

divisions of West Bengal: the GNLF chief said that there was no reason why a Muslim state could not be carved out of the Muslim dominated areas of Malda district, Islampur and Chopra in West Dinajpur district and Phasidewa.

Ghisingh apparently is seeking greater leverage for the impending negotiations. "Even if the DHC is accepted, who would be its guarantor?" asked Ghisingh. The fact is that the DHC is proposed to be formed by amending a state Act, and not the Constitution itself. The proposed amendment would certainly contain enough checks and balances for supervision of the council's activities and even its supersession in case of gross irregularities. What Ghisingh is concerned about is that the West Bengal government should not have the right to supersede the DHC at will.

But then, as Ghisingh claimed, the people would accept nothing less than a separate homeland. As a sop, Ghisingh



Subash Ghisingh: hopeful

would demand that the council be re-named "Gorkhaland" or at least, the Gorkha Hill Council. Moreover, the DHC would cover only the three hill subdivisions and not the Jalpaiguri-Dooars area because the Nepali-speaking population constitutes a minority there. Ghisingh would therefore advocate a formula under which the contiguous Nepali-speaking areas of Sili-guri subdivision could be tagged with the Dooars region and brought under the purview of the council.

The GNLF president also feels that the grant of Rs 46 crores is insufficient as the council was not being given charge of the tea industry as well as the reserved forests. In the GNLF budget, health and education alone would consume at least Rs 30 crores. "What am I to do with the rest of the paltry Rs 16 crores? That is not even enough for the maintenance of the public latrines in the hill areas," Ghisingh complained.

Tapas Mukherjee/Darjeeling

KARNATAKA

HEGDE SCORES AGAIN

The CM's nominee is appointed state Janata president

Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde's bad patch may finally be over. The "unanimous election" of his nominee, M.P. Prakash, as the new Karnataka Pradesh Janata Party president on 5 October has proved the chief minister's supremacy in the state unit in spite of the challenge from a vocal dissident group.

The twice postponed election was held as the erstwhile state party president, M. Chandrashekhar, was inducted into Hegde's cabinet on 26 April. Although there are only four months to go before fresh party elections to all posts are held nationwide, this state poll had become the testing ground for the party rebels, such as Dr B.M. Thippeswamy, M.S. Narayan Rao, S.N. Humbarwadi, B. Guruprasad and others, who have sustained a five-month-long campaign against corruption and inefficiency in the Hegde administration.

The election, which had been a mere formality on previous occasions, became a multicornered contest with the filing of six nominations. Among the contestants was the rebel candidate M.S. Gurupadaswamy, MP and Janata leader in the Rajya Sabha and a former Union minister under Indira Gandhi. He was pitched primarily against the official candidate, Abdul Nazir Sab, the rural development minister. The rebels were as keen on avoiding the traditional "consensus" choice as the loyalists were on avoiding a confrontation, even though they claimed to be sure of the outcome, conceding no more than 80 votes to the rebels. The two camps jockeyed hectically for primacy among the 282-member electoral college, comprising Janata state council members.

Until the very last minute, it seemed as though a contest was inevitable, despite the efforts of leaders like S.R. Bommai who tried to build bridges between the opposing groups. "Not that elections are not healthy and democratic," he said later, "but this time an unhealthy factionalism had developed." Several options were suggested by the mediators, including that of leaving Hegde and Chandra Shekhar to suggest a consensus candidate. The dissidents protested arguing that this would be most undemocratic and Hegde agreed, declaring that the Janata, unlike the Congress(I), did not believe in nominations. Then, at one point, five of the six

candidates offered to withdraw from the contest.

But Gurupadaswamy was adamant and delivered an injured speech to an astonished state council implying that there was a conspiracy against his candidacy. Perhaps the speech did him more harm than good. For, the chief minister's camp was able to propose the name of M.P. Prakash without any opposition from the rebels. Interestingly, Prakash had been asked by Hegde to file his papers only at the eleventh hour, which led to speculations that perhaps Hegde had always intended to back Prakash despite his public support for Abdul Nazir Sab. The argument may be far-fetched because Abdul Nazir Sab, one of the few secular Muslims the party can boast of and a gentleman with a clean reputation, would have been good for the party's image, as Hegde himself declared. His earlier support for

M.P. Prakash (right) being congratulated by



Mushiq Ahmed

Nazir Sab, mainly on the grounds of his being a minority member, and his later acceptance of Prakash, a Lingayat, proved once again that Hegde is unable to rise above caste imperatives in politics.

If Hegde emerged as the victor, the person who lost face was H.D. Deve Gowda, the public works minister and a Vokkaliga leader, who was alleged to be the shadow puppeteer of Gurupadaswamy's candidacy. Deve Gowda, in turn, is supposed to be Janata Party president Chandra Shekhar's man, and the two together are trying to temper Hegde's influence in the party, each for his own reasons. Of course Deve Gowda has always denied this, and also denies that Gurupadaswamy was his candidate. "Prakash's election was unanimous," he says, adding rhetorically, "Who has ever questioned the leadership of Hegde?" But for Hegde's supporters, Deve Gowda's mischief has finally been exposed, and now that the state council has come out solidly behind Hegde, they claim that the situation will improve dramatically for the chief minister.

For the dissidents, who call themselves reformists, the election of Prakash

is not altogether unacceptable. Although a Lingayat, the soft-spoken Prakash has a relatively secular image, and a socialist background. Being relatively young himself (49), he has good links with the younger elements in the party and may be able to rope them in for reviving the organisation, especially at the *zilla parishad* and *mandal* levels. Yet Prakash has a difficult task ahead, and his performance will be closely monitored. Says a disappointed Narayan Rao, "We do not consider him a compromise candidate, but we will have to wait and see how he functions."

Hegde, meanwhile, is not leaving anything to chance. Consultations with the dissidents have already begun and at a Janata Legislature Party (JLP) meeting the day after the election, Hegde even offered to resign if people accused him of being the leader of a particular faction. Nobody asked for his resignation of course, and the dissidents were strangely silent. "We have said all there is to say," said one spokesman. Their very presence at the meeting was a compromise of sorts, since they had earlier threatened to boycott all JLP meetings until their demands were met. But conspicuous by his absence was the defeated Gurupadaswamy.

However, the dissidents have won some of the battles. One of their persistent demands, that the jumbo cabinet be pruned, may be met in November. Another suggestion, that the increase in the intake of engineering college students be stopped because it is only a means of collecting cash for the party, is also being heeded. Hegde has sent a strongly-worded note on the subject to Jeevaraj Alva, minister for higher education, and one of the prime targets of the rebel group.

In the final analysis, however, the dissidents have achieved little, perhaps because they could not play the waiting game as well as Hegde. The hesitation of the rebels to openly defy the party leadership may perhaps have been due to a bitter lesson learnt a decade ago, which prevents them from crossing the boundaries of dissidence.

Whatever the reason, their diffidence has worked to the advantage of Hegde who, with the election controversy behind him, is getting ready for a belated visit to the drought-hit districts of the state. And for those who are eyeing his chair, there is a long wait ahead, not only because Hegde has apparently consolidated his position, but also because he now sees little or no chance, as party insiders admit, of making the move to Delhi.

Rohini Nilekani/Bangalore

MEDIA

SCRIBES UP IN ARMS

Sunday Observer has been hit by a spate of resignations

Rahul Singh took over this month as the new editor of *The Sunday Observer* amidst a spate of resignations by the paper's journalists who have raised the banner of "editorial freedom". The editor-designate, Amrita Abraham, who had been with the paper for six years, had earlier resigned "because of serious differences with the management over freedom of the editor. I told the managing director that I could not accept the appointment." Another reporter, Ajit Pillai, resigned and will join *The Indian Post*. Jyoti Punwani is



Rahul Singh: challenging assignment

leaving "because things wouldn't be the same without Vinod and Amrita whom I worked with for six years. It has nothing to do with Rahul who is such a nice person." Ajoy Bose, the Delhi correspondent, resigned on 7 October.

Whether their fears that the management, represented by the owner and managing director, Ashwin Shah, is going back on its assurance that there would be no change in the degree of editorial freedom exercised in the paper so far are unfounded or not, will be proved in time. But Shah did attend the editorial meeting on Tuesday (6 October), a thing he had never done during Vinod Mehta's regime as editor. Among the things that Shah refused to consider when he appointed Ms Abraham as editor, was the promotion of staff members that she had recommended. He also refused to bring parity in salaries of

