

Congress decides against president's rule in Uttar Pradesh

The Congress appeared to have decided against imposing president's rule in Uttar Pradesh after a section of the party leaders expressed apprehension that the move could boomerang, party sources said Wednesday night.

According to Congress sources, a majority of senior leaders were of the view that the move, which they feared could be blocked by Rashtrapati Bhavan in the initial stages, would embarrass the government.

Sources in the party told IANS that while a section of leaders, which they say is in a minority - including party president Sonia Gandhi's MP son Rahul Gandhi - want presidential rule in the northern state, the senior leaders are insisting that the government should not make such a move, especially after the Election Commission has announced poll dates for the state.

According to the sources, Defence Minister A.K. Antony conveyed his views against the move to Sonia Gandhi Wednesday even as the prime minister and other ministers contemplated the idea of enforcing Article 356 for president's rule.

'No senior leader has the courage to tell Sonia Gandhi that such a move would boomerang on the party after the embarrassment the government had to face in Bihar and Jharkhand (where the imposition of president's rule had invited severe criticism). Rahul Gandhi also feels that presidential rule would be good for the party during the conduct of elections,' said a senior congress leader.

Congress leaders, including CWC members, feel President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's response to the move could be unfavourable.

Sources at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the presidential palace, compared the current Uttar Pradesh situation to that in Bihar. The Supreme Court had strongly criticised a decision to impose president's rule in Bihar in 2005 - something to which Kalam had given his consent after a recommendation by then governor Buta Singh.

'The president will be reluctant to see his name being dragged once again to the Supreme Court,' said an informed source.

However, the Congress insisted that Mulayam Singh government should quit as it lost the 'moral and constitutional right to continue in power' in the wake of the Supreme Court disqualifying 13 Bahujan Samaj Party MLAs for defecting to the Mulayam Singh government in 2003.

Despite desperate attempts by the Congress leaders, its Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) ally continues to be strongly opposed to the imposition of president's rule in Uttar Pradesh.

According to sources in the CPI-M, party general secretary Prakash Karat, who met both Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee Tuesday, told them that his party would not support such a move and that it might damage its alliance with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). However, he is believed to have told the prime minister that the Left Front would not withdraw its outside support to his government.

Besides, he said the party could not 'afford upsetting its allies just ahead of the budget session'.

'We have to remember that we need to pass the budget, for which the Left's support is crucial,' the leader added. The union budget is scheduled to be presented on Feb 28.

Chief Election Commissioner N. Gopalasami Wednesday announced a seven-phase election to the 403-member assembly from April 7-May 8. All results would be announced on May 11.

Just hours before the election announcement, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav announced his left-of-centre party's decision to withdraw support to the Manmohan Singh government. The move, however, is unlikely to affect the stability of the UPA government that now has around 300 members in the 545-member Lok Sabha.

The BJP also wants the state elections to be held under the president's rule.

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