

BJP hopes turmoil will catapult them to power

## Cong (I) confident of forming alternative govt

NEW DELHI, Nov 30: The Congress (I) Party, which forced Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's resignation two days ago, said today it was confident of forming an alternative government, reports AFP.

"We are still engaged in our efforts," Congress spokesman Vithal Gadgil said. "Yes, we are confident. This can happen either tomorrow or the day after."

Gadgil's comments came a day after a colleague hinted the party could again prop up Gujral's United Front coalition if it agreed to drop a partner, the DMK, linked to Sri Lanka Tamil guerrillas blamed for the 1991 assassination of former Congress prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The Congress on Friday withdrew support to Gujral's seven-month multi-party government after failing to pressure the prime minister to axe the DMK from the coalition.

The Congress then staked a claim to form a coalition of its

own, counting on support from sections of the United Front. But Front partners announced they planned to stick together.

On Saturday a Congress leader, J B Patnaik, said in an apparent climb down: "My party has an open mind on a better alternative offered by the United Front, but without the DMK."

Another party leader, Pranab Mukherjee, admitted the Congress game plan was not proceeding smoothly.

"We are still trying," said Mukherjee, a confidant of party president Sitaram Kesri. "However, if the United Front don't cooperate, the arithmetic will not work out."

The Congress has only 138 seats in the 545-member parliament and would require around 140 more members to form a viable government. Hindu nationalists, the largest bloc in parliament, have 162 seats.

Former prime minister H D

Deve Gowda, whose previous coalition government was toppled by the Congress in April, on Sunday said the country was heading for fresh elections.

"A (new) poll is inevitable," Deve Gowda said.

Meanwhile, Hindu nationalists — feared by some, admired by others — are hoping India's political turmoil will catapult them to power in the world's largest democracy.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian people's party), the largest party in last year's hung parliament, is hoping to bag even more seats if the country is forced back to the polls for the second time in less than two years.

Even the BJP's fiercest critics, the communists admit that voters' disenchantment with the other parties may give the nationalists a decisive edge.

The present scenario is certainly advantageous to the BJP," said Doraiswamy Raja, a Communist leader.

The BJP is unlikely to win a majority on its own in any fresh elections although it may again be the largest single party, analysts say.

The jockeying for parliamentary position follows the collapse on Friday of the country's centre-left coalition.

Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and his cabinet resigned after the influential Congress Party withdrew support from Gujral's fragile minority government.

The BJP is one of India's best-organised parties, with an estimated membership of 20 million.

The party has grown tremendously since elections in 1989, when it boosted its tally in parliament from a mere two members to 89 and propped up India's first, short-lived coalition government.

Its presence in parliament swelled to 199 MPs two years later when it fought the polls on its own, and to 162 last year.

## China for use of landmines for self-defence

BEIJING, Nov 30: China said it needed to use landmines for self-defence, reaffirming its objection to a treaty banning the weapons, reports Reuter.

Although China supported reasonable restrictions over the use of landmines, it reserved the right to use them on its own soil to defend its border, Xinhua news agency quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Tang Guoqiang as saying.

The general principle of solving the landmine problem should be one that takes balanced account of both humanitarian concerns and the legitimate military needs of sovereign states for self-defence, Tang was quoted as saying.

China and the United States have objected to a deal reached by around 80 nations in September to ban the use, stockpiling and production of Anti-Personnel Landmines (APLs), which are blamed for killing more than 25,000 people around the world each year.

An anti-landmine treaty is due to be signed at a conference beginning in Ottawa on Tuesday, but Tang said: "China does not intend to sign this convention."



Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, right, meets with the Russian Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, centre, in Baghdad Saturday. President Saddam Hussein praised Russia on Saturday for its role in ending the three-week standoff with the United Nations over weapons inspections. Others unidentified.

— AP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY



Jordan's King Hussein (L) kisses his American-born wife, Queen Noor, after the monarch addressed the opening session of the newly elected Parliament with a speech outlining his policy on Saturday. Hussein said the Israeli people wanted peace with the Arabs and that their resolve will win.

— AP/UNB photo

**Gunmen massacre 15 in Colombia:** Fifteen people died in two massacres reported on Saturday, bringing to three the number of mass killings reported in Colombia in the past 24 hours, AFP reports from Bogota.

Survivors said a Medellin police colonel blamed the slaughter on a territorial dispute between street gangs selling hallucinogenic drugs. Five people were killed in one home, including a five-year-old girl and six people were injured. Three died in the second home.

**Jiang arrives in Mexico:** Chinese President Jiang Zemin arrived in Cancun resort city Saturday after flying from Vancouver, Canada, the official news agency Notimex reported. AFP says from Cancun.

He will spend a day resting before an official visit to Mexico begins on Monday when he travels to the capital. Jiang's wife and delegation of 180 people were met by Quintana Roo state Governor Mario Villanueva Madrid, Mexico's Ambassador to China, Luis Wibe Alfaro and China's representative in Mexico, Shen Yunan.

**Radio station closed down in Bosnia:** Police loyal to Bosnian Serb President Biljana Plavsic closed down Saturday a radio station run by supporters of her political rivals the Beta news agency reported. AFP says from Banja Luka.

Local journalists confirmed the crackdown on the Sveti Georgije (Saint George) radio station, a private concern based in Plavsic's stronghold of Banja Luka, which began broadcasting Monday.

**Policeman killed in Moscow:** A tax police officer shot and killed a city policeman Saturday after the two were involved in a minor traffic accident in central Moscow Interfax reported, citing a police official. AFP reports from Moscow.

After the accident, the two, who had identified themselves to one another, began to quarrel. The dispute escalated until the tax police officer drew his service revolver and shot the city policeman. The city policeman died at the scene.

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