

I will be chief minister if people so desire: Gopinath Munde I will be chief minister if people so desire: Gopinath Munde

Reiterating that he wants to shift to the national political scene, rebel Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) general secretary and Maharashtra strongman Gopinath Munde says he has not shed his chief ministerial ambitions.

'I am going to contest the next Lok Sabha elections and, may be, join the central cabinet if the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) comes to power. But I can always come back to Maharashtra and be chief minister if the people so desire,' Munde, who recently created a storm by resigning from all party posts, told IANS.

The former deputy chief minister, perceived as the only mass-based leader of the BJP in the state, talked exclusively about his recent rebellion and the party's electoral prospects in Maharashtra. He was here to attend the party's 'dhaan utpadak parishad' (paddy growers' rally) in Sakoli.

'Narendra Modi went to Gujarat as chief minister from the party's national set up and Shivraj Singh Chauhan went to Madhya Pradesh. Likewise, I can go back to Maharashtra,' Munde said, when asked to comment on his popular image as the future chief minister of Maharashtra.

'My desire to move to the centre is akin to a student's natural desire to move up to the higher class; it doesn't mean I have lost interest in the state politics,' said Munde, whose differences with the party's state unit chief Nitin Gadkari are common knowledge.

Denying that he got a reprieve from the party after his public criticism over its style of functioning, he asserted that his grievances were addressed because the party leadership knew his worth and commitment.

'There is no question of 'jeev-daan' (reprieve) or any other 'daan' (consideration)', Munde said. He had earlier alleged that there was no democracy in the BJP.

Munde's pent up anger over his 'marginalisation' in recent years exploded when the party appointed Madhu Chavan as its [Mumbai](#) unit chief April 20 despite his stiff opposition.

Swinging into a damage control action, the party's national leadership called Munde over to [New Delhi](#) for conciliatory talks the next day, replaced Chavan and announced that the party would fight the forthcoming elections in the state under Munde's leadership.

Even as the 'only party leader in the state with a mass base' withdrew his resignations, there was a talk in the BJP rank and file that the party refrained from taking a tough line against Munde only because it could not afford a bad press ahead of the Karnataka assembly elections.

Munde, however, told IANS that there was no question of any disciplinary action or show-cause notice against him as he had not quit the party or even threatened to do it.

'Disciplinary action was taken against Uma Bharati (former Madhya Pradesh chief minister) as she had threatened to quit the party whereas I had asserted that I would remain in the party as an ordinary worker,' Munde said.

Referring to his statement that thousands of party workers shared his anguish over lack of democracy in the party and that he would tour the state to have an intimate dialogue with them, Munde said that he would still do it though he would now give it a name different from 'samvad yatra'.

'I have taken out 'yatras' (political pilgrimage) in the past like 'Sangharsh Yatra' and 'Karj Mutkti (loan waiver) Yatra' and I have not called off the 'Samvad Yatra' meant to gauge the workers' mind. But I may call it something else now,' he said.

Proclaiming the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance victory in the forthcoming state elections as a certainty, Munde expressed confidence about his party winning up to 30 out of 66 seats from the Vidarbha region and 75 of the total 288 seats in the state in alliance with the Shiv Sena.

He also ruled out the possibility of the BJP or the Shiv Sena ever forging an alliance with Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) even if the latter wanted to ditch its ally, the Congress.

'The BJP will not ditch the Shiv Sena (by forging a power alliance with NCP) even if it means sacrificing power prospects nor would the Shiv Sena do it to the BJP,' Munde said.

He described the paddy cultivators' rally as a step to create their lobby in the state and at the national level to ensure a fair price for their produce.

'There are strong lobbies of sugarcane cultivators, cotton growers and wheat cultivators but no lobby of the paddy growers who are getting almost just half (Rs.648 per quintal) of what they deserve - Rs.1,200 in order to stay afloat,' he said.

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