

## Is Jharkhand heading towards president rule?

With Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) chief Shibui Soren eyeing the chief minister's post and the man in the chair Madhu Koda adamantly refusing to give it up, Jharkhand is inexorably slipping into another political crisis.

As the possibility of President's rule is debated in political circles, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which has a razor thin majority in the Jharkhand assembly, finds itself divided between the two leaders.

The two key partners of the UPA, the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), have declared their support for Soren, who bailed out the Manmohan Singh government during the July 22 trust vote in parliament. But smaller parties and independent legislators in the state are the key to the chief minister's post.

In the 82-member assembly, the UPA has the support of 42 legislators -- 17 from the JMM, nine from the Congress and seven from the RJD. The rest are from smaller parties or are independents including Koda.

If the JMM withdraws support, the Koda government will be reduced to a minority.

'If Koda will not resign then we will withdraw support. We will hold a crucial meeting on Aug 17 and decide the future of course of action,' said Soren.

And with former chief minister Arjun Munda of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) stating soon after Soren staked his claim to the chief minister's chair that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would not form an alternative government, President's rule could become an eventuality.

Giving his take on the situation, Railway Minister and RJD chief Lalu Prasad told reporters in New Delhi: 'We support Soren's claim but the JMM chief should be careful that the move does not boomerang. If he fails to manage the numbers, then President's rule may be imposed.'

The Congress and the RJD have asked Soren to manage the independents and try to get the chief minister's chair but most of the independents are against the move.

The independents who don't want to see Soren as chief minister are Deputy Chief Minister Stephen Marandi, Kamlesh Singh and Jobha Manjhi. Among those silently watching developments before making their stance known are Chandra Prakash Chaudhary, Enos Ekka and Harinarayan Rai.

Marandi, who quit the JMM in 2005 when he was denied a ticket that was given to Soren's son instead, for instance, has categorically stated that independent legislators did not want any change of leadership.

But there are others like Human Resource Development Minister Bandhu Tirkey and legislator of the United Goan Democratic Party (UGDP) who has said: 'There should be no problem in elevating Shibui Soren as chief minister when the Congress and the RJD have given their green signals.'

Congress insiders say that the party itself does not have too much to lose. It has been unhappy with

the functioning of the Koda government and has made that clear on several occasions. President's rule might not be such a bad idea, said a party leader.

*Nityanand Shukla ( © IANS / India eNews)*