for future rulers, says Moopanar

We will work for the people: Jayalalitha

From Our Special Correspondent

MADRAS, May 10.

The AIADMK accepts the verdict of the people with all humility, its general secretary and Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalitha said today, reacting to the rout of her party in the general elections. She said the AIADMK would continue to work for the welfare of the people and thanked those who had voted for her.

The AIADMK firmly believed in the doctrine *vox populi vox dei* (the voice of the people is the voice of God), Ms. Jayalalitha said.

She appealed to the party cadre not to lose heart but continue their service to the people. In a statement today, she assured them that she would continue to lead them 'with motherly affection'.

Ms. Jayalalitha said she proposed to issue a detailed statement shortly, listing the works to be taken up by the party and was discussing the strategy with leaders. "I have faced ups and downs both in my private and public life. The AIADMK has grown strong by facing trials and tribulations even from the days of MGR," she said.

The AIADMK never lost its balance in victory or sank into depression in defeat. It was a party of idealists who faced victory and defeat with equanimity. The votes polled by the party demonstrated the confidence reposed by the people in each constituency. More than 50,000 people in Bargur had voted for her, she said, conveying her deep sense of gratitude to them and to the people of Tamil Nadu. The party would fulfil the expectations and win their confidence, she said.

Mr. G. K. Moopanar, president of the Tamil Maanila Congress has said that the people of Tamil Nadu should be saluted for establishing unequivocally through the ballot that their power was mightier than autocracy and authoritarian tendencies.

In a statement issued here this evening, Mr. Moopanar said through a silent revolution in a Parliamentary democracy, the people of Tamil Nadu from North to South and West to East had clearly prescribed how politicians coming to power should conduct themselves in future. Unprecedentedly and with a great sense of responsibility the electorate had given a lesson to the future rulers of the State, he said.

When a decision was taken against the interests of the people of the State and the aspirations of the Tamils, quite unexpectedly and surprisingly the people of the State rose as one man against such a decision thereby endorsing the decision of the partymen in the State. "I am grateful and indebted to the people for standing behind me like a solid rock in the crusade against corruption and self-indulgence," Mr. Moopanar said.

Men and women, haves and havenots, urban workers and rural labourers and tillers of the soil and all those from different walks of life collectively stood against abuse of authority, money power, communalism, casteism and violence and clearly gave a verdict without fear or favour. This was a very healthy trend in a Parliament-

However, it appears that it would not be smooth sailing for the Prime Minister's loyalists. Mr. Rajesh Pilot, a member of the Congress Working Committee, has demanded that the party's highest body should discuss the political situation before the CPP meeting. Mr. Pilot's views are believed to be shared by many, especially those feel that it is equally incumbent upon the Congress to facilitate the emergence of a non-BJP coalition; Mr. Pilot and others believe that the leadership issue in the party should be sorted out keeping in view the emerging political contingencies.

On the other hand, the Congress was not averse to wanting to exercise a veto on the choice of leader of the National Front-Left Front combine. According to Mr. Devendra Dwivedi, a AICC general secretary and a confidant of Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, both Mr. V. P. Singh and Mr. Basu were unacceptable to the Congress.

The Congress strategy appears to be not to make it easy for the National Front-Left Front combine to make a credible claim to form a Government. If the Janata Dal leaders get bogged down in the leadership controversy, the NF-LF would be in all sorts of trouble. The Congress appears inclined to encourage the minority view in the Janata Dal which favours a tie-up with it — without insisting on a change of leadership. Mr. R. K. Hegde is believed to be championing such a view.

Another curious argument was made by Dr. Jagannath Mishra, a senior leader from Bihar and a member of the outgoing Narasimha Rao Cabinet, that the President should order a fresh poll as the May elections has produced a hung Parliament. While Dr. Mishra was not opposed to either the BJP or the National Front-Left Front forming the Government, he decried the efforts made by various political parties to prevent the BJP from coming into the office at all costs. "It was for the President to decide whether it was in a position to form the Government," he argued. His assertion was that if the BJP was seen to be unreasonably prevented from forming the Government, that party would garner greater support in the next election.

By the end of a hectic day the political situation was far from clear. The final tally of strength of various parties is yet to come. Till then the President is not likely to issue any invitation to any party.

Overwhelming opinion among the available Congress leaders here is that the party should not succumb to the pressure from outside for change of Mr. Narasimha Rao at this juncture and are of the view that such an eventuality does not augur well for the party. Against this backdrop the issue of leadership appears to have become the major stumbling block in the informal negotiations among various leaders of the NF-LF combine and the Congress at various levels.

The scheduled Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh has been cited as one of the principal reasons as to why the NF-LF cannot accept Mr. Rao as the Congress leader. They have conveyed to the Congress leaders that any understanding with the Congress under the leadership of Mr. Rao could prove costly for the combine in the Assembly elections and pave the way for return of BJP in the State. The Congress leaders however are not impressed with this logic.

There were hectic parleys among the senior Congress leaders throughout the day about the election outcome and the course of action the party should adopt. Besides Mr. Pawar and Mr. Vijayabhaskara Reddy other important leaders involved in the mutual consultations included Mr. K. Karunakaran and Mr. C. K. Jaffer Sharief.

Today's issue has 36 pages which include an 8 page section containing Sports Special and Opportunities — an exclusive appointments section and a 4 page Young World

DMK favours V. P. Singh as PM

From our Special Correspondent

MADRAS, May 10.

The DMK president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, today favoured Mr. V. P. Singh for the post of Prime Minister. "A good leadership is required for a stable, viable and durable government and our first choice is Mr. Singh," he said.

He appealed to the National Front-Left Front leaders to enlist the support of Congress MPs for forming such a government.

Addressing a press conference he said that the NF-LF did not have the required strength to form a government at the Centre as the NF in its present form had only the Janata Dal with the DMK, TDP (Naidu) and the AGP having quit the front.

He made it clear that the DMK had not taken a final decision on these issues. "We have not committed ourselves to anyone," he said.

Mr. Karunanidhi referred to the claim of the CPI(M) General Secretary, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, that the NF-LF could form a government and said that their numerical strength was not enough to accomplish the task. Hence his suggestion for the coming together of Janata Dal, Left Front, DMK Front, TDP and AGP to enhance the strength to be able to form a government at the Centre.

"I hope Mr. Singh will accept my suggestion to take up the leadership," he said adding that he would discuss the proposal with the leaders of the constituents of the DMK front.

'Let us see' Mr. Karunanidhi said when asked whether his party would come to the rescue of the BJP if it fell short of majority.

He replied in the negative to another question whether his party considered the BJP as an untouchable. The BJP should also not treat others as untouchable, he said.

Repoll in Patna areas

NEW DELHI, May 10.

The Election Commission today announced repolling in two Assembly segments of the Patna parliamentary constituency on May 16.

The Commission had received large number of complaints of rigging and booth capturing on the polling day on May 7. — UNI

MANDATE '96	
Lok Sabha	
Party position at 11-00 p.m.	
Total seats:	543
Election held:	537
Results declared:	404
Party	Seats won
INC	113
BJP	115
JD	31
Shiv Sena	15
Samata Party	5
CPI(M)	14
CPI	7
DMK	17
TMC	19
Others	57
Independents	11

Assam, Haryana, Pondy CMs resign

NEW DELHI, May 10.

The Congress Chief Ministers of Assam, Haryana and Pondicherry resigned today, while the BJP-Shiv Sena dealt a severe blow to the Congress in Maharashtra wresting as many as 33 Lok Sabha seats.

The BJP was also doing well in Uttar Pradesh, securing 31 of the 53 seats and was set to repeat its performance in the 1991 elections when it had won 51 seats.

In Bihar the ruling Janata Dal and its left ally, CPI, bagged 11 Lok Sabha seats while the BJP and its ally Samata Party got 8 out of the 20 constituencies decided till 9 p.m.

The Congress suffered heavily in Maharashtra from where all the 48 results had come in. The party got only 15 seats against as many as 38 in the last elections. The BJP-Shiv Sena combine won 33 seats, with the BJP alone accounting for 18.

The Assam Chief Minister, Mr. Bhumidhar Barman, who submitted his resignation was asked by the State Governor, Mr. Lok Nath Mishra, to continue till alternative arrangements were made.

The Congress, which had fielded candidates for 122 of the 126 seats in the Assam Assembly, had secured only 24 of the 91 seats declared.

The Asom Gana Parishad had won 50 seats. In Pondicherry, the DMK-TMC combine had secured 15 seats in the 30-member house.

The HVP-BJP alliance led by two times former Chief Minister, Mr. Bansilal is all set to form the new Government in Haryana following the major poll reverses suffered by the ruling Congress led by Mr. Bhajan Lal.

The HVP-BJP alliance is set to win 42 Assembly seats including Sirsa whose result is awaited. The BVP has won 33, and the BJP 9. In two other constituencies of Tauro and Mahindergarh, it was leading. The Congress has won eight seats besides leading in Ateeli resulting in the Chief Minister, Mr. Bhajan Lal's resignation.

Among the prominent winners today from Maharashtra were the former Chief Ministers, Mr. Sharad Pawar (Baramati) and Mr. A. R. Antulay (Kolaba). Among the losers were the former Finance Minister, Mr. Madhu Dandavate of the Janata Dal (Rajapur), Mr. Murli Deora of the Congress (Mumbai South) and the trade union leader, Mr. Datta Samant of the Samajwadi Party (Mumbai South Central).

The former deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Devi Lal lost the elections from Rohtak, Haryana.

The former Union Minister, Mr. Arif Mohd. Khan, contesting as an independent candidate from Bahraich in Uttar Pradesh was also defeated.

The BJP's prime ministerial candidate, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee was declared elected from Gandhinagar by a margin of about 188,000 votes.

The Janata Dal leader, Ms. Maneka Gandhi won the Pilbhit seat from Uttar Pradesh, the Union Minister, Mr. Santosh Mohan Dev the Silchar seat (Assam), the BJP's Mahant Avaidyanath the Gorakhpur seat (U.P.) and Mr. Arunachalam of the TMC the Tenkasi seat (Tamil Nadu).

Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, who floated the Madhya Pradesh Vikas Congress party after resigning from the Congress, bagged the Gwalior seat by a margin of about 2.80 lakh votes. His mother, Ms. Vijayaraje Scindia won the Guna seat as a BJP nominee.

In Satna the Tiwari Congress working president, Mr. Arjun Singh trails Mr. V. K. Sakshilecha

(BJP) by 23,000. In Madhya Pradesh results of 38 seats had come in and the BJP bagged 27. The Congress secured only 8. The former Chief Minister and Janata Dal leader, Mr. Biju Patnaik defeated the Congress candidate, Mr. A. N. Sahu from Cuttack by a margin of 57,810 votes.

The All-India Indira Congress (Tiwari) working president, Mr. N. D. Tiwari, was declared elected from Nainital.

In the West Bengal ruling Left Front won 14 out of the 16 seats declared. By bagging 12 seats each, both the Congress and the BJP in Rajasthan ended in a tie.

However, the Jhunjhunu seat earlier with the Congress has been captured by the Congress(I) candidate, Mr. Seesh Ram Ola, its lone candidate to win.

Continuing its winning spree in Madhya Pradesh, the BJP has bagged 25 of the 36 seats whose results were declared so far while the ruling Congress(I) could notch up only eight.

The stunning defeats for the Congress(I) were those of Union Ministers, Mr. Aslam Sher Khan and Ms. Vimla Verma, who lost in Betul and Seoni constituencies, respectively.

The BJP's Prime Ministerial candidate from the prestigious Lucknow Lok Sabha seat, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, the Samajwadi Party's national president, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, from Mainpuri and the former Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Sekhar from Ballia were prominent among those who were leading in their parliamentary constituencies in Uttar Pradesh.

The Bahujan Samaj Party supermo, Mr. Kanshi Ram, contesting from Phulpur and the Union Ministers, Mr. Salman Khursheed and Mr. Balram Singh Yadav were trailing in Farrukhabad and Jalesar seats respectively.

The latest trends showed Mr. Vajpayee was leading by over 39,000 votes after the fifth round while Mr. Yadav, who was earlier trailing had now registered a lead of 9,700 votes.

The Union Ministers and Congress(I) nominees, Capt. Satish Sharma and Mr. Ajit Singh and party nominee, Mr. Ratna Singh were leading in Amethi, Baghpat and Pratapgarh constituencies. — UNI, PTI

All in the game



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