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Goa Cong in  
crisis, 10 MLAs  
join BJP

PANAJI, DHNS: Even as the country's focus was riveted on Karnataka's ongoing political drama and the India-New Zealand World Cup semifinal on Wednesday, in a major coup in Goa, the ruling BJP engineered a split in the 15-member Congress legislature party. It managed to break 10 MLAs, who later joined the BJP in a series of developments which played out through late evening.

The stunning development takes the BJP's legislative strength from 17 MLAs to 27 MLAs in the 40-member Goa Legislative Assembly, well above the majority mark of 21.

The rebellion was led by Leader of Opposition Chandrakant Kavlekar, who BJP sources said, could be inducted as a deputy chief minister in the Pramod Sawant-led ministry. The rebel MLAs are Chandrakant Kavlekar, Isidore Fernandes, Francis Silveira, Filipe Neri Rodrigues, Jennifer and Atanasio Monserrate, Antonio Fernandes, Nilkanth Halarnkar, Clafacio Dias and Wilfred D'Sa.

> Goa, Page 8



Ten of 15 Goa Congress members led by Leader of Opposition Chandrakant Kavlekar, in a letter seeking the merger of their faction in the BJP to Speaker Rajesh Patnekar, in Panaji, on Wednesday. PTI

Goa Cong in crisis...

Goa, from Page 1

The five MLAs, who are the only ones left of the Congress legislature party, are four former chief ministers namely Digambar Kamat, Luzinho Faleiro, Ravi Naik, Pratapsingh Rane and Aleixo Reginaldo.

Chief Minister Sawant told reporters at the state legislative complex, that the two-thirds split in the Congress party, would make his government more stable.

He however ruled out any Cabinet reshuffle, but hinted that it could be in the offing soon.

"This is a welcome sign for the BJP in Goa, because with 27 MLAs our party will be able to deliver a better, stable government," Sawant said.

Speaking to DH, Speaker Rajesh Patnekar confirmed the split and the subsequent merger. "Ten Congress MLAs have merged with the BJP. The CM has also in-

formed this office that the strength of the BJP in the state Assembly has increased to 27. I have accepted both the requests," Patnekar said.

Kavlekar, the leader of the Congress splinter group and now a newly inducted BJP MLA, said that the merger of the splinter Congress group into the BJP, would ensure more development in the constituencies of the 10 MLAs. "We will also strengthen the hands of the chief minister in giving better governance to people," Kavlekar said.

With the latest development, the BJP now has 27 MLAs in the 40-member state Assembly, where the majority required to form a government is 21. It is currently supported by three MLAs of the Goa Forward party and three Independent MLAs.

The development reduces the government's dependence over allied MLAs. BJP sources suggest that allied lawmakers, who are Cabinet ministers may be dropped.