

## Chiranjeevi set to launch political party

Ending months of speculation, popular Telugu film actor Chiranjeevi has decided to take a plunge into Andhra Pradesh politics by launching his own party in the new year, according to sources close to the mega star.

The sources said he would float the party in January and it will provide a third alternative to the state's ruling Congress and the main opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

This move by the actor, who has a massive fan following in the state, could change the political scene in the state. He, however, made it clear that his party would not be only for Kapu, the community to which he belongs.

There has been speculation that Chiranjeevi, one of the highest paid actors in the country, would enter politics before the 2009 assembly elections.

However, the recent controversy following his daughter's elopement with her boyfriend and their marriage against the wishes of the actor's family dealt a blow to his plans.

On record, Chiranjeevi - in the film industry for 25 years - has been denying that he has any plans to enter politics and has instead concentrated on social services, especially blood donation.

He, however, was under pressure from Kapus to join politics to counter the Congress and TDP, dominated by the Reddy and Kamma communities respectively. The communist parties and other forces trying to form a third alternative were also appealing to him to take a plunge.

Chiranjeevi will be following into the footsteps of thespian N.T. Rama Rao, who created a record of sorts by becoming chief minister within nine months after floating the TDP.

When NTR launched his party, the Congress was the only dominant force in the state and people were looking for an alternative whereas Chiranjeevi will have to compete with several parties.

Some feel that Chiranjeevi lacks the charisma of NTR, who died in 1996, a few months after his son-in-law N. Chandrababu Naidu staged a revolt in the party.

The sources said the actor, who hails from Andhra region, might support the demand for separate Telangana.

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