

BJP to airlift ailing MPs for trust vote

They are seriously unwell, strapped to their hospital beds and need constant medical care. But for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), their vote is crucial to topple the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government in Tuesday's floor test.

So some of the MPs are being flown to New Delhi, bandage and all, and some on stretchers.

The first MP to cause worry was BJP veteran Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who has not been keeping well for the past few months and has also not made any public appearances.

Amid speculation that he would not be able to vote, the party sought special permission for him. Vajpayee will be casting his vote in the parliament lobby.

The next to create a flutter was 57-year-old Harishandra Chavan, an MP from Malegoan in Maharashtra. Seriously injured in an accident, Chavan has been bedridden and is immobilised. He is undergoing treatment in a Nashik hospital since June 10.

The party is planning to fly Chavan to Delhi, ignoring his doctor's advice. His family is also worried about moving the injured MP, but party leaders have assured them of all kinds of medical facilities and that moving him would not harm his condition.

That is not all. Bollywood actor-turned-politician Dharmendra has undergone a knee surgery in the US. He is recuperating in Los Angeles. When it seemed that the MP from Bikaner in Rajasthan might give the vote a miss, BJP leaders pressed the panic button.

Dharmendra has been told to rush back to India and to vote against Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government. The actor has said he will consult his doctors.

Apart from Dharmendra, the other to add to the party's worries is MP from Gujarat Mahesh Kanodia. A popular singer, Kanodia recently underwent open heart surgery. Party managers are busy arranging to fly him to Delhi as well, party sources said.

To make it easier for these ailing MPs to vote, the BJP has sought permission for them to cast their vote in the parliament lobby instead of their own seats.

The Lok Sabha manual provides for the speaker to allow exceptions in case a member cannot vote from his seat. Voting slips are provided to such members and they are assisted in the procedure.

The provision was first used on Feb 26, 1999, to facilitate voting by Vijaya Raje Scindia, Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Vaidya Vishnu Dutt. All had medical problems.

So for now all eyes are on these four ailing BJP MPs. As in most cases, their doctors are not happy at the prospect of them being moved from their hospital beds. But the determined opposition is bent upon getting them here so as not to miss a chance of ousting the government.

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