

5796

Parties rush for formal status

Express News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 14.

The Congress(I) and the Telugu Desam Party on Monday made a beeline for the Election Commission to meet the deadline for filing applications for registration as political parties under the new electoral laws.

These two parties figured prominently in a long line of 25 applicants who waited till the last day to file papers seeking the status of a political party under the new laws.

By the close of office hours on Monday, as many as 216 organisations, covering a wide spectrum of known national and regional parties and many new aspirants, had applied since June 15, when the new rules came into force.

Election Commission sources do not attach any significance to the fact that some parties have stolen a march over the others in submitting the applications. According to them, the deadline was not meant to trigger a race among the various established political parties and the new aspirants seeking the status of political parties.

Nonetheless, according to political observers, there is a touch of irony to the Congress(I)'s move to wait till the last day, especially when the ruling party has made much of the new electoral reforms.

This is only matched to some extent by the apparent tardiness of the Telugu Desam, a key constituent of the opposition National Front, these observers add.

The preliminary information, as gathered soon after the expiry of the deadline on Monday, has thrown up some interesting details as set out below.

The Muslim League and the Shiv Sena, whose critics have dubbed them both as communalist organisations, have sent in their applications.

Though it is not immediately known as to what these two organisa-

tions have said in their respective applications, it is no less significant in this context that the new electoral laws require a specific commitment to secularism, among a host of other things.

Any association seeking the status of a political party is required, under the new laws, to specify that it "shall bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India as by law established, and the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy and would uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India."

The sweeping range of these requirements also lends significance to the applications from such other quarters as Akali Dal (Barnala), Shiromani Akali Dal (Baba Joginder Singh) and Akali Dal (Simranjit Singh Mann).

On the whole, the 216 applicants can be broadly divided into four categories.

The first category of well-known national parties covers a spectrum of seven, namely the Congress(I), the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the Communist Party of India, the Congress(S), the Lok Dal of the late Bahuguna persuasion, and the Janata Party associated with Mr. Ajit Singh's name.

While these parties have figured in terms of their original political recognition, recent political realities are also reflected in certain other applications. The Janata Dal led, by Mr. V. P. Singh, has now sought formal recognition, while some papers may have also been filed in the name of the Lok Dal (Devi Lal) and another Janata outfit.

The second category of applicants covers regional and State-level parties. There were 34 such organisations as recognised by the Election Commission under the old rules. Of these, four do not seem to have

applied now. The more prominent among those who have applied in this category are the Telugu Desam Party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the All-India Anna DMK, the Asom Gana Parishad, the Muslim League and the Sikkim Sangram Parishad.

The bitter contentions in Dravidian politics seem to have polarised, with the DMK on one side and the All-India Anna DMK led by Jayalalitha, on the other side. There has been no application to the Election Commission from any splinter group such as the one-man outfit in the Tamil Nadu Assembly led by the former Speaker, Mr. P. H. Pandian.

Of the third category of 18 "registered parties" which, under the old rules, enjoy a priority below the regional and State-level parties, only 13 seem to have presently applied. But, at least a few among the non-applicants, such as the Gandhikamaraj National Congress in Tamil Nadu, have recently disbanded their organisations for all political purposes. The original leader of this particular party is now the Congress(I) deputy leader in the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

The fourth category of totally new applicants covers 166 organisations including the Gorkha National Liberation Front, the Akhil Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the Amra Bangali, the Green Party of India, the Indian National Congress(O), the Tamizhaga Munnetra Munnsani, the Shiv Sena, the Tamil Nadu Makkal Munnetra Cooperative Party, the Lakshadweep Vikasana Samithi, the National Front (Rajinder Puri), the All-India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Baba Joginder Singh), the Telugu Nadu Party, the Labour Party of India, the Akali Dal (Simranjit Singh Mann) and the Indiraji National Congress and so on.