

Pranab was ready to break norm in 2014

He had a plan ready for hung House

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Former President Pranab Mukherjee was ready to break the convention and invite a Congress-led coalition to form a government if the 2014 Lok Sabha election had thrown up a hung Parliament.

In the final volume of his autobiography, *The Presidential Years*, formally released on Tuesday, the late Mukherjee said he could not be "neutral between stability and instability".

However, he said he did not vote in 2014, keeping in mind the constitutional position he occupied. He said the Congress would have not faced a drubbing in 2014 had he been a Minister in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.

In a no-holds-barred description of his years in the Manmohan Singh government, Mukherjee criticised decisions such as the creation of Telangana and targeted the party's leadership for allowing leaders like Mamata Banerjee to walk out of the coalition.

Parliament disruptions

He blamed the Narendra Modi government for the repeated parliamentary disruptions in its first term. He talked about "expecting the unexpected" from Mr. Modi in terms of foreign policy, and pointed out how the Prime Minister had come to him to seek support for the November 2016 demonetisation.

"I had expected a hung Parliament with the BJP emerging as the single largest party with about 195-200 seats. In such situation, it would have been my constitutional responsibility to ensure stability. Had the Congress emerged with fewer seats but promised a sta-



Pranab Mukherjee

ble government, I would have invited the leader of the party to form the government, keeping in mind their previous track record in managing coalition governments successfully," he said.

Congress's defeat

"This would have been in contravention of the convention established by the former president, Shankar Dayal Sharma, of inviting the single-largest party to form the government. He had invited Vajpayee to form the government after a hung House in 1996 despite lack of clarity on Vajpayee's numbers," he said.

Talking about the Congress's defeat in the 2014 polls, Mukherjee noted that among many reasons the party had failed to realise was the end of "charismatic leadership" and the "establishment was reduced to a government of averages".

"If I had continued in the government as Finance Minister, I would have ensured Mamata's continuity in the coalition. Similarly, Maharashtra was handled badly, partly due to decisions taken by Sonia Gandhi. I would have brought back Shivraj Patil or Sushil Kumar Shinde, considering the dearth of a strong leader from the State, like Vilasrao Deshmukh," he said.