

## BJP demands floor test, UNPA cracking up

Ahead of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Japan for the G8 summit, the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Saturday got into battle mode demanding an immediate floor test by the government in parliament even as fissures appeared within the United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA), a grouping of regional parties that projected themselves as a third front.

Though the Samajwadi Party indicated it would support the government if there was a floor test once the Left parties withdrew their support over the India-US nuclear deal, it's still touch and go for the government.

Even with the Samajwadi Party's 39 MPs in the Lok Sabha, the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) is expected to have 275 members - just three above the mandatory half-way mark to prove the majority - to back the government should it face a trust vote in parliament.

Saturday witnessed an aggressive BJP, which has hitherto been watching the unfolding political crisis in the UPA from the sidelines.

Alleging that the Congress-led government has lost its majority, BJP leader L.K. Advani Saturday demanded that a parliament session be convened immediately and the government prove its majority.

'Even though normally, the house is to meet some time in August, in view of the present situation, my party demands that a session of parliament be immediately convened and Manmohan Singh seek a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha,' demanded Advani, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)'s prime ministerial candidate.

Advani said governance under Manmohan Singh's government had been reduced to 'theatre of absurd.'

The ruling Congress was not amused. 'Advani and his party are desperate now. He has forgotten the constitutional laws and conventions. He is welcome to bring a no-confidence motion whenever he wants,' Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)-led Left parties which prop up the UPA government has announced that they would withdraw their support if the government finalised the India-specific safeguards agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a crucial step to carry the contentious India-US civil nuclear deal forward.

External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee is expected to reply Sunday to their letter asking to clarify the government's position on approaching the IAEA for finalising the India-specific safeguards agreement before July 7. Party insiders hinted that the government would also request the Left parties to attend the last meeting of the UPA-Left nuclear committee.

However, Left leaders said they would not attend any more meetings but would instead go to President Pratibha Patil to convey their collective decision to withdraw support.

Determined to press ahead with the landmark deal, the Congress has sought the support of its

foe-turned ally Samajwadi Party, which has so far given sufficient indications that it will back the government in the event of a crisis.

Justifying its support to the UPA government Samajwadi Party general secretary Amar Singh said it had to choose between the secular and the non-secular parties. He also said the BJP leader Advani was 'more lethal' than US President George W. Bush.

'Communalism is a bigger threat than imperialism today,' Amar Singh said.

The Samajwadi Party's move to join hands with the Congress has nearly broken the United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA), formed as a non-Congress, non-BJP alternative.

'The Congress has insulted them (Samajwadi Party) earlier...Now for the third consecutive time, they want to be insulted. It is their own thinking,' former Haryana chief minister and INLD leader Om Prakash Chautala told reporters.

An angry Brindaban Goswami, the president of Assam Gana Parishad, which has three MPs in the Lok Sabha, said they were never consulted on supporting the nuclear deal.

'The Samajwadi Party should have consulted the UNPA constituents before taking a decision to support the nuclear deal. We will take a collective decision whether or not to retain the SP in the UNPA,' Goswami said.

But the TDP leaders denied that the UNPA was collapsing. 'We may lose one or two allies but credibility is far more important for us. We have been opposing the nuclear deal from day one as it goes against the national interests and there is no change in our stand,' TDP's senior leader and former MP R. Chandrasekhara Reddy told IANS in Hyderabad.

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