

Leadership scramble in Assam Janata

Our Staff Correspondent

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THE scramble for Chief Ministership is on in the Assam Janata Party. As there are half a dozen contenders, a number of State executive members and newly elected MLAs feel that the leader of the Janata Legislature Party should be elected by secret ballot. Also, there should be no "imposition" by the Centre of an "outsider."

This is an allusion to Mrs Renuka Devi Barkataki, Union Minister of State for Education, who is supposed to be one of the aspirants. Three of the "local" contenders belong to the former Socialist Party—Mr Golap Borbora, Mr Kiron Bezbarua and Mr Lakshyadhar Choudhury.

Mr Borbora is the chairman of the State Janata Party. Mr Bezbarua, who won the Gauhati west seat, is a barrister and tea planter. He is reportedly being

backed by a powerful Union Minister who is taking an active interest in Assam politics.

Mr Choudhury, now in his sixties, is a former Mayor of Gauhati. The RSS-Jana Sangh group has thrown its weight behind Mr Lasheswar Gohain who defeated former Minister Deben Bora, Mr Dulal Barua, deputy leader of the Janata Legislature Party, is another strong contender. As JLP leader Gauri Shankar Bhattacharjee did not contest this time, Mr Barua will stake his claim for leadership.

The sixth named is that of Mr J Hazarika, who defeated PWD Minister Indreswar Khound.

Mr Hazarika was an MP for 15 years and for some time worked as parliamentary secretary.

WITHOUT CP-M

The Janata Party has secured 53 seats and its ally the PTCA four seats. It needs another nine for a bare majority. There are 11 independents, including three "rebels", who fought and won against the official Janata candidates. These rebels were expelled from the party on the eve of the poll but now the trend is to forget the past and bring them back to the party.

The current thinking among the Janata leaders is to form a stable Government without depending on the support of the CP-M.

Mr Ramakrishna Hegde and Mr Biju Patnaik will be observers at the Assam Janata Party MLAs meeting which will elect their leader here on Monday.

Meanwhile, Governor L P Singh has accepted the resignation of the Assam Ministry headed by Mr S C Sinha.

NO UNITY

Mr Sinha gave an emphatic "no" to a reporter's question whether he favoured a reunification of the two Congress parties in view of the election results in the five State Assemblies.

Mr Sinha said unity could only be on the basis of ideology or programme, not at their cost.

"There can be no compromise with personality cult and no question of unification with a party that designates itself with the name of an individual—the Congress-I."

Mr Sinha said his personal stand in the matter was unequivocal and would remain unaffected even if some people defected from the Congress to the Cong-I.

About the cause of the Congress debacle in Assam, he said this was the inevitable result of the Congressmen gradually losing a contact with the masses in course of the years.

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