

BJP poised to take power in Karnataka

AFP, Bangalore

The main Hindu nationalist party was yesterday poised to take power in southern India for the first time after ending a political feud that had brought down the government in Karnataka state.

A BJP-led government would help stave off elections 20 months before they are due in the prosperous state, whose capital Bangalore is home to the software, biotech and aerospace industries that are spearheading India's economic boom.

The state of 60 million people came under New Delhi's direct rule when the coalition government collapsed on October 9.

State Governor Rameshwar Thakur was consulting legal experts after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) staked its claim Saturday to forming a government with the support of old ally Janata Dal-Secular, news reports said.

The two parties together have a comfortable majority with 136

seats in the 224-member state assembly, bringing the BJP, India's main opposition, within striking distance of leading a government in southern India.

Senior BJP leader Venkiah Naidu told reporters in Bangalore that the governor, a New Delhi appointee, had no option but to swear in a BJP-led state government because the numbers are in its favour.

It is the latest twist in a political drama that began three weeks ago when the state government collapsed in acrimony between the coalition partners in what analysts have called "politics of opportunism."

"Never before has the state witnessed such as blatant opportunism in politics," political commentator HS Balram wrote in a commentary in the Times of India.

The JD-S had refused to transfer control to the BJP and become the junior partner under the terms of a 20-month-old power-sharing agreement that had brought the coalition to power.

Paulson pushes India on nuclear deal

AP, Kolkata

Visiting US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson urged India yesterday to quickly implement a landmark civilian nuclear energy deal with the United States.

Paulson was speaking in Kolkata, a stronghold of India's communists, who oppose the deal and have threatened to topple the government if it goes ahead with it.

"This is a very important deal," Paulson told reporters after a conference on bringing banking services to India's impoverished masses. "We want the nuclear deal to move as quickly as possible."

The deal would reverse three decades of American anti-proliferation policy by allowing the US to send nuclear fuel and technology to India, which has been cut off from the global atomic trade by its refusal to sign nonproliferation treaties and its

testing of nuclear weapons.

Last week, the Indian government said it would wait to finalise the agreement for at least a month after inconclusive talks with its communist political allies.

Paulson acknowledged that the Indian government would have to first solve its internal disputes.

"You all have to work through your own internal political decision. That's up to India," said Paulson, who also met with West Bengal state's communist Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya later Sunday.

Paulson did not address the media after that meeting, leaving the building following a scuffle among journalists jockeying for position near him.

Paulson is visiting India from Saturday to Wednesday, with stops in Kolkata, Mumbai and New Delhi. He has said he will encour-

age India to step up economic reforms and search for a solution to long-stalled global trade talks.

The Indian government has not taken the next steps in closing the civilian nuclear energy deal negotiating separate agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nuclear Suppliers Group, a group of nations that export nuclear material.

The deal faces opposition in America, too. Critics there, including some in Congress, say providing US fuel to India would free up India's limited domestic supplies of nuclear material for use in atomic weapons, which they argue could spark a nuclear arms race in Asia.

President Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have sold the deal, first conceived in 2005, as a way to bring India a nuclear weapons state into the international atomic mainstream.



US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson (R), accompanied by Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, the Chief Minister of the West Bengal, reacts during a press meeting in Kolkata yesterday. Paulson in India for a four day visit, said that India should go ahead with the civilian nuclear deal with the United States as 'quickly as possible'.

Benazir visits blast victims

AFP, Larkana

Benazir Bhutto visited a family whose son was killed in the October 18 suicide blasts, as the former Pakistan premier Sunday kept up a tightly secured trip to her ancestral home.

Benazir Bhutto made a jubilant return to her family district in rural southern Pakistan on Saturday, in her first trip outside of Karachi since the bombings in the city that tar-

geted the two-time premier, ripping through her homecoming parade.

Thousands of supporters cheered Benazir Bhutto as she flew into Sukkur city from Karachi before she was driven to Larkana district, where crowds danced and waved flags as she paid her respects at the Benazir Bhutto family tomb.

The mood was more sombre on Sunday as Benazir Bhutto called on the bereaved family in their two-

room mud house and offered prayers before moving on to the home of a worker of her Pakistan People's Party who was injured in the blasts, which killed 139 people.

"I have come to condole the martyrdom of a brave and innocent boy of 22 years who lost his life in the movement to save democracy," Benazir Bhutto wrote in a condolence book on the veranda of the family's house.

Maoists kill 5 more villagers in India

AFP, Ranchi

Five villagers have been shot dead by suspected Maoists in eastern India, a day after the left-wing rebels killed 18 people, including a former minister's son, in an ambush, police said yesterday.

"Five civilians were killed in Boda village by Maoist rebels levelling charges that they were police informers and involved in coal smuggling," Rajiv Kumar Mallik, police spokesman for mineral-rich Jharkhand state, told AFP.

"They were first abducted on Saturday night."

Villagers spotted the bodies in a forested area near their village

some 120km west of state capital Ranchi.

The deaths come a day after 18 people, including the son of a former chief minister, were killed while watching a cultural performance organised by the politician's family in another remote village in the state.

About 16 of the state's 19 districts are facing a Maoist rebellion that officials say has spread to half of India's 29 states.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has described the rebels as the single biggest threat to India's internal security. The Maoists say they are fighting for the rights of neglected tribal people and landless farmers.



Former Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto talks at a meeting with workers and supporters of her party at her house in her ancestral village Naudero Saturday. Thousands of supporters cheered Benazir Bhutto as she visited her ancestral village amid tight security.

Politicians, officials wash hands off Nawaz deportation

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistani politicians and officials have distanced themselves from the Sep 10 deportation of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif on his return home, saying they were not responsible for the action.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi and the heads of the 13 agencies and departments involved in Sharif's deportation have, in affidavits filed in the Supreme Court, said they played no part in an alleged conspiracy to flout a court order permitting Sharif's return home.

Most of them say "unidentified characters" whisked Sharif away. The Supreme Court will on Monday resume hearing a contempt plea filed by Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) against his deportation.

In his affidavit, Aziz "has prayed that his name may be struck off from the list of contemners while the Punjab chief minister has also denied involvement and asked for the dismissal of the petition", The News reported on Sunday.

"The copies of these replies ... make very interesting disclosures indirectly pointing fingers at hidden characters as masterminds of

the Sep 10 operation," the newspaper added.

For instance, the reply submitted by the Pakistani government through the interior secretary carries a statement of Syed Kalim Imam, additional director of immigration at Islamabad Airport, claiming his ministry played no role in the deportation and that "unidentified" people were involved.

National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lt Col (ret) Azhar Mahmud Qazi, who attempted to serve an arrest warrant on Sharif after he landed here but was unsuccessful, claims: "Someone else was handling the issue."

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said that since Islamabad airport's control tower is operated by the Pakistan Air Force, it is PAF that is responsible for clearing and accepting flight plans and providing aerodrome control services at the airport.

Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) says the PIA aircraft used for deporting Sharif to Jeddah was chartered by the foreign office, which did not mention the name of the VIP who was to be flown out.

According to PIA, it had charged the government over Rs 8 million (\$130,000) for the charter flight.



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