

Shiv Sena to vote against UPA, will issue whip

The Shiv Sena, a constituent of the opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Saturday decided to issue a whip to its MPs to vote against the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Tuesday's trust vote in parliament.

The decision came after a nearly two-hour long meeting attended among others by Sena chief Bal Thackeray, executive president Udhav Thackeray and NDA general secretary Gopinath Munde here. Eleven of the party's 12 MP were present at the meeting, which lasted till late in the evening.

Former Lok Sabha speaker and former Maharashtra chief minister Manohar Joshi said the lone absentee, Tukaram Renge-Patil, could not attend the meeting but was 'in constant touch' with the party leadership.

Sena leader in the Lok Sabha Anant Geete said the party would vote against the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government. 'This government must go. This is what Bal Thackeray said,' he told reporters after the meeting.

The party would issue a whip to all its MPs Sunday.

Asserting that 'nobody can purchase the Shiv Sena', Geete said all its MPs will be present in parliament and would vote against the government.

Senior Congress leader from Konkan and state Revenue Minister Narayan Rane had recently claimed that some Shiv Sena MPs were in touch with him, hinting at a possible rift in the party's ranks.

Rane is a former Shiv Sainik and was chief minister in the state's former Shiv Sena-Bharatiya Janata Party government 1995-1999.

The Shiv Sena MPs are likely to meet again Sunday to finalise the party's strategy for the trust vote.

Saturday's meeting was seen as the party's bid to keep its flock together and ensure that other parties don't lure any of its MPs.

The meeting was also meant to foil attempts by Rane and the Congress to garner support from probable rebel Shiv Sainiks and simultaneously reassure the other NDA constituents that the party was with them.

There has been speculation over the Sena stand since the party has openly supported the India-US nuclear deal. Last year, the party had gone against the NDA and supported the candidature of Pratibha Patil for the presidential elections on the issue of 'Marathi pride'.

The party MPs who attended Saturday's meeting were: Mohan Rawale (Mumbai South-Central constituency), Suresh Prabhu (Rajapur), Anant Geete (Ratnagiri), Anand Paranjape (Thane), Anant Adsul (Buldhana), Bhavana Gawli (Washim), Anant Gudhe (Amravati), Prakash Jadhav (Ramtek), Chandrakant Khaire (Aurangabad), Kalpana Narhire (Osmanabad), Shivajirao Adhalrao Patil (Khed), and Tukaram Renge-Patil (Parbhani).

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