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RAM VILAS PASWAN
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HAVE LOST A VALUED COLLEAGUE, SAYS MODI

"I am saddened beyond words. There is a void in our nation that will perhaps never be filled. Shri Ram Vilas Paswan Ji's demise is a personal loss. I have lost a friend, valued colleague," Prime Minister Narendra Modi tweeted. His interventions during Cabinet meetings were insightful, Paswan said, adding, be it political wisdom or issues of governance and statesmanship, he was brilliant

He was a political contrarian

MANISH ANAND @New Delhi

A master at sniffing out electoral swings and one of the longest serving Union ministers of India, Ram Vilas Paswan passed away on Thursday following cardiac complications, leaving his son and Lok Sabha MP Chirag Paswan to steady the ship of the Lok Jan Shakti Party (LJP) alone in the choppy Bihar elections.

Paswan, 74, was arguably a political contrarian who comfortably settled in the company of Socialists and the BJP with ease.

A fortuitous turn of events had guided him into politics in the late 1960s despite being assured of a job of sub-inspector of police. With Samyukta Socialist Party scouting for a Dalit to contest the 1969 Bihar Assembly elections, Paswan plunged into electoral politics, and took an envious trajectory,

becoming part of the troika consisting of Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar in Bihar politics.

He was a doting father to Chirag, arranging a special screening of his debut movie in Parliament annexe. While he was well aware of his political limitations, his son has taken an ambitious decision to go it alone in the forthcoming polls. The LJP could now hope to whip up a sympathy wave across the Gangetic north in Bihar to consolidate its Dalit vote base.

Unlike BSP boss Mayawati, who could script social engineering in Uttar Pradesh, the influence of Paswan's party

“Papa... you are not in this world any more but I know wherever you are, you will always be with me. Miss you papa

- Chirag Paswan, LJP chief

was confined to a few districts in Bihar like Hajipur, Jamui and Samastipur.

In 2002, he quit the Vajpayee Cabinet criticising its position on the post-Godhra Gujarat riots, and took a strident stand on having a Muslim chief minister in Bihar after the 2005 state polls threw up a fractured mandate and made him the kingmaker.

Two years after exiting the NDA, his party entered the Manmohan Singh-led UPA government in 2004 and he became a Union minister. But by 2014, when the BJP's star was on the ascendant, Paswan had become a vocal supporter of Narendra Modi and joined his government eventually.

"Barah saal me yug badal jaata hai (an era changes in 12 years time)," Paswan would later quip in response to questions on his volte-face on the post-Godhra riots stance. **PI0**

CONDOLENCES POUR IN FOR RAM VILAS PASWAN

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10, Janpath neighbour, RJD chief Lalu Prasad would bank on Paswan to negotiate with the Congress for the 2010 Bihar polls in the face of the Nitish Kumar-led NDA gaining popular acceptance. Paswan helmed several Union ministries, including Railways, Chemicals and Fertilisers, Steel, Food and Consumer Affairs, Labour Welfare, while serving under V P Singh, H D Deve Gowda, I K Gujral, Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. He opted out of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections due to poor health, and instead, got a Rajya Sabha seat.