

Mamta backing Kamtapuri stir: CM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 30. The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, today lashed out at the Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamta Banerjee, for extending moral support to the agitation for a separate state of Kamtapuri in North Bengal which he alleged had links with the ISI.

Addressing a press conference here, he said Ms. Banerjee's statement on Kamtapuri at Siliguri two days ago was "dangerous", considering that the agitators had close links with ULFA and were backed by Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence.

At a 40-minute meeting with the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, earlier in the day, Mr. Bhattacharjee brought to Mr. Advani's notice Ms. Banerjee's statement and urged him to send three extra contingents of the CRPF to the tackle the agitation.

The Chief Minister also asked for 10 more BSF battalions and better coordination between Central and State intelligence agencies to tackle illegal migration and ISI activities in nine districts on the India-Bangladesh borders. The CPI(M)-Trinamool clashes also came up for discussion. Mr. Bhattacharjee informed Mr. Advani that these were confined to the area under seven police stations only, and had now abated with people moving back to their homes.

Mr. Advani indicated to Mr. Bhattacharjee that police should inspire confidence in the people as a neutral, non-partisan agency. Mr. Bhattacharjee said that he



The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, calling on the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

would be visiting Midnapore on December 6 to review the law and order situation.

Mr. Bhattacharjee, who was on his maiden visit here after taking over the reins of West Bengal from Mr. Jyoti Basu, also called on the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee and sought more funds from the Centre for providing relief to the victims of the recent extensive floods in the State.

Recalling the demand for Rs. 1,487 crores raised by the State for the flood relief work, he urged Mr. Vajpayee to speed up the process of setting of a national calamity

relief fund as recommended by the eleventh finance commission.

He requested the Centre's approval for proposals to rename the State capital Calcutta as 'Kolkata' and the State as 'Bangla'. The proposals had the full support of all political parties and there were no controversies, he said. Asked about the industrial scene in West Bengal, he told presspersons that things were steadily looking up with industrial majors like Mitsubishi and Videocon lining up to invest either in newer projects or expansion of their existing units.

THE HINDU

1 DEC 2000

Saif restraint sermon for Mamata, CPM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Dec. 3. — The Jana Chetana Mancha, floated by former CPI-M member of Parliament, Mr Saifuddin Choudhury, today called on the CPI-M and the Trinamul Congress to exercise restraint in their politics of retaliation.

Mr Choudhury said leaders of both the parties should refrain from using language that will fuel passions.

The Mancha wants both the parties to own up their responsibilities for allowing the climate of violence to persist.

It will organise a convention where the Congress and the CPI-M's partners in the Left Front will be invited to build

consensus on the need to curb violence and restore democratic political process.

The Mancha also urged political parties not to make political capital of flood-hit people's miseries while thousands of flood victims are trying to cope with harsh realities.

It condemned the Centre's delay in releasing flood funds. It also criticised the Left Front government for "not doing enough" to mitigate people's sufferings.

The Trinamul-BJP combine should not oppose the ruling Front's initiative to get Central funds for flood-hit people, it said.

The Mancha held a meeting

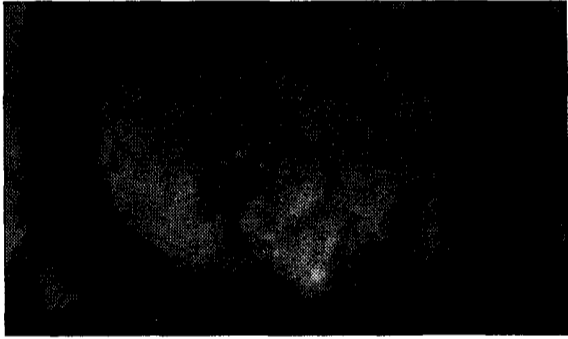
today to take stock of its progress in setting up units in the districts. It plans to enroll 30,000 members this month.

Mr Choudhury will hold meetings and conventions in the districts for a week, as he is getting queries on the Mancha's programmes and objectives.

The Mancha condemns any move to dismember the state as the Kamtapuris are planning to do. However, the Kamtapuris economic

grievances should be addressed in proper perspective. It would be wrong if the state suppresses their aspirations by force.

MANCHA TO HOLD CONVENTION



Mr Saifuddin Choudhury

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Dec. 3. — Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, today scoffed at Miss Mamata Banerjee's threat to recapture villages from where Trinamul workers have allegedly been driven out by CPI-M cadres.

He said the Trinamul chief's words do not make any sense. "Once she threatens to capture Writers' Buildings and then to recapture villages", Villagers, belonging to any party, will live in their rightful places. No one will be allowed to evict villagers from their homes, he said.

Miss Banerjee alleged during her visit to Midnapore yesterday



Mr Anil Biswas and Miss Mamata Banerjee

day that CPI-M men had driven out her party supporters from their homes. She said her party would not take it lying down.

The LF will organise a march to Raj Bhavan on 16 December to protest against the Centre's "refusal" to release relief funds.

THE STATESMAN

4 DEC 2000

Fly the red flag for peace; Buddha

Arindam Sarkar
Keshpur, December 6

SWEAR ALLEGIANCE to the hammer-and-sickle and you'll prosper, was Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's message at a mammoth CPI(M) rally here today.

He and party colleague Surya Kanta Mishra tongue-lashed the Trinamool Congress, called it a forum for troublemakers, ridiculed its leader Mamata Banerjee as "Resignation Didi" and harangued on how it didn't make sense being with her party.

"We won't tolerate any more trouble in Keshpur and will pull out all stops to prevent the Trinamool from clawing its way back." The Chief Minister was at his belligerent extreme and his one-lakh-plus audience loved it.

Coming as it did four days after Mamata's Chherua meeting, where she vowed to take back areas she had lost to the CPI(M), Bhattacharjee's message to his rival was: "I have taken up the

gauntlet." "Quit the Trinamool and flock to the Red flag if you want to survive in peace here," Bhattacharjee said amid loud cries of 'lal salam' from a packed house on the grounds opposite Jamshed Ali Bhavan, the CPI(M) office here.

"The path of the Trinamool is that of sin. The party has over the last two-and-a-half years tortured people. Its army of goons and ruffians has burnt houses, raped women and killed farmers. We lost as many as 35 comrades here. Let those who made the mistake of joining Mamata return. We will accept them as friends. This mindless violence should end," Bhattacharjee said.

Earlier this morning, the Chief Minister reached Kharagpur by train. His convoy pulled up at the circuit house at 12.25 pm. Accompanied by Mishra, his number two in the Cabinet, the Chief

Minister left for the meeting venue at 2.20 pm. His convoy, escorted by 200 motorcycle-borne outriders, was welcomed a kilometre from the venue by a human chain clothed in red. Hundreds of men turned out in red T-shirts, white trousers and caps and women in red-bordered saris lined the route fists raised in red salute. They were there everywhere. On the way to Keshpur - at Elaiganj, Panchkuri,

Keshpur Tough Talk

Jamtala, Amrakuchi and Panchami villages. Schoolchildren blew whistles, waved flags and showered petals on the Chief Minister's convoy.

The meeting ground was a sea of red. As the crowd cheered, the offensive against the Trinamool remained unrelenting. "Why should you support the Trinamool? Are we new to you? Haven't we worked with you for the last 24 years? Isn't it true that we made it to Writers' Buildings through years of struggle? See what has hap-

pened to the Trinamool today? Violence has isolated them. The turnout today proves that people have said a resounding no to them," Bhattacharjee said.

"Recently, when I met Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani, they asked me whether peace would return to Keshpur. I said yes. Those who played with fire have burnt their fingers," the Chief Minister said. "But for peace to prevail, the Opposition must cooperate. If they try to ignite fire again, we know how to deal with them."

Equally hard-hitting were Mishra and district secretary Dipak Sarkar. "I would request the 'bhai' (brothers) of the 'Resignation Didi' to fall in line and take to the CPI(M). Your Didi is supposed to take care of railway lines, instead she worried too much about the Panskura Line. And both ended in disasters. Your Didi can't stop the Left Front from forming the Government for the sixth time under Bhattacharjee," Mishra said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME.

7 JAN 2000

Police track Kamtapur link with Ulfa

FROM PROBIR PRAMANIK

Alipurduar (Jalpaiguri), Dec. 7: Interrogation of an arrested Ulfa militant has established the group's links with north Bengal separatists even as intelligence reports pointed to a possible spillover of the war in the North-east with the growing influence of the Bengali Tiger Force (BTF), which has its roots in Tripura.

Rameshwar Rava, the Ulfa operative who was arrested from a Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) hideout in Dhupguri on Saturday night, has disclosed during interrogation the north Bengal separatists' links with the Northeast insurgents.

"Rava has revealed that the KLO's self-styled commander-in-chief, Tushar Roy alias Tamir Das alias Jeevan Singh, was among the first batch of Kamtapuris to undergo arms training at the Ulfa's camp in the jungles of Bhutan, north of Nalbari district in Assam, last year," Jalpaiguri superintendent of police Ranvir Kumar said.

"According to Rava's revelations, each KLO and Ulfa cadre is assigned a 'technical' code name. 'Tech names' give a local touch to the insurgents operating in each other's territory. While Rava's 'tech name' happens to be Pankaj Roy, Tushar is known to the Ulfa as Jeevan Singh. We had information that Tushar, along with the KLO's self-styled field marshal, Mrinal Roy alias Samir Das, attended a meeting with Rava on Saturday night. Though Tushar

and Mrinal gave us the slip, Rava's arrest has thrown up concrete leads into the Ulfa's operations in North Bengal. We believe Rava was hired to execute a particular operation. But our failure to recover any arms is the worrying point," Kumar added.

The district police chief said Rava was in the area since November 27. He entered Dhupguri a day after the police crackdown on Kamtapur activists.

While refusing to comment on the growth of the Bengali Tiger Force, Kumar said: "We are aware that some posters ascribed to the BTF had recently appeared in some areas of Samuktala, Barobisa and Kumargramduar areas on the Bengal-Assam border."

Top intelligence sources in Alipurduar, however, said the BTF's activities had increased in recent months. "The BTF is being financed by a section of businessmen across the Assam-Bengal border to counter the National Democratic Front of Boroland. The BTF has support from the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF). We apprehend the spillover of the BLTF-NDFB rivalry into the Kumargram-Barobisa-Alipurduar area," an intelligence official said.

KPP threat

Kamtapur People's Party (KPP) president Atul Roy has threatened to disrupt the proposed CPM rally at Shiv Mandir, a KPP stronghold on the outskirts of Siliguri, on December 11.

The rally is scheduled to be addressed by Jyoti Basu.

THE TELEGRAPH

8 DEC 2000

KPP threatens to disrupt Basu rally

SUDIPTA CHANDA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Dec. 8. — The Kamtapur Peoples' Party has threatened to disrupt a rally to be presided over by Mr Jyoti Basu on 11 December at Shivmandir on the outskirts of Siliguri.

Mr Basu is scheduled to address public meetings at Siliguri, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri between 11-13 December.

"We want to get even with the CPI-M, which tried to foil our centrally-organised rally at Cooch Behar on 6 December," KPP president Mr Atul Roy said.

Challenging the CPI-M "to fill up the venue of Mr Basu's meeting with supporters if they can," Mr Roy said "his party activists would ensure that people don't turn up."

Mr Roy didn't explain how his partymen will desist CPI-M supporters from attending the rally. He, however, dropped broad hints that physical

intimidation could be one of the means to discourage people from attending Mr Basu's meeting.

"It would be a tit-for-tat lesson for the CPI-M," he said. According to him, the CPI-M-led state government used the police and party cadres to frighten KPP supporters from attending the Cooch Behar rally. "We will make the Marxists take a dose of their own medicine. Probably it will teach them not to be vindictive towards us in future," Mr Roy said.

Political observers are of the opinion that the KPP, in defying the CPI-M, may have received support from some more established political organisation.

This observation becomes all the more credible following a statement of former MP from Assam Mr Purna Narayan Singha who was one of the guest speakers at the KPP central rally at Cooch Behar on 6 December.

Mr Singha, in his speech, had said: "The Trinamul Congress has extended support towards the Kamtapur cause."

Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja had also stated during their recent visits here that their organisation was not against some of the demands of the KPP. Desisting from rejecting the CPI-M's allegation that the Kamtapuri movement is being directed and controlled by the Trinamul and the BJP, Miss Banerjee had countered saying: "The movement is the outcome of 24 years' of Left Front misrule."

Both, Miss Banerjee and later Mr Panja preferred to play the "underdevelopment" card to counter the CPI-M's allegation. They were not categorical on whether the Trinamul maintained relations with the KPP, which is at the vanguard of the Kamtapuri movement.

■ Editorial: Stir in the North, page 8

THE STATESMAN

9 DEC 2000

Police confirm
KPP-Ulfa

9/12 Links SA

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Dec 8. - The police has definite information of a nexus between the Kamtapur Peoples' Party, its militant wing Kamtapur Liberation Organisation and the Ulfa.

The police claim that it has established links between the Ulfa and the KPP. The matter came to fore with the arrest of Mr Rameswar Rava, alias Pankaj Roy and a trained Ulfa militant from a KPP worker, Mr Nagen Roy's house in Jalpaiguri district on 2 December.

Jalpaiguri SP, Mr Ranvir Kumar said Mr Roy admitted that he had been asked by KLO chief, Jeevan Singh alias Tusar Das and Nirmal Roy to shelter the Ulfa militant. Police have also learnt that some other families had sheltered Rava too.

Rava has allegedly admitted that he has acquired training at the Ulfa Core Headquarter, in Bhutan. The CHQ, it is learnt, is a two day's walk north from Nalbari, Assam through dense forests.

"Rava has admitted meeting Jeevan Singh at the CHQ," Mr Kumar said. This, and other evidences establish the KPP-Ulfa-KLO nexus, the SP said.

Ulfa militants have also set up a training camp at Nichula forest in Kalikhola Bhutan, which trains KLO activists, police said. About 150 pro-Kamtapuri youths from Jalpaiguri district alone have undergone arms training at the Nichula camp. The NDFB is the latest entrant to the scene. It is extending support to the above mentioned groups.

The activities of the Bodoland Liberation Tiger Force and the Bengal Tiger Force along with surrendered Sulfa activists are also worrying the police.

Operating in the lower Assam region and at Barobisa, which marks the border between West Bengal and Assam, the two organisations are rapidly gaining ground.

THE STATESMAN

9 DEC 2000

Minister dares Kamtapuris to stop LF rallies

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, December 8

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS and Urban Development Minister Asoke Bhattacharya today challenged Kamtapur Peoples' Party (KPP) to stop the Left Front from holding public meetings in North Bengal.

Parties belonging to the ruling Left Front have decided to hold public meetings in Siliguri, Coochbehar and Jalpaiguri between December 11 and December 13.

Veteran CPI(M) leader and former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu would be the main speaker at all three rallies.

The three public meetings are being organised as a show of strength by the Left Front to counter the KPP's campaign for a separate Kamtapur state in North Bengal.

Referring to the KPP threat, Bhattacharya said, "The KPP leadership and their supporters are leaving in a fool's paradise."

Rubbishing the KPP's claim that its mass rally on December 3 had a record gathering of more than 2.5 lakh people, Bhattacharya claimed that not even 50,000 peo-

ple attended the meeting. "Our rallies, on the other hand, would surely beat all previous records," he added.

The minister ridiculed the KPP's threat of not paying taxes. "The State Government spends on North Bengal's development much more than Rs 50 crore collected annually," he asserted.

Bhattacharya accused both Trinamool Congress and the Congress of extending moral and

Counter Moves

political support to the separatist KPP forces, in spite of the later's links with ULFA and the Pakistani ISI. "But, we will never allow the KPP and its supporters to turn North Bengal into Assam, where ULFA and other armed extremists are playing havoc."

The minister was, however, sympathetic to issues like language, culture and education, which the Rajbanshis have taken up passionately.

"The Left Front and the State Government are ready to sort these out across the table. But, we won't sit idle when they confront us with AK-47s and other sophisticated weapons," he asserted.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 DEC 2000

DEPUTY AGAIN!

Buddhadev is a prisoner of the party

IT is about time that Buddhadev Bhattacharya realised that he is being played for a fool and that by his own partymen. He went overboard at Keshpur on 6 December. He announced his conclusion that people had joined the Trinamul by mistake and he was inviting them to return by the endearing question — why should you be with the Trinamul and not with us? *We are not a party of princes!* — he added. Maybe not but the CPI-M is rapidly acquiring notoriety as a party of fathers of princes. If he is not sure, he could consult Jyoti Basu! Then he claims that his party has been fighting for the poor and the downtrodden for years. They did fight for sharecroppers among agricultural labourers and introduced path-breaking reforms but that was a very long time ago. There are reports — fresh and current — that Trinamul supporters are being allowed to return but on two conditions enforced by party goons — join the CPI-M and pay fines to the party for failing to see the light earlier. He described the Trinamul as a party of sin and injustice. The moral tone is misplaced. What is more, his colleague, Dipak Sirkar, the Secretary of the Midnapore District Committee who also spoke at the same meeting, said that in the Keshpur segment of the Panskura parliamentary constituency in June this year, the Trinamul had a lead of 18,000 votes and went on to boast that if Mamata Banerjee came to Keshpur now, she would not be able to attract 18 people to a meeting. Here is a Freudian slip. In other words, the political cleansing undertaken has been thorough and complete — and ruthless. That it has been achieved at the cost of good governance does not seem to bother the leadership of the CPI-M.

A day later, Buddhadev denies that he said what all newspapers have reported him as saying in Keshpur. All he said, according to him, was that those who had gone over to the Trinamul *had taken the wrong path. Such people should stay with us.* That he is entitled to hold that view is not in question. What is indeed questionable is the action taken to force this view on the people affected. Whether he is aware of it or not is for him to inquire. What is not questionable is that force has been used, fines imposed and threats disseminated by his party apparatchiks to ensure that his vision of political cleansing is effective. This is not acceptable. Also to deny what is said at public meetings, with the press in attendance is a bad practice; it lacks credibility although it may provide a temporary escape route for domestic advantage. It is also a weapon that is grossly overused.

Close on the heels of this misadventure in Keshpur, comes news of large outstandings on account of electricity bills due to the West Bengal State Electricity Board on account of Jyoti Basu's occupation of the official residence of the state's chief ministers during the 24-month period ending July 1999. For that period the government are clearly responsible. A whole year and more has passed since then. The amount is already Rs 3.75 lakhs. Basu's occupation of the official residence is to continue — will the state government undertake to pay and continue to neglect to pay? Just as the state government led by Buddhadev has had no qualms about assuring the continuance of Jay Krishna Ghosh as a confidential assistant to Basu on the same salary and perquisites as though Basu were still in office.

If nothing is to change, Buddhadev may find himself Deputy Chief Minister again!

THE STATESMAN

10 DEC 2000

BJP open to tie-up with KPP

SILIGURI, Dec. 9. — The BJP is not averse to joining hands with the Kamtapur People's Party in the Assembly polls as both share the anti-Left agenda.

"We'll discuss the matter with our North Bengal leaders and then consider whether to contest on a common platform. Both parties are opposed to the LF," BJP's state unit president, Mr Asim Ghosh, said here today.

Mr Ghosh said the Kamtapur demand was justified, but the Assembly had to unanimously approve the proposal before it could be taken up with the Centre. He slammed the government's "repressive" measures. The problems should be addressed through "dialogue." — SNS

■ More reports on page 5

THE STATESMAN

10 DEC 2000

Rajbonshis are Bengalis: Basu

HT Correspondent
Cooch Behar, December 12

JYOTI BASU today told the Rajbonshis they have no identity distinct from Bengalis and, therefore, no reason to ask for a separate State. This he knew from the experience of his own family, the former Chief Minister declared.

"My elder brother married the daughter of King Prasanna Deb Raikat of Jalpaiguri, and my sister-in-law never called herself a Kamtapuri. She always insisted that she was a Bengali," Basu told a public meeting here today.

The Kamtapuris are not a separate people, and Rajbonshis are Bengalis, Basu declared. There is only one State of West Bengal, and it belongs to all Bengalis - political parties and forces opposed to the Left Front Government are making people believe that North Bengal is distinct from the rest of the State. But they would not succeed, Basu said.

Newspapers and TV came under severe attack. "A section of the media is spreading separatist tendencies," Basu thundered. He

urged the people of the State not to be influenced by such reports. But these "separatist" sections of the media too would fail in their "mischievous" attempts, Basu said.

Nor would separatist movements like those of the so-called Kamtapuris achieve anything. The Government did not like to crack

down on them, but wanted the agitators to know they were not on the right track, Basu said. "We don't want to respond to bullets with bullets and to violence with counter-violence."

According to Basu, non-Left parties were falsely trying to project North Bengal as

an area where there was no development. He had seen no signs of suffering and deprivation among the common people here, he said - so how could he believe the enemies of the LF?

And development and industry were indeed coming: a multi-crore rupee paper mill was all set to come up in the area. A problem, though had been created by the Centre - by allowing import of paper, they had bred doubts in the mind of the entrepreneur.



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 DEC 2000

51 N Bengal CPM leaders on KLO hit list

Kinsuk Basu
Calcutta, December 12

FIFTY-ONE KEY CPM leaders from Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Siliiguri are on the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation's (KLO) hit list, a confidential intelligence report suggests.

Among those being targeted by the KLO, nearly 25 are from Jalpaiguri, 16 from Cooch Behar and 10 from Siliiguri. The list excludes Ministers from North Bengal, for the militant organisation doesn't consider them key to strengthening their party's base in these regions. Only those leaders given the task of influencing the fence sitters among Rajbanshis

these targeted men are zonal committee members and party whole-timers.

Home Secretary S N Roy was informed about the threat to these leaders few weeks ago, intelligence agencies confirmed today. The report suggested that the security cover of some of these men be tightened, while others be provided cover immediately.

In Jalpaiguri, leaders on the list included some from Dhupguri, Moinaguri, Paanbari and Kumargram, from where Jitendra Chandra Sarkar came. Sarkar, a school-teacher, was attacked late on last night by a group of armed men. The attackers fired at Sarkar when he was taking a stroll

Among those being targeted by the KLO, nearly 25 are from Jalpaiguri, 16 from Cooch Behar and 10 from Siliiguri. The list excludes ministers, for the militants do not consider them key to strengthening the party base in the region

schoolteacher of Barobisha, Pranesh Pal was gunned down by alleged Kamtapur militants.

CPI(M) Insiders at the Alipurduar Zonal Committee said over the telephone that Sarkar was one of the few entrusted with the job of building the party's base in the interiors of Kumargram. He thus fell prey to the KLO.

The other leader from Kumargram on the hit list is Chanu Sarkar, a key CPI(M) functionary. In Dhupguri, Banamali Roy's life is under threat. The intelligence reports suggest that party activists from parts of Mathabhanga, Toofanganje and pockets of Dinbhata and Sitai in Cooch Behar and Phasidewa, Kharibari and Naxalbari in Siliiguri are in

danger. The message behind such attacks and threats, intelligence agencies claimed, was to send the right signals to a section of the Rajbanshi population, who seemed to doubt the ability of the KLO in spearheading a separatist movement.

While some KLO leaders are busy working on these targets in North Bengal, intelligence agencies say a larger section is engaged in picking probables for a training camp in Bhutan.

Reports hint at the re-emergence of the KLO commander Jeevan Singh who was released on bail recently. Singh is now in India and working on an Ujfa plan towards strengthening the militant outfit in North Bengal. All this without informing the Kamtapur Peoples' Party, the parent organisation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 DEC 2000

Basu wants North Bengal to stay away from militancy

HT Correspondent

Calcutta, December 11

IN A stern signal to Kamtapur activists at Siliguri today, former Chief Minister Jyoti Basu said he would not want North Bengal to imbibe the ethnic strife in Assam.

"Some forces here are playing a destructive game in the name of language. They are trying to divide the poor. We will not allow it."

Basu took the opportunity to blast the BJP-led coalition at the Centre. He announced the Government should either mend its ways or go. "It is an uncivilised barbaric Government. It is selling out the country. Now it's playing up the temple issue again."

"I thought Vajpayee was different. He told me the demolition of the Babri mosque was an accident. Now I find him changing roles. He says it is a political act." Addressing a

CPI(M) gathering close to the Kamtapur People Party's (KPP's) headquarters in Atherokhai, the party patriarch warned divisive forces not to resort to guns. Basu sounded reassuring to the people who had come to the meeting ignoring the KPP threat.

"I have told the Bhutan king that

Atherokhai Meet

the Ulfa has set up a training camp there. He said he needed help from our Army to drive them out. I have urged the Centre to provide him the forces he requires."

Hinting at his long time family ties with Rajbanshis, Basu challenged the KPP claims that their language was different from Bengali. "My sister-in-law was Prasanna Deb Raikat's daughter. I used to come to her Jalpaiguri home often. Was she

not a Bengali? She stayed at my Hindustan Road home too.

"I never found her claiming a separate identity other than that of a Bengali. Pronunciations, dialects vary from place to place across Bengal. The language used in Dhaka differs from that in Barishal and Calcutta. But they are diverse forms of the same Bengali language." Basu referred to what renowned linguists such as Suniti Chattopadhyaya have said on the issue.

Basu rubbished Opposition claim that the Left Front had neglected north Bengal. "It is bogus. On the contrary, we are spending more on north Bengal than on south Bengal. Our per capita allotment for people in the north is Rs 260. This is higher by Rs 40 over that in the southern districts. Lakhs of people work in the tea gardens and there is no such scope in other parts."

RAL UNIVERSITY



CENTRAL RAILWAY

DRM's OFFICE

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 DEC 1999

Trinamul man's tongue cut off

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GHATAL, Dec. 13. — Mr Gour Khanra, a Trinamul Congress worker was critically injured after a portion his tongue was cut off by a CPI-M cadre in Dhipalsa last night.

He was brought to SSKM today afternoon. His condition is stated to be critical. Trinamul Congress leaders have demanded arrest of the people involved in the incident. No one has been arrested so far.

Mr Khara was writing wall graffiti for Miss Mamata Banerjee's rally at Kespur on 3 January.

Mr Samir Bhattacharya, Trinamul's Rajnagar booth committee secretary said that a CPI-M cadre, Mr Prafulla Samui cut off nearly one-third Mr Khanra's tongue.

Daspur Police also corroborated Trinamul leader's views saying "Mr Samui had an antecedence of trying to bite off his mother-in-law's tongue in a domestic dispute recently".

The incident occurred when a group of about 60 CPI-M cadres led by Mr Gostha Kramrai, ex-Rajnagar gram panchayat pradhan, attacked the Trinamul activists writing on the walls of a public urinal. The walls were booked by CPI-M for the ensuing Assembly polls.

A scuffle ensued in which Mr Khanra fell down and Mr Samui tried to throttle him. Mr Samui then cut off Mr Khara's tongue, Mr Sankar Khanra, his brother said.

Another Trinamul man, Mr Bhabesh Prodhon, was also hit on his head with a torchlight. They were admitted to Daspur health Centre from where Mr Prodhon was discharged after first-aid while Mr Khanra shifted to Ghatal SD Hospital.

Dr Jayanta Sasmal, attending surgeon of the hospital, told

The Statesman that Mr Khanra's injuries were serious and required nine stitches. Dr Sasmal, however, could not say whether Mr Khanra would ever get back his power of speech. It would require high-tech treatment which is not possible here, he said.

Mr Samir Bhattacharya said they had already contacted Miss Mamata Banerjee in Delhi, so that the best possible treatment is made available to Mr Khanra.

On the other hand, Mr Gunadhar Bose, CPI-M's Daspur zonal committee secretary, claimed Trinamul men attacked CPI-M cadres injuring two of them. A complaint has been lodged in the police station in this regard. He said Mr Khanra's injuries were self-inflicted as it occurred when he tried to bite a CPM cadres.

Daspur police said the CPI-M registered their complaint only today afternoon.

'BJP slams Left': The state BJP leadership said that while the Left Front government's sustained neglect of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Bihar had forced the Rajbanshis to resort to the Kamtapuri movement, suppressive measures by the CPI-M leaders were spreading violence in North Bengal, adds SNS Calcutta.

Mr Ashim Ghosh, state BJP president, who returned after his tour of North Bengal, said here today that the LF government had not taken any steps to improve the economy, industry, education or health of North Bengal.

Mr Jyoti Basu's promise of setting up a jute mill in 1996 in Cooch Bihar had created much enthusiasm among the people. However, it has caused frustration and dismay because nothing has been heard about it till now.

PANKAJ CONTRADICTED ON KOTWALI VIOLENCE

SUDIPTA CHANDA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Dec. 13. — There was no incident of violence and torching of houses in Kotwali yesterday as claimed by Trinamul leader Mr Pankaj Banerjee in Calcutta, says Cooch Behar police.

Here's the version of Cooch Behar SP, Mr KC Meena (and local Congress leaders) and a party colleague of Mr Banerjee:

What actually happened was that violence broke out in the Barangaras area of the district on the previous day, 11 December. Men stated to be CPI-M supporters were responsible for torching nearly 30 houses that evening. But the victims belonged to the Congress and not the Trinamul.

More embarrassing for Mr Banerjee could be the statement of a senior Trinamul leader and the party's Cooch Behar unit convenor, Mr Rabi Ghosh, today. He admitted that, "the victims are Congress supporters, not Trinamul activists."

Criticising Mr Banerjee for "trying to sell a lie," Cooch Behar AICC member, Ms Sabita Roy said that the victims had switched over from the CPI-M camp to the Congress four months ago.

She also said that the incident had nothing to do with the victims' attending Mr Jyoti Basu's meeting, held at Cooch Behar yesterday. "The incident occurred the day before, not yesterday as claimed by Mr Banerjee," he said.

According to her, the fire has destroyed a large quantity of paddy stored in the granaries of the houses and gutted a fertiliser store.

Criticising Mr Banerjee's "attempt to hog the headlines by stating a blatant lie," Congress's Darjeeling district secretary, Mr Shankar Malkar said: "Playing politics with distressed people has always been the ugly practice of Trinamul leaders."

Mr Banerjee had made similar claims in May when three persons, two CPI-M and one BJP supporter, died in a political clash during a gram panchayat by-election at Hazrahat, Mathabhanga in Cooch Behar district.

THE STATESMAN

14 DEC 2000

Planters on KLO kidnap list

Kinsuk Basu
Calcutta, December 13

HC-1
THE KAMTAPUR Liberation Organisation (KLO) plans to abduct six tea planters from Assam who are now settled in North Bengal, an Intelligence report suggests. Two of those on the "abduction list" are from North Dinajpur; the rest are from Siliguri, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

The planters had been targeted by the ULFA after they refused to shell out the money the ultras demanded, the report says. ULFA has now tracked these men down to North Bengal, and wants to get back at them through the KLO.

Jeevan Singh, the KLO commandant now out on bail, is learnt to have been entrusted with the task of planning the operations. The actual abductions will, however, be carried out by the ULFA.

The Intelligence observation

14/12
comes close on the heels of the kidnapping of three planters by the KLO, two of whom remain untraced. Forty-five-year-old Om Prakash Agarwal was carried away from Kotwali in Jalpaiguri in October. Naresh Das of Barobhisa and Roshan Lal Garg of Moynaguri had been abducted earlier. Both are known to have dubious dealings in Assam. Garg - who

ULFA Pressure

is rumoured to have become a millionaire in a very short time - has returned, reportedly after paying an undisclosed amount in ransom. The police believe the KLO is holding Agarwal and Das.

Information on the planned abductions has put the police on high alert. Intelligence agencies are, however, skeptical about being ultimately able to foil the

Kamtapuris.

The KLO desperately needs cash to meet ULFA demands for continuing the training of activists in Bhutan. ULFA has recently threatened to stop the training if it is not paid immediately. Hence the KLO's urgency, the report said.

But it's not the KLO alone that is out on a fund-raising drive. Intelligence agencies say even the KPP has embarked on a collection drive. Over the past few months, it has shot off "threat letters" to small-time tea planters in Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar and Siliguri demanding money. While some have coughed up (the amount never exceeds Rs 5,000) without informing the police, others have preferred to ignore the threat.

The incidents first came to light nearly two months ago when Intelligence agencies arrested a KPP activist in Phansidewa receiving money from a tea planter.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 DEC 2000

Basu allays fear of Kamtapuris

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Dec. 14. — Mr Jyoti Basu said there is nothing to be afraid of secessionist movements in North Bengal. Addressing a press conference here today, on the penultimate day of his five-day visit to the region, Mr Basu said while the Kamtapuri movement is restricted to a

'I AM TOO ILL TO BE PM'

SILIGURI, Dec. 14. — Mr Jyoti Basu today ruled out the possibility of his leading the Third Front, citing poor health.

"I am just not well," he said at a media conference on the penultimate day of his five-day visit to north Bengal.

"I gave up the chief minister's office due to poor health, and you think I would now like to be Prime Minister? In fact, I shouldn't be making such trips as the one I am making now but the party had arranged it earlier," he said. — SNS

handful of misled people," the Gorkhaland demand is "just an election gimmick."

Praising the people for their spontaneous response at the three public meetings, Mr Basu said he had never seen such huge gatherings during his earlier visits.

Mr Basu iterated that majority

of the Rajbanshis is with the Left Front. "A handful of people are trying to mislead the community, but they will not succeed," he said and criticised the Press for indirectly supporting the Kamtapuri movement. "Some dailies have been distorting our statements," he remarked.

Mr Basu warned there is "no

room for complacency" in the Left Front on the Kamtapuri issue. "We have to work hard to bring back those who have gone astray."

Mr Basu told the gathering that there is nothing to be worried about in the event of a possible tie-up between the KPP, Trinamul and the BJP for the forthcoming Assembly elections. "I don't feel there is any threat from the combine," he said.

Calling Miss Mamata Banerjee an opportunist, he said: "There was no BJP in West Bengal, only she brought them here,"

On the Gorkhaland issue being raised again by the GNLFF, Mr Basu said it is an "election gimmick". "It will fade after April elections," he said.

THE STATESMAN INDIA

THE STATESMAN

15 DEC 2000

Reward for tip on KPP leader

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Dec. 14. — Local police have announced a reward of Rs 2,000 for anyone who can provide information on the whereabouts of KPP central committee leader Mr Subash Burman, believed to be involved in subversive activities.

Mr Burman has been in hiding ever since the police crackdown on KPP activists following the bomb explosion at Pakuahat earlier this month.

Earlier this week, police raided a KPP stronghold — Kansa village near the Bamongola police station. Nearly 200 KPP members fled their homes after the raid.

Intelligence officials believe that Mr Burman might be hiding somewhere in South Dinajpur.

According to police, Burman is bent on "waging war against the state".

He is also known for his

organisational abilities.

His wife, who has already been questioned by police, said the Kamtapur Women's Forum would hold a meeting soon to chalk out a plan to counter police atrocities.

The forum will also push for the release of KPP leaders arrested in connection with the bomb explosion.

The Malda SP, Mr Debashis Roy, said police knew about the forum's plans and assured that they had made all necessary arrangements to foil any bid to create violence.

Trinamul stand

The Trinamul Congress is likely to make its stand clear on the Kamtapur issue on 7 January, when Miss Mamata Banerjee is scheduled to attend a party convention here.

Undecided on the touchy issue, local Trinamul leaders have so far either been wary of expressing views on the

subject or have parroted whatever the state leaders have cared to comment in bits and pieces.

They expect Miss Banerjee will clearly state the party line on her trip, ending their dilemma.

Her statement is keenly awaited as the Left Front has alleged that the Kamtapur movement is being organised by the Trinamul-BJP. Former Janata Dal MP from Assam and a KPP sympathiser, Mr Purna Singha, recently said the movement was being aided by the Trinamul. Also, the state BJP chief, Mr Ashim Ghosh, has supported the Kamtapur demand and even expressed the willingness to forge electoral ties with the KPP.

The Trinamul's local leadership, it was learnt, is not averse to ally with the KPP in the Assembly elections, provided the latter relinquishes its statehood demand.

'GORKHALAND MINUS GNLF'

DARJEELING, Dec. 14. — Opposition party CPRM has ridiculed GNLF leaders' statement at a rally here yesterday that only the GNLF had the right to raise the Gorkhaland demand.

Speaking at a public meeting to mark the CPRM's fourth anniversary, party leaders said that Gorkhaland would be created minus the GNLF, bent on obstructing the movement. They said that the GNLF had jettisoned the statehood demand by signing the DGHC Accord.

None other than Mr Subash Ghisingh had the right to raise the Gorkhaland issue, he was the creator of the demand, senior GNLF leaders of the party's Darjeeling branch committee had said at a public rally yesterday.

A fresh agitation would begin soon and Gorkhaland would be created under Mr Ghisingh's leadership, GNLF leaders added. Among those who spoke at today's public meeting were the CPRM secretary Mr RB Rai and Rajya Sabha MP Mr Dawa Lama. They charged both the state and the GNLF for neglecting problems of the region. This has encouraged people like Mr Chhatre Subba to come to the fore. The hills, they warned, would soon explode.

They criticised the Centre for keeping silence on the Gorkhaland demand which had been raised in a 'democratic fashion'. "Maybe the Centre will only react once it hears the sound of bombs exploding," they said.

"GNLF leaders have only dreams of becoming ministers in the state government and have no interest in the statehood demand," the CPRM leaders added. — SNS

Calcutta is dead, long live Kolkata

By Dhiman Chattopadhyay
The Times of India News Service

KOLKATA: It's official now. The Centre has finally agreed to the West Bengal government's proposal to rename Calcutta as Kolkata.

But the move has not evoked much enthusiasm among citizens. While many simply said that they were "happy" with the decision, others said that the Left Front government should concentrate more on improving the lot of its citizens.

The state assembly had adopted an unanimous resolution a year ago recommending the change-over. On Saturday, it received the official green signal from the Centre.

Former chief minister Jyoti Basu said he was "happy" that the Centre had finally accepted the proposal to rename the city. "It was long overdue," he added. City mayor Subrata Mukherjee also welcomed the name change, but said it was a 'belated' decision, as did novelist Sunil Gangopadhyay.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 DEC 2000

Calcutta is now Kolkata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Dec. 23. — It's official, Calcutta is now Kolkata. "Kolkata has returned to Kolkata." was how the chief minister welcomed Calcutta's rechristening today after the Centre accepted the state's proposal.

Greeting the residents of the city late tonight, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said: "Though it comes rather late, I am happy that the Union home ministry has accepted our proposal."

Writer Sunil Ganguly said the renaming "fuels our Bengali pride". Yes, the city has many problems and people may ask how changing its name will help solve them. Still, the

renaming "makes us feel that the city belongs to Bengalis".

Moreover, why should the colonial hangover linger? Mumbai and Chennai are accepted names now. So is Myanmar. Why should Calcutta be different?

Saying that renaming the city was just one of the demands which intellectuals had placed before the state, the writer also hoped the state would be renamed Paschim Banga. "I find it absurd why the name of the state which is actually Paschim Banga, should be translated in English when there is no such translation for states like Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh," he said.

He regretted that not a single

signboard or bill board in the Esplanade area was in Bengali.

A proposal had been submitted to the state government and the mayor of Calcutta, he said, to ensure that at least a third of the signboards in the city should be in the vernacular.

Calcutta's mayor welcomed the change in name, but said the decision was "belated". "We wanted a change in the name of the city in line with the new names of Bombay and Madras long ago," PTI quoted Mr Subrata Mukherjee as having said.

But he does not want all signboards in the city rewritten in Bengali. "We have no such law and it is not advisable to go for such a change since ours is a cosmopolitan city."

THE STATESMAN

24 DEC 2000

ONE CHEER FOR KOLKATA!

5-16-76 Why now and why at all?

WHATEVER may be said about the Bengalis, they are not known to share the parochialism of the Maharashtrian or the chauvinism of the Tamilian. So while Mumbai for Bombay and Chennai for Madras may be passe, Kolkata for Calcutta is not. One must therefore dig for reasons and they are not easy to come by. One possibility is that having brought Calcutta to its knees in terms of good governance, law and order, commerce and industry, medical facilities, education, drinking water, militant unions for everything and all this against the backdrop of all-pervasive corruption, there is not much more damage the Marxists can do and therefore why not begin again with a brand new Kolkata. Writer Sunil Ganguly disappoints when he says that the new name *makes it clear that the city belongs to Bengalis*. Beggars on the streets will now raise their heads high and look the victim in the eye to negotiate what they should get. After all, the whole city belongs to them now! Perhaps Sunil has another point too. Calcutta wants to become indistinguishable from Bal Thackeray's Mumbai and Jayalalitha's Chennai, especially in terms of political violence and intolerance; as for nepotism the comparison is too close to call if you look at Jyoti Basu; also in terms of elevating mere politicians into demi-gods and goddesses. If Sunil is right it must distress all those who have prided themselves on the city being different from any other, free of prejudices of all kinds. But then times are changing and Calcutta must change with it.

Maybe there is a constructive and novel reason for the change. Signboards will have to be repainted, letter-heads reprinted, street names renewed and there will be a host of other changes to be made and all this will need extra labour, new staff or at least overtime to existing staff. Either way the proletariat will hope to benefit. Can it be that our resourceful Marxists, always on the look out for more pay for unnecessary work have thought this up as a palliative for the unemployment problem among their cadres? It may also be their novel attempt to divert attention away from the mess that Jyoti Basu has left behind including the legacy of abuses of power and the skeletons that are tumbling out of the cupboard.

One word of warning is in order. Wait for a while before you change the number plate of your car. If West Bengal becomes Paschim Bangla, the letters WB will have to change to PB. Momentous changes are in the air! One thing seems clear. This change alone will induce overseas investors to queue up to bring their investments here. Are the Chief Minister and Asim Dasgupta ready for the flood of funds? Somnath Chatterjee, MP, Chairman of the Paschim Bangla Industrial Development Corporation Ltd is raring to go. //

THE STATESMAN

26 DEC 2000

Row over Buddha's 'shoot-to-kill' orders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
CALCUTTA, DEC 26

MAJOR political controversy has erupted in West Bengal over the Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee's instructions to the police to shoot down armed criminals, as the major opposition Trinamool Congress threatened to move Amnesty International and human rights bodies.

In defence of his instructions to the police to shoot armed criminals, the Chief Minister today said there were definite provisions in this regard in the Police Act and IPC, and denied having

violated human rights norms. "Police Act 23 and IPC 76 clearly envisage that the police should shoot an armed criminal when he is out to kill an innocent

man rights norms. The Chief Minister had yesterday said during laying the foundation of East Jadavpur police station that armed persons on

some areas in South Calcutta, particularly in his assembly constituency of Jadavpur.

The Chief Minister said only in case of excesses on innocent people by the police would attract attention of human rights bodies. "There is no contradiction between the two. It is a crime not to shoot a criminal when he attacks an innocent person.

In view of rising dacoities in Calcutta, Bengal CM defends move to empower police with right to kill criminals

roads did not enjoy human rights and police should shoot them down ... "Human rights are for human beings".

Bhattacharjee's statement came in the wake of a spurt in criminal activities and dacoities in

condemned by Congress, BJP and particularly Trinamool Congress which even threatened to move the Amnesty International, National and state Human Rights Commissions.

The Trinamool Congress chief said today that the Chief Minister's instructions to the police was violative of all basic human rights and constitutional norms. "We will take up the issue with the Union Home Ministry."

Party's policy-making body chairman Pankaj Banerjee condemned the Chief Minister's statement, accusing him of "encouraging growth of Fascism".

"When this kind of situation develops, when an organised gang is out to kill someone, it must be confronted by the police to save lives," Bhattacharjee, also in charge of Home (Police) department, added.

His yesterday's statement was

Buddha in eye of storm for giving cops licence to kill

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, December 26

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee drew flak from rights bodies and political parties today for his statement that consideration of human rights need not stop the police from pulling the trigger on criminals.

But Bhattacharjee stuck to his guns, insisting it was right for the police to shoot at and kill armed criminals if the situation demanded. "Just as opening fire without any justifiable reason is wrong, not opening fire in case of an absolute need too is a crime," he told reporters at Writers' Buildings.

The West Bengal Human Rights Commission (WBHRC) has decided to seek an explanation from him for what it termed as his "contempt" for human rights and the commission.

The rights body chairman Justice Mukul Gopal Mukherji told *The Hindustan Times* that the step was meant to get at the truth. "I have seen newspaper reports. But it would be improper to judge the issue on the basis of these reports, especially when the Chief Minister

RIGHT OR WRONG

- ✓ Police can fire to protect Govt property, people's life, prevent riots or a blaze and in self defence
- ✓ Judicial magistrate's inquiry to follow firing
- ✓ Inquiry to consider police officer's compulsions, especially provocative situations
- ✓ Criminal guilty of crime that invites life sentence can be shot
- He can't be shot during arrest, unless he resists
- ✓ Senior officer answerable to human rights panel
- ✓ If a deceased's relative complains, a separate inquiry would be set up

is available to explain things in the right perspective."

The Association for Protection of Democratic Rights (APDR), a civil rights group, too, slammed the Chief Minister for his "cavalier attitude" towards human rights. It will move a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court.

"We will bring it to the notice of international bodies such as Amnesty International," said APDR general secretary Sujato Bhadra. "Such licence to kill is anti-constitutional and against the rule of law. The Chief Minister himself is instigating violence, but what happens if people apply the same yardstick to kill policemen or even politicians for colluding with criminals," Bhadra asked.

The Opposition, too, cried foul. Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee said Bhattacharjee's statement reflected his "fascist attitude". Mamata said she would take up the issue with the Union Home Ministry. The Chief Minister junked the charge, saying there was "no contradiction" between protection of citizen's rights and respect for human rights.

The Congress echoed the Trinamool's view and accused Bhattacharjee of playing to the gallery. WBPCCC vice-president Saugata Roy described it as irresponsible. BJP State vice-president Muzaffar Khan said since the Chief Minister had little concern for human rights, it was no wonder jungle raj prevailed in the State.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 DEC 2000

Basu hands over Great Eastern legacy to Accor

Our Calcutta Bureau
CALCUTTA 31 OCTOBER

IN WHAT may well be his last business deal, outgoing chief minister Jyoti Basu put his seal of approval on the 30-year lease of the state government-owned Great Eastern Hotel to French hotel chain Accor.

Exactly six days before leaving the chair that he has been occupying for the last 24 years, Mr Basu, on Tuesday, pushed through the proposal that has been in limbo for the last few years.

The last Cabinet meeting, chaired by Mr Basu, decided to hand over the splendid 160-year-old hotel to the Asian arm of the French hotel chain — Asia Accor Pacific (AAP).

AAP, in turn, will renovate and upgrade the now ailing hotel into a five-star deluxe hotel with a capital outlay of Rs 100 crore.

Accor will run the 200-room heritage hotel under its popular

years, as per the agreement of the lease.

The memorandum of understanding (MoU) will be signed shortly between the Accor group and the state government, which will be followed by the signing of an agreement to complete the upgradation of the 200-room hotel within four years, the minister said.

"We did not go in for risk-sharing with Accor. We thought it wise on our part to ensure a guaranteed return and that's what we did," Mr Mukherjee said. In reply to a question, the tourism minister expressed the confidence that "even if the three unions do not agree with the government's decision and go against it, the government will not back out."

All three unions of the employees and supervisory staff body had already been informed of the government decision, as was the case when it had decided to privatise the hotel in January 1999, the minister said.

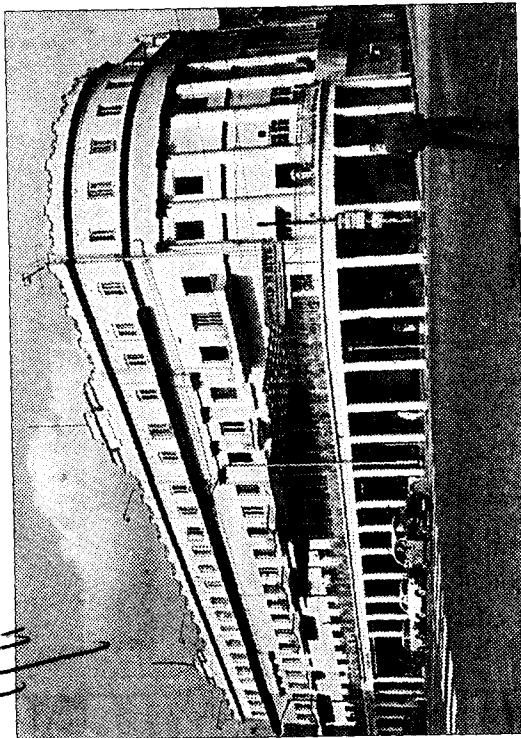
It may be recalled that the state government had to go back on its decision to privatise the hotel more than once, thanks to stiff resistance from employee unions.

"At that time it was not possible to implement the decision. The government has decided to do it now. And you take it from me, we will do it this time," Mr Mukherjee said.

He said the state government had more pressing commitments and other priority sectors and, therefore, it was not feasible to invest huge government funds in the hotel.

With losses soaring since the early 90s, the cumulative loss of the hotel reached Rs 9 crore till March, 2000.

This, in turn, had compelled the government to release a grant of Rs 1 crore in 1999-2000 to meet the cost of staff salaries and suppliers' bills, besides a grant of Rs 2.75 crore in 2000-2001 to keep the hotel operational, the minister said.



FRENCH CONNECTION: Great Eastern Hotel en route to grand revival. — Mona Chowdhury

international brand name — Sofitel, with the state government continuing to be the owner.

Soon after the Cabinet meeting, Mr Manab Mukherjee, the state tourism minister, told reporters that the hotel will be handed over to the French company on management lease for 30 years, with the state government continuing to be the owner. Mr Mukherjee said, will receive 3 per cent of the gross revenue for the first 10 years, 3.5 per cent during the next 10 years and 4 per cent for the following 10

Basu beyond Bengal

By Harish Khare

RECALL THE anxious summer of 1999. The Vajpayee Government had been voted out and an alternative arrangement had yet to be put in place. Ms. Sonia Gandhi had committed her famous *faux pas* of "we have 272 MPs" right there before the television cameras in the Rashtrapati Bhavan forecourt; Mr. Arjun Singh had quereed the pitch by declaring that "Ms. Sonia Gandhi will be the Prime Minister". There was a stalemate, as the non-BJP parties and leaders were unwilling to play courtiers to the Sonia monarchy. At that moment came the suggestion from the most responsible quarters: "Why not Jyoti Basu?". Now it was the turn of the Congress strategists to commit their "historic blunder" and say no. The rest is history, and the AICC establishment now has all the time in the world to savour for the next four years its giant tally of 112 Lok Sabha MPs.

But what needs to be noted is that Mr. Basu was deemed to be the only decent and respectable face, with stature and experience, to become the Prime Minister of India. That fleeting afternoon of May 1999 attests to the usefulness that Mr. Basu has carved out for himself, way beyond his West Bengal, a State he presided over for over 23 years as a communist leader. If he could survive all these years it was because he was one of the few communist leaders with a mass following: he only had E. M. S. Namboodiripad and A. K. Gopalan for company. This mass appeal constituted only a small part of the Jyoti Basu political persona. There are, at least, three distinct aspects of the Basu era which need to be underlined in the overall national context, and which proved remarkably helpful in coping with the various crises the Indian state encountered these last two decades.

First, Mr. Basu turned out to be the most wholesome embodiment of that undying and seemingly interminable anti-New Delhi sentiment and attitude. That tradition goes back to the days of Subash Chandra Bose who dared to defy — and almost got away with it — the Mahatama. If the Left Front regime could withstand the repeated onslaughts from powerful Prime Ministers, first Indira Gandhi, then

against those trying to tear down the secular fabric. That is why he is hated so passionately by the Sangh Parivar. Again, at a time when most non-BJP leaders have lost their voice, Mr. Basu's presence provided the polity a much-needed secular corrective.

Are these intangible contributions sufficient to overcome the torrent of indictment that has been directed against Mr. Basu in his long chief ministerial innings? Yes, and no. Within West Bengal, Mr. Basu could not always keep down the Left cadres' Stalinist impulses; he can also be accused of turning a blind eye as the CPI (M) mercilessly imposed a patron-client relationship on almost all aspects of civil society and crowded out political space for the non-Left Front voices; and, certainly he could not control the systemic aberrations that crept in appointments, postings and transfers of Government employees. He is also guilty of countenancing, sometimes even abetting, victimisation of the Trinamool Congress cadres; he conspicuously failed to check and condemn violence against political rivals in Midnapore. On the other hand, Mr. Basu also became the prime example and practitioner of what the CPI(ML) pithily terms "parliamentary cretinism".

These are essentially West Bengal-centric failures, and anyone who rules for more than two decades is bound to leave a mixed record. In the days to come these and other 'failures' would be chronicled tirelessly, if only to reinforce the Basu fatigue that seems to have set in among the West Bengal electorate. In any case we live in uncharitable times and we tend to be particularly uncharitable towards all those who proudly call themselves 'communist'. Yet by the end of his innings Mr. Basu had acquired a bourgeois respectability that was a source of comfort to most corporate interests; after all it was this respectability that was very cunningly tapped first to float the idea of that most dubious and immoral policy giveaway, the VDSI sleight-of-hand during the United Front regime. On balance, Mr. Basu's silent and unappreciated contribution to the consolidation of a democratic Indian polity outweighs his failures and successes in West Bengal.

On balance, Mr. Jyoti Basu's silent and unappreciated contribution to the consolidation of a democratic Indian polity outweighs his failures and successes in West Bengal.

inance of this "success" can be understood only by those who pause to consider that the rest of the Northeast remains in a ferment, and enormous resources of the Indian state are directed towards keeping that region's restlessness within tolerable limits. What is more, the historians grudgingly acknowledge that when the clever-clever boys in the Rajiv Gandhi team wanted to stoke the Gorkhaland fires (and use the disturbance as the excuse to impose Article 356 on West Bengal) it was Mr. Basu's clear-headed approach that won the day for democracy and India; the Chief Minister is on record as having instructed his senior bureaucratic aides that the Gorkhaland stir was a political problem and had to be dealt politically.

Because Mr. Basu had the abiding reassurance of a nationalist, he and his regime were well equipped to deal effectively with separatist temptations; and, by presiding over a regime that, at least to begin with, had a definite progressive touch to it Mr. Basu nipped in the bud any potentially dangerous convergence of ethnic deprivation and bad governance. If for nothing else, the protagonists of the Indian state have to be grateful to Mr. Basu for ensuring that West Bengal has not joined the rest of the Northeast in its sulking resentment of New Delhi.

And, the third aspect of Mr. Basu's innings has to be his contribution to keeping afloat the secular plank. As the years passed, Mr. Basu grew in stature and seniority just as the Congress' will to take on the communalists got weaker by the year; almost naturally he became the rallying point for secular voices and forces, way beyond West Bengal. Here was a leader who was uncompromising in his commitment to secular values, and whose respectability was always available

Rajiv Gandhi, and now Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, it was only because Mr. Basu provided a leadership that was administratively and politically superior to what the Congress had to offer. As Chief Minister he brought to his job an intellectual and personal integrity, and in the process garnered for himself and his Government a kind of moral stature that eluded most rulers, at the Centre or in the States. No doubt, Mr. Basu presided over a communist Government; and, it was impossible for him to keep under check the unhealthy influence of arrogant party bureaucrats, insufferable theoreticians, and heartless apparatchiks over the functioning of the Government. Yet Mr. Basu's own personality, his inherent decency, his democratic temperament that tolerated, even indulged, dissent and disagreement, enabled him to keep the channels of communication open, with friends and foes alike. The Left Front in West Bengal was the most audacious experiment in doing things differently than what New Delhi thought or did. And precisely because of the Basu temperament Calcutta's contrariness could never degenerate into that ugly streak of separatism that had stalked the Indian nationhood in various parts of the country. Nor could New Delhi, even at its haughtiest worst, perceive Mr. Basu's West Bengal as being in a separatist mood. In turn, West Bengal, basking under the Jyoti Basu equanimity, could sport as well as absorb quite a bit of anti-New Delhi sentiments, thereby putting the Indian state on a mature and healthy footing.

The second aspect of the Basu chief ministerial innings follows from the first. A West Bengal under Mr. Basu that could look New Delhi in the eye became the bulwark of the Indian state in a region that was most naturally prone to external temptations and allurements. The signif-

Doubts aired on authenticity of oil pool deficit

Mamata rollback wake-up call rattles Cabinet

C. L. MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 2. — The bitterness from the endless wait for rollback showed on Miss Mamata Banerjee as she lost her patience at the Union Cabinet meeting today. At a 10-minute caustic speech, she questioned the very authenticity of the projected oil pool deficit and the efficiency of the petroleum ministry in handling the price hike exercise.

Miss Banerjee continued her diatribe as the Prime Minister and his colleagues listened silently. External affairs minister Mr Jaswant Singh pleaded with her for patience and promised an early and 'positive' response to her rollback demand. Miss Banerjee left it there, but her exasperation was amply conveyed to one and all at the meeting.

No matter what Mr Singh promised, the fact remains that the government is yet to work out any definite formula of a rollback, if any, said sources. But Miss Banerjee's outburst brought home the realisation that she is bent on settling the issue one way or the other — setting off fears of resignation rerun.

BASU'S WARNING

CALCUTTA, Nov. 2. — Mr Jyoti Basu today said he had not received reply from the Centre on his letter to the Prime Minister, sent yesterday, on whether the petroleum price hike would be rolled back. He said the state government would be compelled to hike bus fares if it isn't. — SNS

With international oil prices showing no signs of receding, the government is not left with many 'crisis-management' options.

One of those few options that are being weighed is another cut in the excise duty, thus bringing down the retail prices of petroleum, LPG, diesel and kerosene. But this will pass the burden of the cut to the revenue department. The department has collected some additional revenue because of the prevailing high price line.

Another option would be to slash sales tax, which the state governments — including NDA constituents — would oppose tooth and nail.

"The situation is so tight that even a Re 1 cut in kerosene or a Rs 5 cut in LPG will amount to an additional burden of Rs 1,000 crore. So, economic logic doesn't favour a rollback. But then, political compulsion could prevail," an official said.

Sources said the crux of Miss Banerjee's speech in the meeting was the 'mismanagement' of the oil pool deficit, an argument similar to her arch-rival CPI-M. What really set the alarm bells ringing was that she even doubted the authenticity of the deficit, which was estimated at Rs 24,000 crore at the time of the price hike.

She is also learnt to have read out to Mr Vajpayee and her other Cabinet colleagues portions from the CAG report on the petroleum ministry, "pinpointing the mismanagement, especially on the oil pool deficit front" and its fall-out on the poor.

Sources close to her said she was in no mood to kiss goodbye to the rollback issue. Trinamul sources also stressed the political ramification of the issue in view of the coming Assembly elections in West Bengal.

■ More reports on pages
8 & 10

THE STATESMAN

3 NOV 2000

Cabinet gives go-ahead to DTH telecast

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 2

PHEW! Nearly three years well-heeled Indian television viewers were tantalised by the prospect of unrestricted access to hundreds of global channels, the Union Cabinet today finally cleared Direct-to-Home (DTH) broadcasting.

DTH service obviates the need for your friendly (?) neighbourhood cable operator. What you get will be what you pay for. For an investment of around Rs 12,000 on a decoder and a pizza-sized dish antenna, a DTH subscriber will be able to receive global channels.

The Centre has, however, built in safeguards against the creation of broadcasting monopolies, compromise of national security and distortion of public taste.

There is to be a 49 per cent cap on foreign equity in DTH service providers. Of

this, up to 20 per cent is to be foreign direct investment and the rest is to be Foreign Institutional Investors, Overseas Corporate Bodies and Non Resident Indian investments.

Briefing reporters after the Cabinet meeting, Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj said DTH was the first major step towards convergence but extra caution has been taken to ensure that no vertical monopolies are created.

"For security reasons, DTH players will have to beam from the home soil through earth stations within the country. They will also have to adhere strictly to the advertisement

and programme codes laid down by the Ministry," she said.

For similar reasons, the chief executive officer and a majority of directors of DTH companies would have to be resident Indian citizens.

Mrs Swaraj said to obviate creation of monopolies, the share of existing broadcasting companies and cable network owners would be restricted to 20 per cent in the DTH ventures. The new companies will also have to keep the I&B Ministry informed about any changes in the equity pattern.

There will be no restriction on the number of DTH licenses to be issued by the I&B Ministry for a 10-year period.

While companies will have to furnish an initial deposit of Rs 10 crore, they will have to pay Rs 40 crore as bank guarantee for the 10-year license period. At least 10 per cent of the total revenue generated will have to be shared with the Government.

In case of violation of rules, apart from the threat of revocation of the license, the errant companies will have to shell out penalty to the tune of Rs 50 crore. They will be required to preserve for at least 90 days, recordings of all programmes to be able to make those available for Government scrutiny.

Mrs Swaraj said Doordarshan could also provide DTH service but the final decision in the matter rested with Prasar Bharati. Companies keen on using the technology for other services like fax and internet will have to obtain separate licenses.

DTH service providers will have to show Doordarshan channels on the must-carry mode.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Companies to beam from India.
- Separate licenses for internet, fax services on DTH.
- Company's CEO and majority of directors to be resident Indians.
- Recordings of programmes to be preserved for 90 days.
- Rs 50 crore penalty for serious violations of programming code.
- Only 20 per cent foreign direct investment.
- Rs 10 crore initial deposit for 10-year license.
- Rs 40 crore bank guarantee.
- 10 per cent Government share in annual profits.

Government gives the green signal for DTH

get. 3/11

By Balu Mahan

Cabinet nod will facilitate India's convergence efforts **Viewers are in for a huge bonanza, but at a price**

The Times of India News Service

By Sujoy Bosu

NEW DELHI: The Union government has approved a proposal to permit Direct to Home (DTH) TV services. The decision reverses the 1997 ban and institutes measures for regulation of content and prevention of monopoly.

The recommendations of the group of ministers, which received Cabinet approval on Thursday, makes it mandatory for all DTH service providers to uplink from India. It places a limit of 20 per cent on FDI and an overall cap of 49 per cent on foreign investment.

Announcing the details at a press conference, information and broadcasting minister Sushma Swaraj said it was a major policy decision that would make "convergence effective from today".

In 1997, the government had prohibited DTH keeping in view its implications for "national security, cultural influence, moral and social values". Ms Swaraj said the ban was no longer valid in view of "vast technological changes".

The minister said DTH would provide a broadband backbone for convergence and IT-enabled services besides using superior technology for the distribution and reception of television programmes. Ms Swaraj pointed out that safeguards would also be taken in spite of all its advantages.

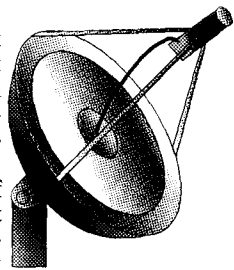
DTH licenses will be provided by the government on a non-exclusive basis. The applicant company will have to be registered under the Indian Companies Act. It would also need Indian management control with a majority of Indian representatives on the board and a resident Indian citizen as CEO. Along with the caps on foreign investment, no broadcasting company or cable network will be eligible to own more than 20 per cent of the total equity of an applicant company.

There will be no restriction on the number of licensees, and licences will be issued by the government for a period of 10 years subject to the payment of an entry fee of Rs 10 crore, an annual fee of 10 per cent of the revenue and a bank guarantee of Rs 40 crore as also the licence fee and royalty for the spectrum used. Proposals envisaging use of Indian satellites will be extended preferential treatment.

The licensing authority, which will be the information and broadcasting ministry until a regulatory authority is set up under the convergence bill, will have the power to revoke the license in public interest for reasons to be recorded, impose a penalty of upto Rs 50 crore for violation of licence conditions.

The earth-link station in India will be established within 12 months from the date of issue of the license. The licensee will adhere to the programme and advertising codes, not carry any channels prohibited by the ministry, and keep a record of the programme and advertisements carried on the platform for a period of 90 days after broadcast.

The licensing authority has reserved the authority to prohibit transmission or reception of programmes in the interest of national security or in the event of an emergency, war or other exigencies. A separate license will have to be obtained for voice, fax, data, communication and Internet.



MUMBAI: So, DTH is on its home run after a four-year-old ban. For many in the television industry, who were expecting a long wait, the birth of this techno-savvy baby has come as a surprise early delivery.

The top three private broadcasters—Star, Sony and Zee—said they were still studying the details of the government notification and were reluctant to comment.

Media experts say the real beneficiary will be the diehard couch potato. Sample the possible benefits. Cricket blackouts in the city may soon become a thing of the past, courtesy DTH, where the channel signals will be directly delivered into the living room boob-tube via a 12-inch satellite dish perched on a window-sill. Bypassing the local cable operator, viewers can also watch channels like Disney, Paramount, Granada, Supermovies and even Playboy, just by clicking their remotes.

And the DTH juggernaut rolls on. E-mail, internet access, home shopping, net-banking and tele-education may also be possible, albeit with some hardware and software add-ons. (Some media experts say that DTH may be the forerunner of convergence in this country.) Those staying in remote areas with little or no access to cable TV will now be able to access, say, Amitabh Bachchan on *Kaun Banega Crorepati?* or follow global newsbreaks, courtesy DTH delivery. Moreover, theatre-like digital picture quality and sound may soon emanate from TV sets. So far so good.

Now for the bad news—the money factor. All this will cost much, much more than what viewers have been accustomed to paying their local cablewallah. At Rs 12,000-Rs 15,000 as a one-time initial cost for the decoder and the dish and Rs 500 as the monthly cash outflow towards subscription charges (at a bare minimum), not many couch-potatoes will agree that DTH comes cheap.

Moreover, with different channel bouquets being readied by different broadcasting majors (five at last count), the TV viewer may end up missing out on some prime channels which may not be offered by rival bouquets.

Local cable operators, meanwhile, say they are not perturbed by their new adversary. As Atul Saraf, president of the Cable Operators of Mumbai Association (COMA), says, "We won't be affected by the entry of DTH. With the high costs involved, there cannot be many takers for DTH in most metropolitan cities."

Concurs a leading cable operator from suburban Mumbai, "Except for those living in bungalows and plush flats who will not mind paying the large amounts, DTH is not likely to become popular within city limits. Even today, there are pockets in which people pay a measly Rs 60 per month as cable subscription rates."

He has a point. In countries like the U.S. and the UK, cable and DTH systems of delivery co-exist instead of competing with each other. In most countries where DTH is present, cable, with its low costs, stands for mass while DTH, with its high quality and accompanying costs, stands for class.



ALL SYSTEMS GO? DA! Operators of Russian satellite system floated into the space station about or

13 Indians among SIA crash victims

BANGKOK: All but one of the 14 Indians on board the Los Angeles-bound Singapore Airlines (SIA) flight that crashed at Taipei international airport have died. S.V. Koppaka survived the crash, according to a list issued by SIA. The list classified 13 other Indians as 'dead or unaccounted for' and their names do not figure in the list of survivors. Most of the victims were from Hyderabad.

Taiwan aviation authorities said on Thursday that the death toll had risen to 81, while the airline said it had 79 confirmed dead.

AFP adds from Singapore: SIA has sent a team of specialists to Taipei to investigate the cause of the Jumbo crash. It has rejected speculations that the pilot was on a closed runway under repair.

The SIA experts will work with Taiwanese authorities conducting the official investigation, the airline's public affairs vice-president, Rick Clements, said. SIA chief executive officer Cheong Choong Kong said they would release information about the cause of the crash very soon. (Agencies)

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 NOV 2000

Basu walks into the sunset

5 cricketers suspended



- CM signs off from Writers
- Addresses mammoth rally

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 3

ON A day private buses were off the road, Calcutta turned out to witness history—Jyoti Basu, the State's Chief Minister of 23 years, stepping out of Writers' Buildings for the last time. The day began on a restrained note, though. At 11.25 am, Basu's cavalcade pulled up at the Writers' Buildings gates. Escorted by Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Chief Minister stepped out of his car, got headed straight for his first floor office. It was like any other day — sombre and silent. He looked straight ahead and strode powerfully down the corridor and disappeared into his chambers.

Once in his straight-back wooden chair, it was work. He inked a couple of files, gave quick instructions to his confidential assistant and had a brief meeting with Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta and Bhattacharjee. He then stepped out. His colleagues in tow, the Chief Minister, who will lay down office on November 6, headed for the Rotunda, packed with reporters and a battery of photographers — men with whom he has always enjoyed a love-hate relationship.

The man himself betrayed no emotions, but the scribes did. They showered him with mementos — a pen, a photo album, and yes, a box of sweets. The box of sweets drew a rare smile from him. "Sweets! Sweets! You have given me these? But I can't eat them." Told that they were sugar-free, a grin played on his face.

As Basu lectured the medianmen on objective reporting, they heard him out. "You may criticise us any number of times. But sometimes, I find you write the opposite of what we say. It may be deliberate, it may not be. But let criticism be based on truth."

And, in a way, he did acknowledge that he had at times treated newsmen shoddily. "I know you were upset at times over some of my utterances, because of my failing health I had to return home quickly."

The tete-a-tete with scribes over, Basu stepped out before a sea of supporters. Addressing the mammoth gathering from the same spot he spoke on June 21, 1977, (the day he took charge as Chief Minister of the Left Front Government) he said: "I became a communist to change society. But my health is failing and I can't do justice to my mission." The Chief Minister signed off with a wave at the roaring audience. He slowly walked down to his car, looked up at the Writers' Buildings and drove out.

ON PAGE 3

- Creating history in and out of office
- Writers' without Basu
- Brickbats and bouquets for the leader
- R P Goenka on Basu's contribution

History's man in bowout moment

Kinsuk Basu
Calcutta, November 3

11.25 a.m.: It might have been yesterday, the day before, or a month or a year ago. The men in white who guard the seat of the State's power shuffled their feet, pulled in their stomachs, puffed out their chests and stood in attention as the slight figure in dhedi-kurta hurried

past. As he got into the lift with Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, he looked up once from behind the thin rim of his glasses. Upstairs, he walked straight into his office. A familiar routine for 23 years. Business as usual for Chief Minister Jyoti Basu. For the last time in his life.

In his chamber, the Chief Minister worked a while. He met Joykrishna Ghosh, signed a last few files and chatted informally with Bhattacharjee and Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta.

Outside, photographers jostled with securitymen to position themselves as best as they could to catch

the moment when the patriarch steps out.

12.23 pm: Basu emerged from the room he has occupied for 23 years. Bhattacharjee and Dasgupta on either side, he strode down the corridor to the Rotunda where reporters were waiting to felicitate him.

There was no room for Chief Secretary Manish Gupta or Home Secretary Sourin Roy inside, packed with scribes like sardines in a tin. Basu sat on a chair upholstered in his favourite red. There was chaos as the crowd fell over itself to present him with mementos. Basu accepted them sitting, face deadpan.

He spoke on his ideals, confessed to failures, swanked on successes and counselled scribes against misquoting. It was a short speech.

1.03 p.m.: Amid a roar that might have reverberated beyond the Maidan, the leader took the dais before 6,000 followers — history repeating itself. June 21, 1977, to November 3, 2000: he could not have been unmindful of the moment.

1.46 p.m.: Probably for the last time, Basu waived to the masses, walking from one end of the dais to the other. He got off, strode to his car — WB-02 E0001 — looked up once at the massive building of red brick, and got in.

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 3

THE INDIAN cricket board today suspended the five cricketers identified as culpable by the Central Bureau of Investigation in its report on match-fixing.

The suspensions are to be reviewed within the next 15 days, when the findings of the board's own inquiry by former CBI director K. Madhavan will be available. Madhavan was recently appointed the cricket body's anti-corruption commissioner.

Mohammed Azharuddin, Ajay Jadeja, Manoj Prabhakar, Ajay Sharma and Nayan Mongia will not be allowed to participate in international or domestic cricket under the board's aegis over the next fortnight.

Of the five, only Azharuddin, Jadeja and Sharma will be immediately affected by the suspension order. Jadeja, who scored a century for Jammu and Kashmir in the Ranji Trophy competition earlier this week, will miss two matches over the next fortnight. Sharma, the former Delhi captain who is representing Himachal Pradesh this season, too will miss two matches in the North Zone Ranji league competition.

The Hyderabad Cricket Association today announced it had dropped Azharuddin from its team till the Madhavan probe is completed.

Mongia, Baroda's most experienced cricketer currently, is unaffected because the West Zone Ranji league phase is yet to begin. Prabhakar has long retired from competitive cricket.

2 accused defend themselves



MONGIA: I am a god-fearing man and I would not even think of doing anything like that. The ban has come as a shock to me as I am innocent and time will prove it. I find I have been wrongly implicated as I was not even in the 14-member team in two of the three matches mentioned in the CBI report.

PRABHAKAR: The report is one-sided and the cricket board has succumbed to it. If the CBI goes only by what the bookies say, what can I do? The CBI has apparently taken the negative parts of my testimony to show that I'm the main culprit.



pension of the cricketers under a cloud follows board president A.C. Muthiah's meeting today with Union sports minister Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa.

Dhindsa announced that the Centre would consider taking back the Arjuna Awards given to five of the five accused if the Madhavan report gives reason to do so. Azharuddin, Prabhakar, Jadeja and Mongia are Arjuna awardees.

Comrade Basu bids adieu after historic stint as CM

By Alope Banerjee
The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: History was created exactly at three minutes past one on Friday afternoon when the longest-serving chief minister of the country, Jyoti Basu, stepped out of Writers Building for the last time. Never before him had any chief minister relinquished power voluntarily.

Thousands of state government employees assembled at the corridors of the state secretariat and outside the central gate to have a glimpse of the living legend, 87-year-old Basu, in his spotless white kurta and dhoti. He waved at them, smiled and drove away in his convoy.

"It is not my age but my health that has been bothering me. I could attend office only for about an hour everyday. As a chief minister I was failing to do justice to the

responsibilities bestowed upon me. So I decided to step down," Ms Basu said during an informal get-together with the journalists at the state secretariat, minutes before his final departure.

"There is no remedy for the disease I am suffering from. I have consulted doctors during my visits abroad. Even they said my ailment is incurable," he said in a matter-of-fact manner with sombre-faced chief minister-designate Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and finance minister Asim Dasgupta on his side. "I am not quitting politics. I shall work for the party as long as my health permits, till my end," he said.

Ms Basu admitted that his government had suffered from a fear psychosis during its early days that it might be dislodged by the Centre. "We had the bitter experience of Kerala before us. We were not sure how long the Centre

would allow us to survive. Even people abroad are surprised to see a communist government continuing in a province for such a long time," Mr Basu said. But, he said, he was 'more or less happy' with the performance of his government.

The octogenarian Marxist had some advice for his successor. "Never hide your weaknesses from the people. Tell them what you have been able to do. Also tell them what you have failed to do and explain to them why you failed. The second advice for his successor was that he should pay attention to the criticism of the people. "Often we fail to do this and get isolated," he said.

He had a word or two for journalists too. "Criticise us. We need your criticism because this will correct our mistakes. But please do not distort facts. I often find newspapers distorting facts, deliberately

or otherwise," he said.

Mr Basu later addressed a farewell organised by the coordination committee of state government employees near the central gate of Writers Building. Thousands thronged the road outside the state secretariat while others leaned from windows of the Writers Building to have a look. It was here that he had been welcomed by a tumultuous crowd 23 years ago when he became the chief minister of the state for the first time.

"I was initially hesitant to attend this meeting here. The road has been blocked off because of the meeting," Mr Basu told the huge audience. "But Buddha is the police minister and he has given me permission to hold the meeting," he told the crowd which burst into laughter at the dig.

"Now Buddha will be the CM after me. Help him as you helped me," he said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 NOV 2000

Basu bids adieu to Writers' and power

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 3. — Friday, 1.45 p.m. WB-02 E-0001, a white Ambassador, with an 86-year old man, rolls out of the portal of Writers' Buildings, signalling an end to his historic 23-year rule.

The jaw, stiff as usual. The steps brisk, as always. The glance, the half-smile, the gait, the attire — nothing had changed. But what set the day apart was that the patriarch wouldn't return to the seat of power again.

Mr Jyoti Basu got into the car. Cameras clicked. Security-men were scampering to ensure a smooth farewell. The octogenarian Marxist remains the chief minister till Monday, but for all practical purposes, today was the final day.

His successor was constantly by his side. But it was only Mr Basu's presence that could be felt. For 23 uninterrupted years, this man ran a nine-party coalition with the authority of the head of a family. For 23 years, this man in a spotless *dhoti* and *punjabi* epitomised in his person the cosmopolitan and erudite *bhadralok*. Writers' Buildings will never be the same again. And, the surging crowd that came to bid him goodbye knew that better than anybody else.

The outgoing chief minister's day began with a meeting of the CPI-M state secretariat at Alimuddin Street in the morning. By 11 a.m. the crowd in the protected area of Writers' Buildings had begun swelling. Anxious policemen formed a cordon near the entrance to



Mr Jyoti Basu leaves his office on Friday. — The Statesman

the VIP lift on the first floor.

At 11.25 a.m., Mr Basu with his successor in tow walked down the corridor to his chamber on the first floor, in his characteristic nonchalance ignoring the presence of the journalists scrambling for that quote, that angle.

At his chamber, Mr Basu met officials and people from other organisations who came to bid adieu with bouquets and mementos. Amid all this, he made his last official phone call as chief minister — to the Prime Minister's Office to enquire whether there had been any decision on petroleum price rollback.

A near stampede of journalists

followed as Mr Basu emerged from his chamber around 12.30 p.m. to head for the Rotunda, where he was to meet them. Police could do little, neither could the top brass of the administration. Mr Manish Gupta, chief secretary, and Mr Sourin Roy, home secretary, requested journalists to cool down. So did the chief minister designate, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, and the finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta.

Amid the pandemonium, a bouquet, a set of pens and a box of sweets were presented to Mr Basu. "I'm accepting this. But I don't take sweets,

A weekend too soon, all for 'Sir'

For many government staff, the pain of Mr Basu's exit could only be drowned in an extended weekend. Courtsey, his decision to leave on a Friday. After Mr Basu's car set off for Salt Lake at 1.45 p.m., very few returned to work. Attendance was thin at government offices as the weekend took off early. The 'work culture' never did.

■ More reports, another photograph on page 3

■ See Basu: page 8

THE STATESMAN

4 NOV 2000

BASU: Coordination Committee when abuse scribes

(Continued from page 1)

Earlier, I used to." The chief minister was presented an album of his assorted pictures.

At the request of the journalists, Mr Basu began to speak about the role of the media, his reasons for quitting and the work that his party should undertake. He spoke for about 20 minutes. And this wasn't a question-answer session. It was left to Mr Basu to dwell on whatever he chose. A last concession from the Fourth Estate with which the patriarch has always shared a complex love-hate relation.

Outside Writers' Buildings, all hell broke loose. Coordination Committee members gathered near the central gate to give Mr Basu a farewell. Employees, with Coordination Committee badges, blocked the entry of journalists and hurled abuses at them as Mr Basu took a chair on the dais to

45-8
9/11

ERA:

(Continued from page 1)

In the hullabaloo of Mr Basu's farewell, a notable change took place, silently. It was the exit of Mr Joykrishna Ghosh, the chief minister's confidential assistant. He used to wield tremendous power and it was virtually impossible to have any access to Mr Basu bypassing him.

Who will take Mr Ghosh's place and will the incumbent be as powerful? Mr Bhattacharya's present confidential assistant, Mr Moley Roy, is expected to step into his shoes. But he is unlikely to grow into a parallel power centre the way Mr Ghosh did.

deliver his last speech as chief minister.

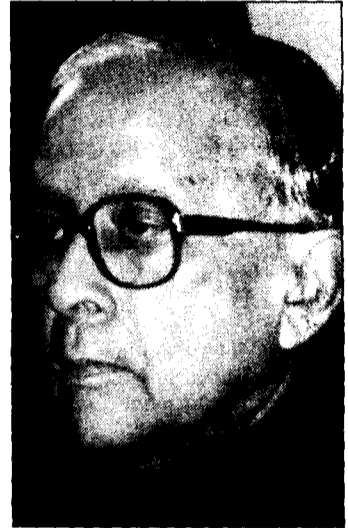
As always, the most vitriolic comments were reserved for the BJP government and the Trinamul Congress. The stretch between the RBI building and BBD Bag was closed to traffic during the speech.

LF ministers listened to his sermon with rapt attention. Mr Bhattacharya will be one lucky man if they listen to him half as attentively.

Securitymen positioned themselves near the VIP lift on the ground floor. The speech would be over in minutes and one of the tallest pillars of the majestic red building would turn his back on Writers' for good.

Amid applause and cheers, the chief minister got off the rostrum, paused a little and walked up to the car as his gloomy-faced aides looked on.

Flashing red lights, the convoy started moving. With the



Mr Jyoti Basu

burden of office finally off his shoulders, Mr Basu leaned back on the seat as he embarked on the one-way journey from Writers' Buildings to Salt Lake.

THE STATESMAN

4 NOV 2000

Mamata pins hope on Nov 7 Cabinet meet

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 4

THE PRESSURE on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to take a decision on rollback of prices of petroleum products is increasing, the CPI(M) in the State has stepped up its campaign against the Trinamool Congress chief over the issue, but Mamata Banerjee remains confident that the PM would keep his word. All eyes are now on the Cabinet meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 7.

"How can she disbelieve the Prime Minister when he himself has assured her that he would review the prices of petroleum products. He has even asked the Petroleum Ministry to reconsider the pricing policy," a close aide of Mamata told *The Hindustan Times*. He dismissed reports that Vajpayee had spoken to outgoing Chief Minister Jyoti Basu and told him that a rollback was not possible.

Trinamool sources here attributed Mamata's confidence to assurances from both the Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, a key member of Vajpayee's kitchen cabinet. "We are looking into the matter and we need little more time," Singh is believed to

have told the Trinamool chief after a recent Cabinet meeting.

Soon after, Vajpayee is said to have held three to four meetings with Petroleum Minister Ram Naik and Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha. They were told to study the oil scenario and present their views in the next Cabinet meeting. "In the last meeting, she suggested measures to bring down the oil price and reduce the oil pool deficit. If those suggestions were absolute trash, the Cabinet would have rejected them outright.

But the PM asked his ministers to consider the suggestions," said a close aide of Mamata. He rubbished claims that Vajpayee had said no to Mamata's demand. "This is a typical CPI(M) propaganda," he said.

At the CPI(M) headquarters in Alimuddin Street, State party secretary Anil Biswas hauled up Mamata for creating confusion on the issue. Biswas demanded that the Centre should immediately make its position clear on the petro price issue.

"There is confusion on this issue and that's making it difficult for the State Government to take a decision on the hike in bus fares," Biswas said.

Rollback Politics

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 NOV 2000

Vajpayee snubs Soren

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Nov. 5: Dangling several consolation posts before the JMM, a meeting headed by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee today rejected the party's demand for the chief minister's chair in Jharkhand.

The leaders of the ruling coalition at the Centre tried to keep the intransigent JMM leader, Shibu Soren, in their flock by offering to help renew his Rajya Sabha term and induct him into the Union Cabinet later.

The alliance also promised to make his nominee deputy chief minister of Jharkhand, scheduled to come into being on November 15. But Soren refused to budge.

The coalition has made it clear that it would back the claim of only a BJP candidate to the chief minister's post. However, the leadership is still hoping that Soren will reconsider his stand and accept the offer.

Sources said talks were held at an informal level. Soren met Vajpayee yesterday for 30 minutes. The Prime Minister told Soren that he would convey the JMM leader's views to coalition convener George Fernandes. Soren held two rounds of talks with Fernandes today but in vain.

The decision to reject Soren's demand and endorse the BJP's nominee was taken at a meeting between Vajpayee and Fernandes this afternoon. Fernandes had also briefed L.K. Advani.

The Soren faction, which has the support of 12 legislators in the 82-member House, is now left with the choice of either accepting the deputy chief minister's post or pulling out of the coalition.

Soren, who has already announced that the alliance is over if his party does not get the chief minister's post, is expected to take a formal decision in a day or two. As a first step, Soren is likely to announce the snapping of ties at the state level tomorrow.

"We will wait till tomorrow. After the coalition's decision is made known to us, we will be free

to chalk out our future course," PTI quoted Soren as saying.

Sources said Laloo Yadav has told Soren that the moment he pulled out, he would be able to split the Janata Dal (United) and Fernandes' Samata Party to prevent the BJP from staking claim.

If Soren backs Laloo's "secular front", it will be within striking distance of forming a government with the help of Independents and breakaway legislators.

But the BJP with 32 MLAs is not sitting idle. The sources claimed that if Soren walks out, the loss will be made up by "converts" from Laloo's party as well as the JMM. A few Congress legislators may also cross over to the NDA, they said.

Blasting the BJP, U.K. Tiwari, a leader close to Soren, said the party has 32 MLAs because the election was a "referendum" on Laloo. "Next time, the BJP will be wiped out from the tribal region. None of its Jharkhand leaders can gather a crowd of even 25,000 people," he said.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 NOV 2000

Buddha steps in, ear to ground

BY INDRANIL GHOSH

Calcutta, Nov. 5: Buddhadev Bhattacharya, who takes over as chief minister tomorrow, says his government would strive to be more responsive to people's needs.

"The government must reach out more, for which speed will have to be imparted to its functioning," Bhattacharya says.

A state government cannot solve fundamental problems of the people because it has to function in a federal structure, but it can still adopt a long-term programme for welfare.

"People are aware that a state government has to work within limits. It cannot neutralise the impact of the Centre's policies on the state's economy, industry and social structure. But it can certainly try to reach out by adopting a humane outlook."

Bhattacharya says the prospects for industrialisation have bri-

ghtened following the Left coalition's positive attitude to investment. He expects Bengal to witness major developments in information technology because of the state's natural advantage of skilled human resources.

"We are in talks with various foreign companies which have shown a keen interest in investing in IT projects here."

Bengal's success in agriculture will be the basis for the planned leap in industrialisation, Bhattacharya says. "Even industry admits that Bengal is an exception amid the economic downturn we are witnessing across the country."

His immediate objective is reconstruction of flood-ravaged districts, for which the government will have to find internal sources of funds.

With the Centre seen to be slow to respond to demands for assistance, the state will have to work out budgetary allocations, Bhat-

tacharya says, asserting that it has performed the task of preliminary reconstruction admirably.

"We have vowed to carry out the reconstruction within the time-frame worked out. This is going to be our priority No. 1."

Bhattacharya realises that the departure of Jyoti Basu will create an administrative void which will prove difficult for an individual to fill.

"Since we are fully aware of the fact, coalition partners will try to improve collective functioning."

He does not believe the Trinamul Congress-BJP combine can be an alternative to the Left Front.

According to him, the reasons are: its programme is bereft of social, political and economic ideals and its penchant for violence.

"It is increasingly becoming a creature of violence, gimmicks and cheap politics. People will see through it."

■ See Metro

THE TELEGRAPH

6 NOV 2000

THE 24-YEAR INNINGS

1977: Wins Satgachia Assembly seat, with 78.8 per cent of votes, as Left Front sweeps to power with a thumping majority to unseat the Siddhartha Shankar Ray government. Takes oath as chief minister on June 21

1982: Pramod Dasgupta dies. Basu becomes undisputed leader of party and government, retains Satgachia with 66.6 per cent of votes. Falls ill and is advised to move to a house on the Raj Bhavan campus from his Hindustan Park home after being sworn in

1983: Visits Soviet Union in July



MOSCOW

1987: Hat trick at Satgachia, with 56.1 per cent of votes. Moves to Indira Bhavan in Salt Lake. Visits England and Bangladesh

1988: Signs the historic GNLFC Accord with Subash Ghisingh. Visits Japan

1991: Bags Satgachia, with 52.85 per cent of votes. Becomes chief minister for the fourth time. Sets the 'reform' ball rolling, sparks debate about a change in industrial climate to ensure development

1994: Visits England; later Switzerland. Industrialisation becomes the keyword for Basu at almost every forum. The policy statement delivered in the Assembly in September unveils the government's new economic agenda, marriage of ideology and market forces

1995: CII partnership summit in Calcutta triggers new optimism about industrialisation. A first: Basu leads business delegation to the UK and the US to woo foreign investment. But backs off in the face of CII opposition to the privatisation of Great Eastern Hotel

1996: Wins Satgachia for record fifth time, with 52.7 per cent of votes. In 20 years, his vote share has shrunk over 25 per cent. Days of high drama in Delhi over becoming 'national-consensus' Prime Minister. The proposal is outvoted (20:35) at the emergency meeting of the central committee of the CPM on May 13. Gowda becomes PM. Basu is sworn in CM for fifth (and final) term on May 20. Visits Bangladesh and plays crucial role in Indo-Bangla water accord signed in Delhi on December 12



With Sheikh Hasina and (right) receiving a piece of the Berlin Wall



Campaigning at Satgachia

1997: Begins the year with a bang by declaring that the CPM decision not to join the United Front government in May 1996 was a "historic political blunder"; puts it down to "lack of proper political understanding"

Jyoti Basu, The Authorised Biography, penned by Surabhi Banerjee, is released in January and sparks a controversy

1998: Leads drive to reintroduce English at the primary level

1999: Nominates Buddhadev Bhattacharya as his successor. Destination West Bengal, organised by WBIDC at Raichak, sees the Marxists roll out the red carpet to investors



Buddhadev Bhattacharya

2000: Visits Israel. In June, lights the lamp to open Haldia Petrochemicals Ltd, which, in Basu's perception, symbolises his government's biggest industrial achievement.



In October, party accepts the Basu line of tactical engagement in governance at the Centre at the Thiruvananthapuram plenum. Basu and party announce his retirement. Before stepping down, Basu clears privatisation of Great Eastern



Graphic: RAJ

'Detached, we have become weak'

Today, Jyoti Basu ceases to be Bengal's chief minister after a 24-year reign. He spoke to Indranil Ghosh of The Telegraph on his successor, on life after retirement and on granddaughter Doel whose advice he sought before deciding to step down. Basu is India's first politician to retire while in power.

Question: Finally, it has happened. No more rushing through an evening with the thought at the back of the mind that you have office tomorrow?

Basu: Yes, it has indeed happened, no more going to office at Writers'. It could have happened earlier had my party accepted my proposal for retirement one-and-a-half years ago.

Q: In retiring, you have become a rare Indian politician to relinquish office when you could have clung on to it for some more time?

Basu: The post of chief minister was given to me by my party,

by the Left Front, with the definite understanding that I will serve the people to the best of my abilities. I did not seek the chair. For the past couple of years I have been feeling that I cannot do justice to the work of chief minister because of my poor health. My point is that if I had not hankered for a chair 24 years ago, why should I hanker for it now. I have retired because I was finding it difficult to serve the people as much as I should. Thanks to my poor health, I was forced to spend less and less time in office, about one to two hours in the morning. You cannot hope to oversee the governance of Bengal, where seven to eight crore people live, spending so little time in office.

Q: How would you like to be remembered — Jyoti Basu, a politician who showed how to give up power? Jyoti Basu, the emblem of Indian communism? Or, Jyoti Basu, the best prime minister India never had?

Basu: These are your views, and I have no comments to offer. But let me tell you, history has no reason to remember individuals. And, it does not.

Q: How would you sum up your 24-year innings?

Basu: I was asked to do a job by my party. I tried to do it with utmost sincerity and earnestness.

again, even if for a short while, to put things back on the rails?

Basu: No, no, and no. There is no question, I repeat, no question of my returning to any kind of office. The situation you are talking about is absolutely impossible, because I have no doubt the Front will be re-elected for a sixth term.

Q: Your voluntary retirement has sparked off a debate: should not a politician holding office either in government or party retire after reaching a certain age. What is your opinion?

Basu: My view is unimportant. I have retired on the grounds of ill health. But, it is true, in our party, we have tried to look at this issue a few times in the recent past. We have tried to find out whether we should retire from the positions we hold in the party or the government... (smiles) As you can guess, our discussions did not lead to any unanimity. However, we broadly feel that you can continue as long as your health permits, your brain functions. A communist works for the people, he does so till the last breath.

Q: Talking about yourself...?

Basu: As I said earlier, I am not leaving politics. I have been a party wholtime since its inception. I will make myself fully available for party work. Why, if my health permits, I will try to be fully involved in the campaign for the elections coming up in another six months. I have asked them to find out if we can use a helicopter for campaigning. I will be visiting the party office on fixed days every week. I have to go because my comrades are there, I may help them in many areas. They (party) are now working out the modalities.

Q: If you were to take a self-critical view, what, according to you, are the party's negative aspects?

Basu: I will be frank. Our people are showing complacency in some districts where they have become detached from the people. Earlier, when our party was small, the cadre used to be in constant touch with the people on a daily basis. We would be fully aware of their needs, aspirations, anguish, struggles. We would deal with them in the proper way, listening to them, their criticisms. We would not always be in a position to miti-

LOOKING BACK: 'HISTORY DOES NOT REMEMBER INDIVIDUALS'



Ananya Sen

sues in North 24 Parganas and Calcutta. We have set up a committee to look into the issues at stake. I am also a member of the committee. In North 24 Parganas, they were divided on participation in a Central government. Things are improving and the debate on participation is behind us because we have been able to address it in last month's

ways thought that we could do a lot more for the people by running a government at the Centre. I had also felt that in the present times it is difficult to oust an elected government from office without paying a political price for it. However, they said "it is a closed chapter". But it was proved later that the chapter was not a closed one. Even though I was in a minority, I did not start regarding those who voted against me as my enemies. Why should there be bitterness, this is not the way to build a communist party.

Q: Those who had voted against participation now understand that they had committed a mistake?

Basu: (Smiles) Yes, of course, they have learnt from their mistake. Earlier, we had this section 112 in our party programme which only visualised participation in a state government. But we changed its wording — I cannot recall the exact words — at Thiruvananthapuram, so that there is no problem in future on participating in a Central government. Our experience shows that it is possible to remain in power with the help of the people, as we are doing in Bengal, Tripura and Kerala. See, the point is we must be able and receptive to change. Earlier, we used to tell the people, "give us your votes, we will articulate your grievances in Parliament or the Assemblies". Now, we should be able to change our slogan and say, "give us your votes, we will form the government".

Q: Do you think history will be so kind as to give the CPM a third shot at the Centre?

Basu: (Laughs) It is very difficult to say. We had a big opportunity in 1996. The Congress then would not have withdrawn support as easily as it did in 1997-98. However, the participation issue is back on our agenda. We have to work towards re-forging the third

front. Our party resolution is that we will have a general understanding with the Congress whose candidates we will support in states where we are not a major force. Besides, there are many NDA allies who are not communal and can be persuaded to join a future third front.

Q: What time have you (the CPM) given yourself for reviving the third front?

Basu: No time-table, because the job is difficult. We have to take into account the rise of the BJP as well as the fact that we need like-minded allies in different parts of the country. Janata Dal, AGP, Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav... we are in talks with many people. But it is very difficult this time.

Q: The job will be easier if only Atal Behari Vajpayee steps down?

Basu: (Laughs) Vajpayee had called just now (last Friday). He said he had learnt from newspapers that I was retiring. We exchanged health notes... I told him that you are still a young man.

Q: Now that you are quitting, leaving a level playing ground, suddenly it seems there are too many leaders in the CPM?

Basu: There may be some, but I cannot comment on them.

Q: You were like an umbrella? **Basu:** As Marxism says, individuals do play a role, but up to a point. I played my role to the best of my abilities, with a lot of help from the party, the organisation. They are also critically important. My successor too will play the role being assigned to him.

Q: How do you describe Buddhadev Bhattacharya? Which of his qualities impress you most?

Basu: He is going to be a fine leader. He has blossomed in politics after his induction into it through the Sixties' student movement. He has seen struggles from a close range. He lost and won elections. He under-

stands the nuances of parliamentary politics very well. People will say Buddha is only interested in stuff like culture, but that is not true.

Q: What is your true? **Basu:** You people (newspapers) have no idea how he has changed in the past two years. Go and find out from the chambers of commerce how well he

is handling complex subjects. Even before becoming deputy chief minister, he was carrying out very important tasks. Not very many people know that it was Buddha who took the initiative in information technology after we called and told him that we are already late, you take charge. He gets things done.

Q: Do you see any resistance to the change in the face of the government?

People will say Buddha is only interested in stuff like culture, but that is not true. You people have no idea how he has changed in the past two years. Go and find out from the chambers of commerce how well he is handling complex subjects

Basu: No. Buddha is acceptable to the people, the party, the Front, the industry. He talks, he mixes with people, he is open to ideas. Please give him time. It is unfair to expect him to do in six months what I could do in 24 years. Anyway, we will be around to help him.

Q: Won't the party expect Buddhadev Bhattacharya's government to tackle the growing popular disaffection with the government in rural Bengal?

Basu: I don't agree that there is growing public disaffection in rural Bengal. What gives you the impression that rural Bengal is not with us? Newspapers like yours are trying to project such an impression on the basis of the unexpected outcome of the Panskura by-election. The outcome is still a mystery. The newspapers are not writing about the role of money and muscle-power being used by the opposition in rural Bengal. I don't know how my party was also in the dark. However, all that has

ular all-party meetings.

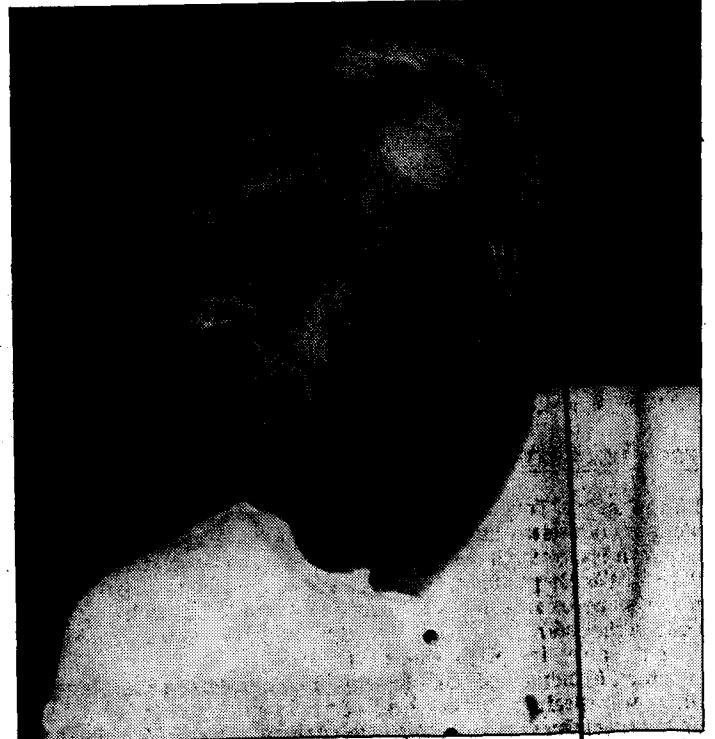
Q: Is the CPM going to split? Will people like Subhas Chakraborty, who are known to have been cornered in the party as well in the government, stay put or quit?

Basu: If newspapers had their way, the CPM must have split many times by now. Tell me, where will they (people like Chakraborty) go? What is the future outside, except for a few photographs or news reports in papers? I don't think any of them will leave. Well, a few individuals may, but that always happens.

Q: There is a feeling that the CPM's new-generation leadership is not as modern as Jyoti Basu to address Bengal's problems in the contemporary context.

Basu: It is a wrong impression. People like Buddhadev, Anil (Biswas) or Biman (Bose) are all realistic people. They are Marxists, therefore scientific in approach and attitude. (Smiles) If you sincerely believe that people, and not God, make history, I suggest have trust, give them a little time.

Q: A generation of new voters who have come into existence in the past 24 years are believed to have turned away from the Left — what is your opinion?



Basu: That is why I tell my party to ensure that we don't lose touch with the people. Many may think that we will win elections or popular support on the basis of our performance. As I see it, performance alone cannot be a factor, otherwise, we should have won the Calcutta civic poll, considering what we have done for the city. Therefore, we have to look at other aspects as well. The new voter has to be viewed in a different context — that of unem-

ployment, capital and talent outflow, technology, all-pervading television culture, media hostility and so on. So, we have to constantly wage an ideological battle to touch the heart of the new voter.

Q: After retirement, you are going to have some free time — how are you going to use it?

Basu: I do a great deal of writing, the demand for which I am sure will increase in the days ahead. I don't get to watch films, but I manage to read.

Q: What are you reading now?

Basu: I am reading the translated works of a Portuguese author. I can't recall the name, but I'm told he is quite a literary figure. Buddha has given me the book. In fact, I get most of my reading material from Buddha. *O khub pare-tare, khub boi-patra, natak, chhabir khabar rakhe* (Buddha reads a lot, besides, he keeps himself abreast of new writers, films and plays).

Q: Will you be travelling? (party) were asking me to visit Hyderabad (in connection with party work), but I cannot undertake a tour right now. Let's see.

Q: You love to watch plays — you had dropped your official plans and gone to watch your granddaughter Doel on stage?

Basu: (Leans forward, face creasing into a big smile) Aha, Doel. Mark my words, she is going to evolve into a very fine actress, and I am saying this not because she is my grand-daughter. Find some time and go and watch her act, she is incredible.

Q: You are extremely fond of her — how did you break the news of your retirement to her?

Basu: Tui aamar ekmatra bandhu re, tui-i bol, admi retire karbo na? (You are my only friend, you tell me what you think of my decision to retire).

Q: What did she say? **Basu:** She clapped and said, 'Dadu, tomar ta sharir kharap, tumi jadi retire karo tahale thik aache' (You are unwell, it's okay if you retire). I have promised her that I will take her to the swearing-in function on Monday.

Q: You stopped the move to preserve your chair. But they are thinking of a statue and such things. How will you stop that?

Basu: Just imagine what an absurd idea it was (preserving



The innings you're referring to is a collective one, which witnessed achievements in many areas as well as failures in some. The new chief minister, the party, the Front, I am sure, will strive to better things in the days ahead.

Q: Let us imagine a situation: they have indeed done their best, yet the CPM, the Front do poorly in the elections. Responding to their demands, Jyoti Basu emerges from retirement to pick up the reins

gate their problems, but we would be honest and tell them about our inability. In many areas, we have stopped going to the people, listening to their woes, their criticisms. As a result, we have become weak. The sooner we correct the situation, the better.

Q: Which areas are you talking about?

Basu: I have to admit that the party has become weak owing to intra-party differences over is-

Thiruvananthapuram conference.

Q: Where the Jyoti Basu line finally triumphed?

Basu: (A quick smile) No, no, there is no such line. That is your view. All that we have is an updated party programme and I am very happy about it. I had said something (favoured participation in a Central government) in 1996, but I had been in a minority which had lost. Yes, I had called it a "historic blunder", because I al-

Buddha tryst with destiny today

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 5

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE will become West Bengal's seventh Chief Minister tomorrow as Jyoti Basu lays down office after a record 23 years. Basu will be in the audience as special invitee, watching his protégé assume the reins of power.

Governor Viren J Shah will administer oath of office to the new head of Government and his 43 ministers at the Banquet Hall of Raj Bhavan at 4.30 pm. The text of the oath has been printed in Bengali, Urdu, Santhali and English. For the first time since 1977, the swearing-in ceremony will be held indoors.

Apart from Basu, Bhattacharjee's finest hour will be witnessed by his octogenarian mother Leela Devi, wife Mira and daughter Suchetana. The 350-odd invitees include film director Mrinal Sen, poets and litterateurs Sunil Gangopadhyay, Buddhadeb

6/11
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Guha, Nabanita Deb Sen, Sandipan Chattopadhyay and Sankho Ghosh, film and stage actor, Soumitra Chattopadhyay and danseuse Amala Shankar.

Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, other judges of the High Court, Speaker of the Assembly Hasim Abdul Halim, Deputy Speaker Anil Mukherjee, the Leader of the Opposition, the Advocate General, members of the Consular Corps, several former

● Related reports on Page 3

Chief Secretaries and some senior retired and serving members of the administration and the police have been invited to witness the ceremony.

In an interview to the CPI(M) mouthpiece *Ganashakti*, Bhattacharjee today said the void left by Basu's retirement would have to be filled through collective work.

"There cannot be any alternative to Jyotibabu. We don't have any leader who can replace him.

Therefore, all Front partners should work collectively to fill the void." As Chief Minister, his job would be to speed up Government work, and make it more responsive and closer to the people, Bhattacharjee said. He was mindful though, of the constraints his administration would have to work under, saying it would be difficult to solve fundamental problems because of the faulty and anti-people policies of the Centre. "In such a situation, what we can do is to take an alternative approach through a long-term programme."

The Central policies of indiscriminate liberalisation and of destroying the public sector were tremendously harmful, Bhattacharjee said.

"It appears from the Centre's policies that they don't have any responsibility towards poverty eradication. In an underdeveloped country there is a great need for public sector units and subsidy. But the Centre is bent upon destroying this facility."

China comrades salute Basu

THE COMMUNIST Party of China has described Jyoti Basu as 'a friend of China' and hailed his role in promoting Sino-Indian relations. "Jyoti Basu is an old friend of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese people," a spokesperson of the international department of the Central Committee of the CPC said.

"Basu has done a lot to promote friendship between our two countries and parties," she said.

However, the spokesperson declined to comment on Basu's resignation from the post of Chief Minister after 23 years in office, saying "this is an internal affair of the West Bengal Government."

Basu last visited China in 1991 as a guest of the CPC and made a brief stopover in Beijing in 1994.

PTI, Beijing

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 NOV 2000

Uma Bharti back in Cabinet

By Harish Khare 7/17

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. The Vajpayee Council of Ministers will be further expanded tomorrow, with the inclusion of at least three Ministers. There will also be a minor reshuffle of portfolios, as well as a Cabinet-rank promotion for Mr. Arun Jaitely.

The swearing-in ceremony is tentatively scheduled for 6 p.m. at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, after the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, returns to the capital in the afternoon from Ujjain.

Ms. Uma Bharti, Mr. B. C. Khandhuri and Mr. Karia Munda are slated to find berths in the Council of Ministers. It is hinted that there could be further additions before the swearing-in. The last Cabinet expansion took place six weeks ago, on September 30 (when Ms. Sushma Swaraj and Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu along with four Ministers of State were inducted).

After the last expansion, the strength of the Council of Ministers went up to 75, and at that time the Prime Minister had gone on record to say that there would be no further additions. As of now, there is a clear vacancy at the Cabinet-level, as Mr. Rajnath Singh has been drafted for the Chief Minister's office in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Arun Jaitely, Minister of State with independent charge, is expected to get a full Cabinet rank, and he will be Minister for Law and Shipping. Mr. S. S. Dhindsa gets charge of chemicals and fertilizers, while Ms. Bharti is to be in charge of the Youth and Sports Ministry. Mr. Karia Munda

is understood to be pencilled in for the Environment and Forests Ministry.

The latest exercise is being undertaken primarily to sort out the BJP's internal problems. Ms. Bharti, for example, has in recent weeks made it clear that she wanted to be back in the Government, (after being made to leave the Council of Ministers because she wanted to devote herself to agitational politics). Now apparently having got tired of life at the barricades, she is keen on returning to constructive work in Delhi. And even though the Prime Minister was not prepared to humour her, she was ready to play the "backward" card, threatening the queer the pitch for the party in Uttar Pradesh at a time when it is preparing to finesse an electoral strategy that could take care of the poaching potential of Mr. Kalyan Singh, on the one hand, and

Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, on the other.

Mr. Khandhuri is being compensated for being talked out of the chief ministership of Uttaranchal. A much respected leader from the Gharwal region, he was being talked about as the ideal choice to be the first Chief Minister. Now that the leadership has been constrained to concede that the Chief Minister ought to be from among the MLAs, Mr. Khandhuri gets a ministerial berth.

Mr. Munda, once a contender for the Chief Minister's post in Jharkhand, will now have to be content with a place in Mr. Vajpayee's team at the Centre. The scheduled induction of Mr. Munda has brightened the prospect of Mr. Babulal Marandi as the first Chief Minister of Jharkhand. Mr. Marandi has already submitted his resignation from the Union Cabinet.

Choice narrows down to Marandi

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. With just two more days left for the formation of Uttaranchal, the race for the Chief Minister seems to have narrowed down to one of the MLAs or MLCs of the new State, and in Jharkhand the choice is expected to be Mr. Babulal Marandi who has been asked by the Prime Minister to resign from his position as Minister of State in the Union Council of Ministers.

The race in Jharkhand had narrowed down to Mr. Marandi and Mr. Karia Munda, who was former head of the BJP's Scheduled Tribes Morcha. It seems Mr. Munda is to be accommodated at the Centre to enable the smooth election of Mr. Marandi as the BJP's choice for Chief Ministership of Jharkhand which is to take birth on November 15.

There was a flurry of activity today, especially in the office of the Union Home Minister, Mr L.K. Advani, who received several MLAs from Uttaranchal. Mr. Kedar Singh Fonia, Mr. Nityanand Swami, Mr. B.C.Khandhuri and Mr. R.C. Pokhriyal were reported to be among the many visitors he received, and the talks naturally centred around the formation of Uttaranchal.

THE HINDU

7 NOV 2008

Basu leaves memories, throne for Buddha

Our Calcutta Bureau
CALCUTTA 6 NOVEMBER

IT WAS almost as momentous as the 20th century dissolving into the 21st. Raj Bhawan, Monday 4.32 pm — the Order actually changed though everybody knew long before that it would. But still that nano-second, the heart did skip a beat — all around the Banquet Hall.

Buddhadev Bhattacharya became the new chief minister of West Bengal. Two paces away to his left was Jyoti Basu, looking on — contentment writ large on his glowing face. The baton passed on to a new pair of hands.

Was Buddhadev nervous? Possibly. For he began: "I, Buddhadev Bhattacharya," fumbled, cleared his throat and read again: "I, Buddhadev Bhattacharya....." Times like these,



NEW CHAPTER: Buddhadev Bhattacharya being sworn in by governor Viren Shah at Raj Bhawan on Monday. — Mona Chowdhury

the glasses do get frosty. But then that does not matter after 24 years! It was a 20-minute job, nay 15

may be! And despite the glitterati around, it was pretty straightforward. The place was packed as

everybody wanted to be a part of history. And at the end of it all, they helped down from the podium a 87-year-old man, who was CM no more — but who hogged all the limelight nevertheless.

A furlong away and an hour later, roar after deafening roar greeted Jyoti Basu as he stepped on to the dais at the farewell organised by Left Front constituents. The occasion: the end of his 8540 days in office as chief minister, West Bengal.

Two and a half decades is quite a slice in time and for quarter of a century almost, Basu had ruled undisputed. And Monday, the adulation he received from thousands wasn't quite a certificate for what he was; it was also an anticipatory ovation for what he will be.

■ Basu to rebuild Third Front: Page 2

The Economic Times

7 NOV 2000

over the reins

8,540 roses for Basu after as many days

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 6. — "No one can snatch West Bengal from us as long as we are with the people," Mr Jyoti Basu told his partymen and admirers at an emotional felicitation accorded to him today.

Netaji Indoor Stadium witnessed a unique programme minutes after Mr Basu formally relinquished office as the country's longest-serving chief minister. Flanked by his successor, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Mr Sitaram Yechury and Left Front leaders, Mr Basu was gifted a garland of 8,540 roses — the number of days of his tenure as chief minister — and other souvenirs.

Thousands lustily cheered speeches extolling the different phases of the patriarch's struggle in his 60-year political career. The function was shown on giant screens outside the stadium.

Mr Basu said he was "overwhelmed" by the felicitation, which he believed was accorded to him not "as an individual, but as a representative of the people".

Visibly struggling to control his emotions, Mr Basu said: "Have I ever in my long political career coveted any post? I became chief minister because my party, our Front partners and the people wanted it."

Quoting a Russian poet, he said he would be happy if he could describe his life as one "given to fight for the liberation of mankind". In a lighter vein, he said the new chief minister, who "understands literature better" would translate in Bengali the lines he quoted.

Mr Basu lambasted the NDA government for "selling" the country's economic sovereignty to the USA. "Look at China. It became independent after us, yet it has attained such self-reliance that the USA is courting it for economic collabora-

tion. We have to be self-reliant, but the NDA government is surrendering to the USA."

He said the Trinamul's demand for President's rule "has an echo of defeat". "It knows it can't dislodge the Left Front from power. So, it is clamouring for President's rule. Let them

had created history by ruling for 24 years at a stretch. "We have made strides in many fields. True, we failed in certain areas, both for the Centre's non-cooperation and for our drawbacks. But we Communists tell people what we can do and what we can't."



Mr Jyoti Basu being felicitated at Netaji Indoor Stadium on Monday.
— Sailendra Mal

overthrow our government."

He repeated his charge against "three to four" newspapers who "do not look after the country's interests and mislead people with false propaganda against us".

"They write that we haven't done anything in our 24 years of rule. Is that so? Are the people of West Bengal so stupid that they have been voting for us all these years though we didn't do anything for them?" he said.

Mr Basu said his government

He said reviving the third front would be one of his priorities now.

Mr Bhattacharya said: "Jyoti-babu was with us, is with us and will be with us", adding that he was "terribly sad" that Mr Basu wouldn't be at Writers' from tomorrow. "But we will follow the path shown by him."

A stampede broke out after the felicitation. Mrs Gouri Mitra, Mr Ashok Mitra's wife, sustained head injuries in the stampede and was hospitalised.

THE STATESMAN

7 NOV 2000

Buddhadev takes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 6. — "It's a very difficult task, particularly now that Jyotibabu has quit. I will try to run the government through joint leadership," said Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today after being sworn in as chief minister at a star-studded function that was boycotted by the Opposition.

The Governor, Mr Viren Shah, administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mr Bhattacharya at 4.30 p.m. at Raj Bhavan's Banquet Hall. The new chief minister's mother, Liladevi, and wife, Mrs Mira Bhattacharya, looked on intently.

After presiding over the transfer of power, Mr Shah administered the oath of office to all the other ministers except an ailing Mr Bhakti Bhusan Mondal, state cooperative minister. No changes have been made in the ministry. The collective swearing-in was surprisingly low-decibel, with the ministers just muttering the oath.

The 10-minute constitutional formality was conducted elegantly by Raj Bhavan officials, the chief secretary, Mr Manish Gupta, and the secretary to the Governor, Mrs Neera Saggi. The glittering function was wrapped up with tea and snacks.

Iterating confidence in his erstwhile deputy, a visibly relieved and cheerful Mr Jyoti Basu told reporters that Mr Bhattacharya would complete his unfinished task competently.

Mr Basu was accompanied by his grand-daughter, Doel. Little Doel shook hands with the new chief minister and congratulated him after the function. Mr Bhattacharya introduced her to the Governor, saying: "You must watch her on stage. She's excellent." At this, a proud Mr Basu put his arms around Doel.

It was a virtual who's who at Raj Bhavan, packed with politicians, novelists, poets, journalists, industrialists, film personalities, bureaucrats, diplomats and even the Indian cricket captain.

Industrialists included Mr Sanjiv Goenka, Mr Rajiv Kaul,



The Governor, Mr Viren Shah, administers the oath of office to Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya at Raj Bhavan, Calcutta, on Monday. — Bijoy Sengupta

Mr Harsh Neotia, Mr Shraavan Todi, Mr Purnendu Chatterjee, Mr SP Bagla and others from the chambers of commerce.

Bureaucrats obviously had to leave behind all their important work at Writers' Buildings to watch the new boss take over. They included: Mr Sourin Roy, home secretary, Mr Jawhar Sircar, industry secretary, Mr Ramsevak Bandopadhyay, power secretary, Mr Sabyasachi Sen, chief electoral officer, and Mr Ashok Gupta, finance secretary.

Seated in another corner were Mrinal Sen, Tarun Majumdar, Buddhadev Guha, Aparna Sen, Ruma Guha Thakurta, Amitava Choudhury, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Sourav Ganguly, Suchitra Mitra and other celebrities.

After patting Sourav, Mr Bhattacharya walked up to them and exchanged pleas-

anties. Amitava Choudhury draped his own *uttariya* over the new chief minister amid applause.

Among those who sat opposite the Governor, the new and the ex-chief minister, were Marxist stalwarts, including the nonageparian and erudite scholar, Mr Hiren Mukherjee. He made it a point to make it to Raj Bhavan today despite failing health.

Mr Basu walked up to Mr Mukherjee, shook hands and sat by him for a prolonged chat. Other leaders such as Mr Somnath Chatterjee, Mr Niren Ghosh, CITU president, and Mr Sailen Dasgupta, Left Front chairman, also joined in.

The CPI-M Politburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechury, Mr Biman Bose, Mr Anil Biswas and the Speaker, Mr HA Halim, looked in great mood as they circulated among partymen.

The ambience resembled more of a government being sworn in for a five-year term, rather than a six-month stop-gap.

Mr Joykrishna Ghosh, Mr Basu's confidential assistant, sat by Mrs Bhattacharya. One of the erstwhile power centres at Writers', he will now assist Mr Basu, the Politburo member.

Mr Bhattacharya said he would try to steer the government the way Mr Basu had done. After tea, he rushed to Netaji Indoor Stadium where the longest-serving chief minister was felicitated by the Left Front.

Before that, he had a word with the Governor who was seen with Mr Basu, huddled together in a corner of the Banquet Hall after the swearing-in.

■ More reports and photographs on page 3

THE STATESMAN

7 NOV 2000

FIRST TEST FOR GOVT. AFTER PM'S SURGERY

Mamata trouble may continue till Bengal poll

9 8/10 110-1 8/10
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT 7. No one in the Government or the Bharatiya Janata Party really believes that the Mamata crisis is over. The Trinamool Congress chief may be back in the Rail Bhavan on Monday as Minister — on Friday, she withdrew the resignation letter submitted to the Prime Minister on September 30 — but many political observers feel that the relations between the Trinamool and the BJP, and the Trinamool and the National Democratic Alliance will continue to be rocky till the Assembly elections in West Bengal in March next.

On Friday, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, spoke to her over telephone and promised to take a second look at the increased prices of petroleum products in three weeks, after he recovers from a knee surgery scheduled for October 10. He followed this up with a fax message along the same lines. Ms. Banerjee then announced that because of the "written assurance" she and her colleague, Mr. Ajit Panja, would resume their ministerial functions.

Senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office as well as BJP leaders are aware that Ms. Banerjee's all-engrossing ambition



right now is to somehow win the Assembly elections and become Chief Minister. Towards this, she and her party have been holding some talks with the Bengal unit of the Congress(I). In fact, some believe that the oil price hike had come in handy for her to walk out of the Government and the NDA, and get added political advantage by giving up ministership.

The first test will come in three weeks, when Mr. Vajpayee holds his first post-surgery Cabinet meeting. Will the Government make substantial cuts in the prices of kerosene, LPG and diesel as demanded by the Trinamool (and now also by Mr. N. Chandrababu

Naidu, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and Telugu Desam Party chief, whose scheme of giving 50 per cent-subsidised 10 lakh LPG connections will come a cropper with the high price of LPG)? If not, will Ms. Banerjee threaten to resign again? Or, will the Prime Minister mollify her by offering her party an additional berth as had been reportedly negotiated earlier?

Reports suggest that within her own party MPs were not too keen on breaking away from the NDA — Mr. Panja certainly appeared not to favour this idea — and if the BJP feels that Ms. Banerjee may act difficult once again, there may even be attempts by the BJP to wean away a group of her MPs. For, the BJP knows only too well, that in Bengal the political stakes for the Trinamool are very high, and that it has not much to lose. To that extent the BJP has more room for manoeuvre.

As one senior BJP Cabinet Minister said, she should know that cutting herself off the NDA would cost her dearly in terms of credibility. It is also known that Mr. Vajpayee was able to push Ms. Banerjee because even if she were to walk away with her nine MPs, the Government would continue to have a majority in the Lok Sabha.

THE HINDU

- 8 OCT 2000

Munda sulks,
stays away from
swearing-in

Days of confrontation over, says Buddha

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 7

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee today expanded his Council of Ministers by inducting two Cabinet Ministers and one Minister of State (MoS).

President K R Narayanan administered the oaths of office and secrecy to Ms Uma Bharati and Mr Arun Jaitley (Cabinet ministers) and Maj Gen (Retd) B C Khanduri (MoS, independent charge).

Senior BJP leader from Jharkhand Karia Munda, who was to be an MoS, did not show up. Sources said he is unhappy about the proposed appointment of party colleague and fellow tribal leader Babu Lal Marandi as the CM of the new Jharkhand State.

Ms Bharati replaces S.S. Dhindsa as Youth Affairs and Sports minister. Mr Dhindsa has been shifted to the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers.

Mr Jaitley, till today an MoS with independent charge, will continue to head the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, with additional charge of Shipping.

Gen Khanduri will head the newly-created Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. The Ministry has been carved out of the composite Ministry of Surface Transport and Shipping.

Mr Sundar Lal Patwa has been moved from Chemicals and Fertilizers to the Ministry of Mines that Mr Dhindsa held as additional charge.

Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav, Surface Transport and Shipping MoS, will now be Jaitley's deputy in the Ministry of Shipping. Arun Shourie gets independent charge of Department of Disinvestment as MoS, in PMO.

See also Page 11

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 7

CHIEF MINISTER Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today set the agenda for governance of the new regime. "We want cooperation and not confrontation," he told reporters at his first press conference after assuming charge as CM. "We would like to have the Centre's cooperation so that my Government can implement many of our policies."

Lest his remarks are misunderstood, Bhattacharjee hastened to add, "The Central Government's economic policies, framed under World Bank and IMF diktat, its approach toward communal problems might make confrontation inevitable. We would fight the Centre's anti-people and undemocratic policies and defend the economic rights of the people," he said.

But even as he criticised the Centre's economic policies, the Chief Minister said that "downsizing" in Government units may become inevitable. "But in the case of Great Eastern Hotel, we are offering the employees the most attractive VRS package," Bhattacharjee assured.

But there was a veiled warning to the State's labour force. "We are telling workers about the increasing global competition. While we would not take away their right to strike, they must also realise that trade unionism does not mean militancy. There would be no trade unions if there was no industry and trade," Bhattacharjee elaborated.

Without mincing words, Bhattacharjee complained about the "lack of work culture" in various Government departments. But, he promised, things are going to change soon. "Performance report of each and every Government



Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee receives a bouquet on his first day in office as Chief Minister at the Writers' Buildings. Photo: Subhendu Ghosh

employee would be prepared and computerisation of those departments which deal with people's day to day issues would follow to make

ON PAGE 3

- Buddha's first day in office
- Basu relaxed in retirement
- Mamata spews venom at Basu

the administration more responsive and dynamic." On the law and order front, the Chief Minister promised that he would do his best to put an end to political clashes in many dis-

tricts of the State. "But for this, I need the cooperation of all political parties, especially those in the Opposition like the Trinamool Congress," he added.

Bhattacharjee said his Government's thrust area would be IT. Besides the existing one at Salt Lake, three more electronic complexes would come up at EM Bypass, Durgapur and Kalyani soon. IT giants like Wipro, IBM and CEMA have agreed to set up units here, the CM claimed, adding that Japanese and British concerns have also expressed readiness to collaborate with the State's Institute of Information Technology.

BUDDHA:

(Continued from page 1)

Front would seek to wean away the Rajbanshis from the Kamtapur People's Party and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation. Both depend on support from the Rajbanshis and have been carrying out a secessionist movement in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling with active help from Ulfa.

The Chief Minister intends to focus on reconstruction and rehabilitation in the nine flood-affected districts and ensure communal harmony.

On the Opposition in the state, he said it should offer constructive criticism. Expressing confidence that the Left Front would win the next Assembly elections, Mr Bhattacharya pooh poohed the Trinamul.

Earlier, at a welcome reception by state government employees outside Writers' Buildings, Mr Bhattacharya said his government would not follow the Centre's path of downsizing the administration. The Centre, he said, had surrendered to IMF and World Bank and was systematically retrenching employees on a large scale.

He assured employees that no such measure would be taken here. The state would not send them away with a VRS. However, at the Press conference earlier, he had said that in specific cases, such as that of Great Eastern Hotel, a VRS package was the only way out.

THE STATESMAN

8 NOV 2000

Buddha stresses collective leadership in LF

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 7. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said today that decision-making in his government would be done through a process of consultation with all senior ministers.

He was addressing his first press conference as Chief Minister at the Rotunda of Writers' Buildings.

"Don't compare me with Mr Jyoti Basu", was Mr Bhattacharya's refrain and he stressed that his buzzword was collective leadership.

The chief minister said his government would avoid confrontation with the Centre but said the policies of the Left Front and the BJP being diametrically opposite, there was "bound to be friction".

Mr Bhattacharya said his government would not submit to the dictates of the World Bank and retrench its employees and send them home with a VRS package.

The World Bank would be asked to keep its hands off West Bengal, he said.

The Chief Minister's emphasis on collective leadership ought to set at rest apprehensions, if any, among smaller partners in the Left Front. Mr Kshiti Goswami, PWD minis-

ter and RSP leader, was one of the ministers who had hoped that the new chief minister would take decisions after consulting all LF constituents and on the basis of consensus.

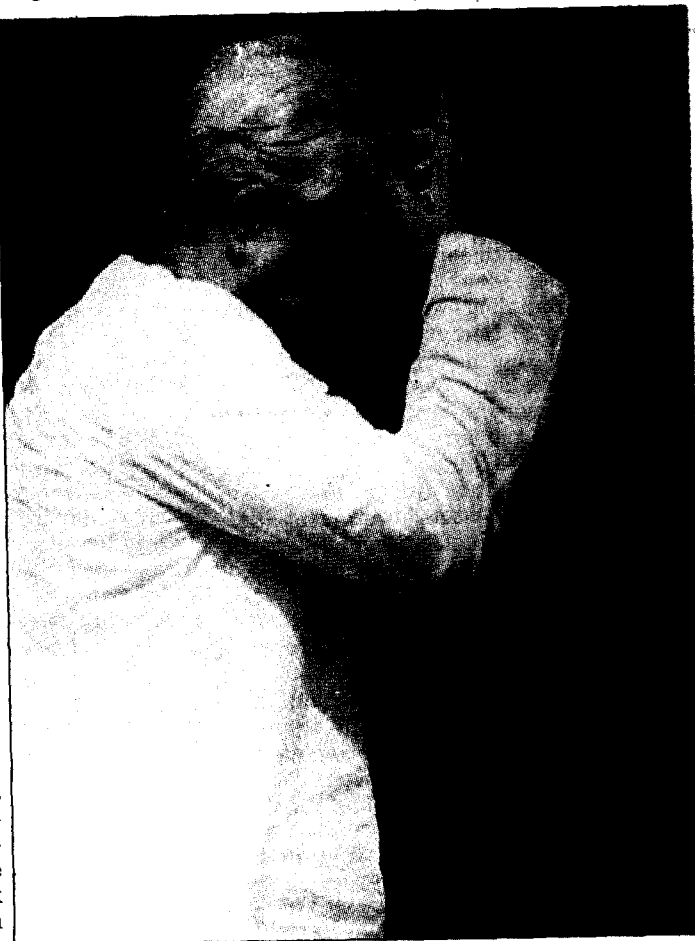
Mr Bhattacharya said decisions which Mr Basu could take unilaterally will now have

mal body for collective decision-making. There will be no "core committee" or "super cabinet", he said. The ministers taken into confidence will also vary depending on issues.

Outlining his government's priorities, the chief minister stressed on a corruption-free and responsive administration.

He plans to introduce a system of performance diaries for government employees. At present, employees merely have to record attendance but there is no way to monitor their work.

Mr Bhattacharya said he would seek to bring peace to areas of the state torn by political violence between the CPI-M and Trinamul. He had discussed the issue with senior Trinamul leaders. Meetings had been held among local leaders in Midnapore too and the situation was improving. He hoped the Trinamul would cooperate in this



LOT ON HIS HEAD: The new chief minister in front of Writers' Buildings on Tuesday. — The Statesman

to be taken "collectively by us".

"I would like to discuss issues with my senior colleagues from all Front partners before deciding on them. Mr Basu's advice will always be with us from outside", he said.

However, Mr Bhattacharya ruled out formation of any for-

endeavour. On the Kamtapuri movement in North Bengal, Mr Bhattacharya said the Left

■ See BUDDHA: page 4

■ Editorial: The morning after! page 6

THE STATESMAN

8 NOV 2000

Atal promotes Jaitley, Uma, allots fertiliser to

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 7 NOVEMBER

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee on Tuesday promoted Arun Jaitley, inducted Ms Bharati into the Cabinet and appointed chief ministerial-aspirant in Uttaranchal B.C. Khanduri with a minister of state post with independent charge in a minor expansion of his ministerial team.

The Prime Minister, who gave in to pressure for according Cabinet rank to Ms Uma Bharati, has allotted her the sports and youth affairs department. Mr Jaitley, who will continue to look after law, justice and company affairs has been given the additional charge of the shipping department. Mr Khanduri is the new minister for road transport and highways.

Mr Dhindsa, who has vacated the sports department for Ms Bharati has been given the relatively plum post of chemicals and fertilisers. The Akali Dal nominee, S.S. Barnala, was manning this department in the previous Vajpayee government.

Consequently, Mr Suderlal Patwa, the minister for chemicals and fertilisers has moved to mining, a portfolio held by Mr Dhindsa. Minister of state in sur-



EXPANSION MODE: Newly appointed Cabinet minister Arun Jaitley (left) takes his oath while Uma Bharati greets President K.R. Narayanan at the presidential palace in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AFP

face transport, Mr Hukum Deo Narayan Yadav, will now be in shipping, assisting Mr Jaitley.

Another minor change effected was according additional charges to Mr Arun Shourie.

The minister holding independent charge of disinvestment will assist the Prime Minister in the ministry of planning, statistics and programme implementation, department of administrative reforms and public grievances in the ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions.

With this expansion, the

strength of the Vajpayee ministry has gone up to 75 — 30 with Cabinet rank, seven ministers of state with independent charge and 38 ministers of state.

The expansion of the team, primarily an appeasement exercise, had its share of problems. Mr Karia Munda, who was slated to take oath as a minister of state turned down the offer.

The rebellion from Mr Munda has come as a surprise as the top brass had not anticipated trouble from a leader. Asked about Mr Munda's refusal to take oath, Mr Vajpayee said:

swiftly countered this and said there would not be any change.

Ms Uma Bharati's induction into the ministerial team appears to be aimed at correcting the perception of a caste imbalance in the BJP.

The party's recent decision to opt for an upper caste leadership in Uttar Pradesh has been used by its political rivals for building a campaign.

The rehabilitation of Ms Bharati, a Lodhi from Madhya Pradesh, it is hoped will help the BJP counter the allegations of an anti-backward bias.

The shipping ministry handed over to Mr Arun Jaitley is expected to see some action as the key infrastructure ministry is a priority area for the government.

The frequent changes in the chemicals ministry, however, is making the industry wary. A section feels that the government yet not realises the importance of sectors like pharma for the overall improvement of the economy.

Mr Vajpayee had moved proactive minister Surest Prabhau to the high profile power ministry in September and given the charge of chemicals to Sunderlal Patwa.

"Perhaps, he wants to continue in state politics."

The Munda rebellion coincided with the success of the BJP in enlisting the support of 44 MLAs for Mr Babulal Marandi's claim to lead the new government in Jharkhand.

Although there is no rethinking in the top brass about Mr Marandi's candidature, some uncertainty was introduced by party's senior vice president Kailashpati Mishra when he said the issue was not yet settled.

Senior party leaders here

Buddha open to talks with Mamata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 8. — Breaking away from Mr Jyoti Basu's tough stance, the new chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, today indicated he was willing to talk peace with Miss Mamata Banerjee. He also said he would consider visiting strife-torn areas.

Speaking to reporters at Writers' Buildings after the first meeting of his Cabinet, Mr Bhattacharya reiterated he was eager to end political violence between CPI-M and Trinamul workers in Midnapore and other districts. At his first press conference as chief minister yesterday, Mr Bhattacharya had listed restoration of peace as one of his priorities.

The chief minister said he would hold talks with Trinamul leaders on ways of ending violence in strife-torn districts.

Asked if he would sit with Miss Banerjee, the chief minister said it was upto the Trinamul to decide on their representatives at these talks.

Mr Bhattacharya said he had instructed the administrations

TRINAMUL NOT EAGER

CALCUTTA, Nov. 8. — The Trinamul Congress leadership does not have any plans to hold talks with the CM Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of Trinamul Congress' policy making body, said: "The question of holding talks with Mr Bhattacharya does not arise at this moment because Trinamul Congress workers were being killed though during our previous meeting with him. The CM gave us assurance that no more attacks against our workers would take place." — SNS

of these districts to ensure the return of people who had fled their homes after violence.

The state government has, meanwhile, responded to the Trinamul's charge about its missing party workers, by instructing superintendents of police of the strife-torn districts to trace them immediately. Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Trinamul leader, had recently handed Mr Bhattacharya a list

of 43 Trinamul workers, who were said to be missing.

Mr Bhattacharya said there was no problem, either financial or otherwise, with Haldia Petrochemicals Limited. The three promoters of the project — the state government, the Chatterjee Group and the Tatas — are discussing the future of the plant but denied that any partner wanted to walk away from it.

At the Cabinet meeting, the chief minister stressed on rehabilitation and reconstruction in the nine flood-hit districts of the state.

Asked about the damage to school buildings in these districts and the consequent problem to next year's Madhyamik examinees, Mr Bhattacharya asserted that the examination would be held on time and the state was trying to repair the damaged buildings in earnest.

Repeating his criticism against the Centre for not extending any funds for flood relief, Mr Bhattacharya said he and the state finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta, might visit Delhi soon to discuss the funds problem with the Centre.

THE STATESMAN

9 NOV 2000

Pressure on PM to sack tainted minister

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 9. — The Union minister of state for defence, Mr Harin Pathak, and a Gujarat minister, Mr Ashok Bhatt, are in the dock after being chargesheeted in a case pertaining to anti-reservation riots in 1985. The case relates to the killing of a policeman.

Some BJP leaders conceded that the two might have to quit their offices on the basis of the principle that a chargesheeted minister must quit. A final decision is to be taken by the Prime Minister. The chargesheeted ministers have explained their position to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee who has not made up his mind.

The Prime Minister's Office is under pressure with the Congress demanding their resignation and threatening

to raise the matter in Parliament's winter session, beginning 20 November. The party today demanded that they be sacked if they refused to resign.

"The ministers against whom cases of murder and riots have been framed have no moral right to continue in office. The Prime Minister should take the nation into confidence and dismiss them," the party spokesman, Mr Anand Sharma, said.

Though Mr Pathak tried to put on a brave front saying the case was politically motivated, the mood in the government and the BJP seemed to be that they should resign on their own. A BJP leader tried to defend the two, arguing that the case was politically motivated. He however failed to give arguments against the norm that the chargesheeted must quit.

A minister privately said former Union ministers — Mr Sukh Ram, Mr Buta Singh and Mr. Muthaiah (AIADMK) — had to resign after the CBI chargesheeted them and hence logically Mr Pathak should step down.

Mr Pathak and Mr Bhatt were apparently trying to gauge the mood of senior BJP leaders. They were slated to meet Mr LK Advani. A leader from Gujarat said they were likely to go by Mr Advani's advice.

Resignations of these ministers are likely to bring into focus the cases against three Union ministers — Mr Advani, Mr Murlu Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati — who are yet to be formally chargesheeted for their role in the Babari Masjid demolition in December 1992.

The Congress indicated this when Mr Sharma said these leaders had failed

to visit court and collect their chargesheets.

Though the designated trial court has taken cognisance of the CBI chargesheet against the three leaders, the charges have not been formally framed. The chargesheet has been challenged in the court.

The BJP deputed its senior vice-president in charge of Gujarat, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, to visit Ahmedabad to make an on-the-spot assessment of the situation.

Mr Pathak and Mr Bhatt are among the 11 accused formally charged in an Ahmedabad court in connection with the riot case.

The IPC sections under which they have been chargesheeted are 302, 307, 326, 333, 148, 149, 152, 153, 506, 186, 188, 120 (B), 134 and 135/1/Bombay Penal Act.

THE STATESMAN

10 NOV 2000

West Bengal: the real issues

By Supriya RoyChowdhury

The bias towards specific, narrowly-defined support blocks — the middle peasantry and the urban lower middle class — has prevented the Left Front from pursuing a broad vision of development.

THE RECENT crisis over the question of imposition of President's rule in West Bengal typifies the nature of contemporary public discourse in India in which the most critical and urgent issues disappear into the quicks and of political trivia. Using the state machinery to perpetrate violence on political opponents, as the Trinamool Congress has accused the CPI(M) of doing, may not be an everyday phenomenon in democratic India, but it is by no means an unknown or unusual phenomenon. But ironically, the Left Front's 23 years of rule could be challenged on a range of themes which are far more critical than a few incidents of political party-incited violence — grave as these are — could be. The Trinamool's present hysteria seems a far cry from an engagement with the real issues that plague West Bengal. This article focusses on two distinct spheres, rural poverty, and institutions of higher education, to highlight the Left Front's policy shortcomings in two critical areas of governance: an equitable development process, and appropriate institution building and maintenance.

In West Bengal, the absence of large land holdings in agriculture has limited the scope of a shift to high technology farming. Thus the rural poor have not been able to share even the trickle-down effects of agrarian prosperity as has been possible in some of the northern States where the Green Revolution has by and large created a capitalist agricultural landscape composed of large holdings and wage labour. In this context, the promise of ameliorating rural poverty was central to the Left Front's claim to power in 1977.

Within the framework of previously enacted land reform laws, the elimination of the zamindari system and of very large landowners had already been accomplished, more successfully in West Bengal than in most other States because of a strong tradition of radical ideology and movements. The rural landscape was therefore composed of a sizeable middle peasantry, small peasants, and a large number of marginal peasants, poor sharecroppers and landless labourers. As part of the radical opposition in the 1950s and 1960s, the CPI(M) itself had played a

central role in organising the rural poor in successive phases of land redistribution. However, in 1977 the CPI(M), as leader of the ruling coalition, faced a situation where further expropriation of land would completely alienate the large numbers of the middle peasantry, from which the Front drew much of its rural support, electorally and organisationally. The CPI(M) thus chose an agrarian programme which avoided problematic issues such as any large scale redistribution of land, lowering of ceilings, or even effective implementation of existing ceiling laws. The centre point of the CPI(M)'s agrarian reform package thus has been a tenancy reform legislation, "Operation Barga", which sought to protect sharecroppers by both registering their rights on land on a permanent basis, and by increasing their share of the produce.

In the context of the extreme poverty and distress that pervade West Bengal's villages, a tenant protection law was not without significance. For the CPI(M), anxious to protect its multi class rural support, "Operation Barga" had a pro-poor character and at the same time avoided the kind of conflictual political paradigm associated with attempts to redistribute property rights. But, in leaving the structure of production largely untouched, this reformist strategy failed to address the broader task of rural transformation. Tenancy reform does not alter the basic structure of dependence which binds the marginal peasant/sharecropper to the landowner. Nor have there been any major steps towards improving agricultural wages for the large numbers of landless labourers.

Given an agrarian policy which left the property structure unchanged, the dynamics of rural inequality and privilege continued to be reproduced in the gram panchayats. Several recent surveys have found that not only are the poorest categories under-represented in the gram

to avoid the Front's policy of transfers. For the same reason, the College no longer attracts the best academic talents. A large number of teachers who came from the mofussil colleges to Presidency College were out of tune with the academic standards and cultural traditions of this institution. Presidency College now stands tragic testimony to institutional decay as a result of misguided policy.

Second, the policy of transfers itself became an instrument of patronage in the hands of the ruling coalition to control institutions of higher learning. The Government College Teachers' Association, a powerful lobby whose office-bearers are predominantly CPI(M) supporters, interacts closely with the education secretariat where decisions are made with regard to posting of Government college teachers. Toeing the party line, or at least not actively opposing it, thus has become a means of obtaining a position in one of the Government colleges located in Calcutta, which is obviously preferable to being posted in a mofussil college.

Whether or not academic excellence can be made to be a mass phenomenon was a question that was not publicly debated. But it is a reasonable hypothesis that the Left Front's transfer policy was designed to support a particular constituency, the expanding numbers of the newly educated urban and semi urban lower middle classes who now staked a claim on the established educational institutions and were necessarily hostile to the old elite who had given an exclusivist character to these institutions.

Arguably, in the two policy areas briefly outlined above, the bias towards specific, narrowly defined support blocks — the middle peasantry and the urban lower middle class — has prevented the Left Front from a broad vision of development and generated a general ossification in institutions across the spectrum. Parties in the Opposition need to initiate a dialogue which could sharpen public awareness as well as their own self-awareness as are the most urgent issues of democratic governance. Unfortunately, the quick search for political power and office frequently underwrites a political discourse in which the real issues are rarely discussed on.

panchayats, but also suffer from the usual handicaps of being politically unassertive. While the gram panchayats may be packed with CPI(M) supporters, the dominant voice in these institutions continues to come from the middle peasantry, from which class indeed a large number of CPI(M) activists in the rural areas are drawn.

While "Operation Barga" reached its limits by the mid-1980s, rural development programmes continue to be co-opted by the more prosperous peasantry. In effect, therefore, the multi class approach helped gain for the CPI(M) a broad base of rural support, but has robbed their rural strategy of any sharpness of focus.

In the realm of higher education, the Left Front has pursued strategies that have proved largely detrimental to the institutions which for more than a century have provided the foundations of Bengali intellectual and cultural life. A central element of the CPI(M)'s higher education policy has been to transfer teachers from Government colleges in Calcutta to mofussil areas. The ostensible purpose of this policy was to break the elitist class character of higher education, that is, the concentration of highly qualified faculty in premier undergraduate colleges in the city, and to distribute them amongst the less privileged masses in colleges in the hinterland.

The Left Front's policy of transfers was most vigorously directed towards Presidency College in Calcutta, which for more than a century has been a unique centre of undergraduate education and has produced an impressive number of scholars of international renown. Over the decades, Presidency College had developed a tradition whereby some of its selected graduates, who might typically go abroad for an advanced degree, would return to the College to teach. Post-1977, many highly qualified teachers of Presidency College moved away to the Universities in order

Cabinet approves changes in Water Disputes Act

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI:



A. B. Vajpayee

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved amendments to the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956, and the Chit Funds Act, 1982, and decided to pursue the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) bill, 1998. It also cleared the rationalisation of the short service commission schemes in the Indian Air Force and decided that India will be a member of the WTO Law Centre which will help obtain free legal services.

Failure of the monsoon in certain pockets also figured at the Cabinet meet.

Prime Minister Vajpayee directed agriculture and rural development ministries to identify areas hit by acute drought conditions and take prompt measures to mitigate the situation, an official spokesman said.

The Prime Minister instructed the ministries, particularly the department of drinking water supply, to work out advance planning to meet shortage of drinking water and fodder besides other steps to ameliorate distress of the people.

The rationalisation of the Short Service Commission schemes in the IAF involves their consolidation under a single scheme with uniform terms and conditions so as to remove anomalies.

The existing schemes for flying (women) technical (men and women) non-technical ground duty branches (men and women) will be clubbed. There will be one validity period of sanction up to 2005 common to all schemes and the initial engagement period of 10 years and one extension of five years will be standard for all schemes.

The Cabinet approved incorporation of the recommendations

made by the standing committee on finance in the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) bill, 1998, to intensify action against drug traffickers.

The amendment will take care of the criticism that the sentence structure envisaged in the Act was irrational and disproportionate to the gravity of the offences.

The amendments to the Inter-State Water Disputes Act will enable to incorporate the recommendations of the Inter-State Council on the Sarkaria Commission report.

The bill to be introduced in the winter session of Parliament will deal with issues such as the time taken in setting up tribunals under the Act, the time taken by tribunals to adjudicate and the

difficulties being faced in implementation of the awards.

The amendment to the Chit Funds Act will raise the limits of aggregate amount of chits from the present Rs 1 lakh to Rs 6 lakh, increase the amount of discount to be foregone by a

subscriber and expand the scope of securities acceptable as deposits by the foreman.

This will conform to the Supreme Court observation in July 1993 that inflation needed to be taken into account.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), which met separately, approved a proposal to continue two centrally sponsored schemes aimed at augmenting the income of farmers in backward states and promoting development of cooperatives in these areas.

The schemes, with a total outlay of Rs 210 crore, would be implemented by National Cooperative Development Corporation through state governments.

The CCEA also approved implementation of development of national parks and sanctuaries at a total cost of Rs 87 crore.

ACTION PLAN

- Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) bill in limelight
- Ministries told to identify drought-hit areas
- Development of national parks and sanctuaries at a total cost of Rs 87 crore
- Central schemes to augment income of farmers in backward states

Vajpayee calls for Jaitley's opinion on tainted duo

SUDESH K VERMA

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 10. — The Prime Minister is understood to have asked the Union law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, to examine the charge-sheets against the Union minister of state for defence, Mr Harin Pathak, and the Gujarat health minister, Mr Ashok Bhatt, for their role in the anti-reservation riots in 1985 in which a head constable was killed.

Amid a growing Opposition demand that the two should resign as they have been chargesheeted in a criminal case, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee decided to seek informal legal advice, a source said.

The decision to ask Mr Jaitley to look into the matter

could be a snub to a section of the BJP which is trying to defend the two ministers on the ground that these cases were political in nature and thus must be distinguished from the cases of corruption and the like which forced Mr Sukh Ram, Mr Buta Singh and Mr Muthaiah to resign.

■ Babari trio Opp's real target, page 8

Senior BJP leaders, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu and Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, have been rushed to Ahmedabad to look into the matter. Mr Krishnamurthy was closeted with the state party president and other senior leaders for over three hours today while Mr Bhatt carried on with his

official duties, adds SNS from Ahmedabad.

Some party leaders fear the resignation of the two 'tainted' ministers could propel the Opposition to go after Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati as they, too, were chargesheeted by the CBI in the Babari Masjid demolition case. Mr Vajpayee is unlikely to go along with this line since the BJP treats the Ayodhya case as an exception.

The anti-reservation stir in Gujarat was also political and no direct involvement of any leader could be proved, a BJP leader said. He said Gujarat could have withdrawn these cases as the Uttaranchal chief minister has done, against those who fought for statehood.

THE STATESMAN

11 NOV 2000

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2000

A NECESSARY STANDARD ND-12 ✓

IT WAS JUST as well that Mr. Harin Pathak, Union Minister of State for Defence and Mr. Ashok Bhatt, Gujarat Minister for Health, were made to quit office following their being chargesheeted in an Ahmedabad court for murder and rioting. There is no way that they, particularly Mr. Pathak, could have continued without becoming an embarrassment to the BJP leadership — more specifically to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee — given the compulsions of coalitional politics. The legal investigation process has caught up with the two Gujarat leaders who are among the 12 facing criminal charges related to the murder of a police head constable during the anti-reservation riots in Ahmedabad in 1985. That the case is 15 years old cannot by itself absolve them of their culpability; it only underscores the need to expedite reforms in the justice delivery system. To say, as the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, did, that the events of 1985 did “not make any sense” after a lapse of 15 years is to be flippant about an issue that has a vital bearing on the national imperative of decriminalising politics and also of upholding the rule of law.

During his previous tenure as Prime Minister, when confronted with such situations of ministerial incumbents being hauled up in court for criminal offences — Mr. Sedapatti Muthiah (of the AIADMK) and Mr. Buta Singh, for instance — Mr. Vajpayee had set down a normative standard for application in such cases; it required that those against whom charges of corruption have been framed by a court of law will necessarily have to step down from public office until they are exonerated. The charges against Mr. Pathak and Mr. Bhatt may not involve ‘moral turpitude’, but that cannot in any way detract from the gravity of the criminal offences brought up before court. Nothing could be more specious, or outrageous, than the argument that such charges as ‘murder’, ‘attempt to murder’ and ‘criminal

conspiracy’ are slapped against political opponents by the powers that be as a matter of course or in a ‘routine fashion’. If the much-too-common ‘vendetta’ and ‘conspiracy’ theories put out by political leaders at the receiving end lacked credibility, the pervasive tendency on the part of their friends and patrons in Government to give them a “clean chit”, arrogating to themselves the powers of the judiciary, is highly deplorable and liable to the charge of contempt of court. Remember the manner in which clean chits were given, even without a semblance of an enquiry, to Sangh Parivar elements in the Graham Staines murder case as also in the various other cases of attacks on the Christian community reported in the recent past?

By getting Mr. Pathak to quit, the Vajpayee regime may have deprived the opposition of a ground for attack. With persons such as Mr. L.K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharati (reinducted into the Cabinet last week) keeping their ministerial berths undisturbed, despite their facing criminal charges in the Babri Masjid demolition case, its vulnerability to the charge of double standards remains as high as ever. In fact, the Pathak-Bhatt case only serves to bring the ‘double standards’ into a sharper focus. The Government has persistently sought to explain away their continued presence by claiming that the prosecution against them is “political” in nature. The distinction is patently invidious and the explanation is too facile to carry conviction. The general norm that chargesheeted persons should not remain in public office cannot be restricted to charges of corruption but must apply with equal force to all serious criminal offences. This is to say that the Vajpayee Government cannot continue the farce of taking the moral high ground of clean governance, even while allowing the Ministers tainted by criminal charges in the ‘Ayodhya case’ to stay on.

THE HINDU

14 NOV 2000

Priority lies in information technology,

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee speaks to Indranil Ghosh of The Telegraph about his priorities over the next six months, his relationship with Basu and his plans for young Bengal.

The Telegraph: Has chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee buried Buddhadeb the culture man?

Bhattacharjee: (Smiles) You're wrong... I have seen all the films worth seeing (in the current Calcutta film festival). My responsibility as chief minister will make heavy calls on my time, my energy, everything. And I know how the situation will unfold... (sighs). But culture for me is not entertainment, it is actually an integral part of my life.

TT: You're only a week into the new job. How does it feel?

BB: My major concern is to identify the limitations of the government. Once we get to know that, we will start finetuning our programmes, and lining up tough decisions. Let me be a little more specific, the tough decisions will be unveiled in a day or two.

TT: Your assertion on assuming office was that your government will be more responsive to people. But has the entire government taken the cue and begun to reach out?

BB: (Hesitantly) Having spent years in government, I know we cannot talk about work culture or discipline, not as yet. But changes have begun to take place, for instance, in Writers' Buildings people are responding. In the districts, I am afraid, the situation is still the same. This is one area where we are planning tough measures. Give us a week, we will introduce performance diary which will determine reward or punishment for government employees.

TT: How tough can you get in a sarkar — as much as a private management?

BB: Yes, if necessary, hire and fire. Don't exaggerate this bit, what I mean to say we will give the hardest punishment to shirkers and disrupters. The existing law gives us enough powers. This (fear of punishment) is very necessary. We are living in a bloody capitalist society, so not all can be motivated to discharge responsibilities.

TT: What you're saying, if implemented, might lead to large-scale departure of supporters from your party and the formidable co-ordination committee of government

employees — are you willing to risk that?

BB: (Leaning forward in excitement) Yes, only people who constitute the bad blood in the CPM or the co-ordination committee will go out. Those who love the organisation, the ideology, the people, will stay put.

TT: There is an election round the corner. Can you afford all this now?

BB: So what? If bad blood goes out, people will feel doubly encouraged to vote us back to power. I am not making idle talk. Minutes before this interview, I signed the orders for suspension of two IAS officers. We in government are duty-bound to behave well with the people, our real masters.

TT: How do you make government employees more responsive?

BB: They realise they will have to fit into the government's overall programme and policies. We are evolving the hard decisions in consultation with them. They support us. Ours is a big organisation where certain elements might range themselves against the government. But we are not bothered. We will do what we feel is right. On Thursday morning Ashim (Dasgupta), Surya (Kanta Mishra) and I had a meeting on this.

TT: You have only six months to improve the working of the government and help the Left Front try to win a tough election. The economy is limping, unemployment rising, New Delhi and Mamata Banerjee snapping at your heels. Against this background, what are your priorities?

BB: Naturally, industrialisation. But it will be industrialisation with a focus. I am not concerned with traditional industries. My priorities lie in information technology and second generation reforms in agriculture. I can prove to you all, with statistics, if necessary, that Bengal has begun to turn around because the environment has changed.

Believe me, things are happening in IT. The second complex at Salt Lake is bursting at the seams, I will be inaugurating it any day. Construction of other complexes is going to start very soon. The Tatas want to come in, so does Sema, a British company. IBM and Webel are about to sign an agreement on long-distance training. We are concentrating on e-governance, e-commerce/manufacturing and e-training. E-governance is meant to improve the work of the govern-

trial, social norms are changing.

We cannot remain insular or blind to such changes. In the new dispensation, productivity, quality of production are no longer the employer's exclusive headache. Labour, too, will have to address the issue of industry welfare. We have told them that they must decide what they want, chaos or industrialisation. What good is a charter of demands if the industry has to fold up.

TT: Great Eastern Hotel is just a start. You will have to undertake a full-scale privatisation programme. Given CITU's mental frame, how will you do it?

BB: I agree there was delay in Great Eastern, but we have succeeded in doing it. As for a full-fledged programme, we are discussing with the party, with CITU. We have to see what the party's immediate programme for Bengal is.

Bengal is one of many states in India and we cannot hope to bring about socialism or communism here in the near future. Our main concerns are political processes, creating jobs, ensuring social welfare, striving for equality, and not taking the government into any kind of business. If you are going to cite Halodia (Petroleum), let me tell you that we did not have any other option but to participate in it. As for now, we will strictly confine ourselves to education, health and social infrastructure.

TT: What is your message to CITU or the opposing section of the CPM?

BB: We must realise that time is no longer on our side. If we do not go and tell the world now that we are an investor-friendly government, the investment boom that is currently building up is going to go past us. We will have to pay a terrible price for it. We have told everyone that we will aggressively chase private capital because we have to create jobs and we will not tolerate things like gherao. We will not hesitate to institute police cases against gherao-wallahs. The government, CITU, the party will now have to be partners in the industrialisation programme.

TT: After all this, can you continue to take the moral high ground and criticise the Vajpayee government for privatisation?

BB: Yes, we can. There are two streams of privatisation. One, driven by the World Bank and IMF, is

causing auctioning of blue-chip, profit-making public undertakings and banks, downsizing of government, shrinking of jobs and market. The other, relatively logical and reality-oriented, stresses the disposal of unproductive, loss-making obsolete industries. There is a sharp dividing line between the two.

TT: You'd be happy to know you have company in the RSS.

BB: (Laughs heartily) Yes, yes, Govindacharya and company have begun to attack the bazaar.

TT: Disillusioned at the stagnation, the young and brilliant are leaving Bengal in droves. What hopes do you hold out for them?

BB: I am aware of the trend and I am very disturbed. The government's emphasis on IT flows from the concern for the young. The government has to speak the language of the young, read the mind of the young and explore possibilities of creating jobs in bio-technology, genetics — the 21st century subjects. I will say two things: this government will make them (youth) feel they have a lot to contribute to the state's well-being; and the CPM will never be seen as an adherent to Pol Potism (laughs). At a serious level, we are far more progressive than many others.

TT: Jyoti Basu thinks that being a young chief minister, you should be able to vibe well with the young?

BB: (Laughs) I am no longer a young man. If anything, at 56, I am an old man. The communist party secretary in Hanoi, who is also the architect of the new economic policy, is younger than me.

TT: Once you were known to be allergic to mixing with industry and business. But today you are actually talking the language. What a transformation!

BB: (Smiles) I admit I once had certain reservations about business and industry. Jyoti-babu pointed out to me: 'Buddha, you're making a great mistake. All sorts make the world. You are in government, so you cannot take such an insular view.' Then he began to push me into situations where I would be forced to deal with them. These days I am seeking out the young generation of industrialists.

TT: Mamata Banerjee is believed to be in a bind as to how to attack Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee.

BB: (Smiles) Why, they are calling me *sanitraser nayak* (hero of violence). However, I will not discuss her or, for that matter, any in-



dividual here. We want a responsible Opposition, which, we expect, will be open to consensual politics as far as possible.

TT: One has always wondered about the kind of relationship between you and Jyoti Basu. Would you care to define the relationship?

BB: What you see today is a relationship that goes beyond the party, politics. It is a father and son relationship.

TT: At every step, you are going to be compared with your predecessor. Is it a fair comparison?

BB: Whoever compares me to Jyoti babu is a fool. I do not have his vast experience or farsightedness. I was fortunate to watch him work in the government as well as in the party, handle people, or take quick decisions without betraying any emotions. It was pure education. So, whoever is making the comparison is doing injustice to us both.

TT: Did you have to speak to Jyoti Basu for advice on any occasion in the past week?

BB: It would be a lie if I said no. I called him a few times, but would not tell you why or what about.

TT: You are a public figure, yet you are intensely private; you will even go to the extent of being perceived as cold to guard your privacy — how do you explain this?

BB: Just because I am a public figure does not mean you will invade my house for a photo session with me and my wife or chase my daughter to her college for an interview. I may not take your call at home at night because I may be listening to music, but that does not mean I would not stop the music and take a call from a district magistrate or police or a party functionary on a crisis situation.

TT: Our hard luck... If only you had said you would not take any of those calls either, we could have described you as 'Bengal's Nero'.

BB: (Smiles) Exactly, I have to keep that in mind also. Newspapers like yours will not think twice before giving me the sobriquet: Nero of Bengal. I will attend the calls and still listen to music the next day. You cannot invade my privacy.

TT: You are extremely proud of your daughter Suchetana, her political senses. Chandan Basu did not join politics, will she?

BB: It's up to her. But let me tell you she is very political. If she decides to join politics, she will have to do it out of a fundamental belief or faith in it.

ment, but the last, e-training, is important. Already, the Japanese and the British are in an advanced stage of talks on training in our IIT.

TT: One doesn't see much movement in e-commerce/manufacturing?

BB: Don't forget our success with Wipro. When our IT secretary called us from Bangalore to say Wipro wants land in seven days and that, too, at the competitive prices offered by Maharashtra, I told my colleagues that it's a challenge. We either take Wipro and prove our intentions, or we continue to be known as a laggard. We gave land to Wipro at the matching rates and closed the deal in three days, and we are capable of repeating this as many times as you want. Let me assert that no serious company seeking to enter the IT business in Bengal will have to stand in queue for more than a month. For a company like Wipro, the wait will not be more than a week. We will give them incentives in the shape of land.

TT: Where was this speed before?

BB: (An embarrassed smile) Let's not start digging up the past.

TT: What or who stopped the government from moving fast — the orthodox section of the party?

BB: It would be unfair to blame

the party all the time. As McKinsey (the consulting agency) pointed out, government procedures were also responsible. Then land, electricity and environment would prove to be very difficult to negotiate. Things are looking up after the setting up of the Cabinet sub-committee whose recommendations would now be binding on the individual departments. But I don't mind confessing that I am still not satisfied with the pace. And, please remember, it's not my job to be satisfied. The Bengal I envision should be in the category of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat.

TT: Are your ministers taking the cue from the leader?

BB: (Smiles) We will have to convince some of our ministers that speed is all that counts. A foreign machine tool company wants to set up shop with a sizeable investment, but the department concerned has sent the file back three times. This kind of joke will not do.

TT: Have you thought how you will cope with CITU?

BB: We, the CITU and the party all believe in the same political programme. We are trying to make CITU understand that across the world political indus-

trial, social norms are changing. We cannot remain insular or blind to such changes. In the new dispensation, productivity, quality of production are no longer the employer's exclusive headache. Labour, too, will have to address the issue of industry welfare. We have told them that they must decide what they want, chaos or industrialisation. What good is a charter of demands if the industry has to fold up.

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Dacoits raid Kasba homes, kill IIT student

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, November 20

A GANG of 20 criminals broke into two Kasba homes early this morning, gunning down an IIT student before they fled with at least a lakh in cash plus valuables.

This is the fourth major dacoity in the area, and police said the gang was the same as the one that had struck at the home of Madhusudan Roy on November 7. But at Writers', Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee told reporters not to play up the dacoity and killing just because they had taken place in the Chief Minister's constituency.

The gang first attacked the Purbachal home of A K Debnath. They hammered at the door with a large cement slab and entered as the door gave away. They took 20 minutes to turn the house upside down, and left with Rs 1 lakh and valuables. Before entering, they had disconnected the telephone and power lines.

Their second stop was at the home of IIT professor Shyamal Kanti Ghosh, also in Purbachal. After they had forced their way in, the dacoits began to break open Ghosh's almirah. When the professor protested, they hit him on the head with a revolver butt.

As Ghosh, seriously injured, crumpled to the floor bleeding in a torrent, his son, Kaustav Kanti, a student of IIT, rushed to him.

One of the dacoits then pumped two bullets into the budding engineer. After cleaning up the house, they fled—at least some of them taking an Ambassador car that was waiting. Kaustav Kanti was declared dead at Ramakrishna Mission Seba Pratishtan hospital.

Arvind Kumar Maliwal, SP, South 24-Parganas, and Gyanwant Singh, ASP, South Rural, arrived soon after and concluded that the gang had struck the area on November 7 as well. The dacoits came from the vicinity, knew the area well, and had done their homework on the targets, police said.

The modus operandi had been the same as last time—breaking down the door with a cement slab. Like last time, they had been using foul language; their descriptions too matched that of the criminals on the earlier occasion.

On November 7, a gang of 22 had raided the home of Madhusudan Roy at Rashdanga in Kasba, breaking down the front door and collapsible gates, and escaped with jewellery and cash, hurling bombs and bricks as they went.

At the State secretariat today, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the DIG (CID) was investigating the incident. But dacoities were taking place elsewhere too — there was nothing special about the four in his constituency, the Chief Minister reasoned.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 NOV 2000

SOPS TO MUSLIMS ✓

Mamata proves two can play the game ✓

ALL that CPI-M leaders in West Bengal needed to do in the wake of Mamata Banerjee's calculated effort to woo Muslims was to point to the impracticality of her proposals. Assuming her party comes to power, how can the Trinamul on its own fulfil its commitment to provide job reservations for Muslims without a broad consensus at the national level? Job reservations in themselves have come under a cloud; is it necessary after 50 years of Independence to put "weaker" sections on this ground alone in responsible positions at the cost of efficiency and merit? As Railway Minister, Mamata ought to know the damage it has done to her department. It is clearly beyond her brief to speak for governments at the Centre and other states when she promises jobs to minorities in the government and local bodies or to speak of making Urdu the second language in schools in "Urdu speaking localities". But she was clearly encouraged by the fact that the Congress MLA, Sultan Ahmed, has joined Trinamul and has sworn to swing the Muslim vote that accounts for 26 per cent of the total electorate. The Trinamul chief must have been further encouraged by the sizable turnout so as to pursue a programme of disabusing Muslims of the idea that her participation in the NDA government makes her part of the Sangh parivar. Except where she goes overboard, the effort to win their confidence is perfectly legitimate.

What is not so clear is why the Left Front, and the chief minister in particular, should panic. The reason is that the Left, as much as the Congress, takes pride in its secular credentials, leans heavily on the minority vote and cannot bear to see an organisation like the West Bengal Pradesh Quami Tanzeem organising a large convention in Mamata's support. The nagging impression is that the chief minister has reacted in anger not because he thinks job reservations as such are undesirable (why doesn't the CPI-M issue an unambiguous statement to that effect?) but because there is a distinct possibility of a swing in the minority vote. Besides, it does not enhance the credibility of a government during whose term lakhs of illegal immigrants have been granted ration cards and have then found their way into voters' lists. By holding out sops, legitimate or otherwise, to prospective voters, Mamata proves two can play that game.

THE STATESMAN

21 NOV 2000

Mayor hits party roadblock in hawkker eviction drive

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 23

9-87 WB

THE CMC'S hawkker eviction drive fizzled out today and exposed the rift between the Mayor and his party over the issue.

The drive, aimed at clearing the stretch from Victoria House to Victoria Memorial, drew a blank as civic officials — nearly 100 of them — found the pavements empty. With most hawkkers staying away, the procession of 12 cars, three pay loaders and a bulky police team went back having done little.

In front of Victoria Memorial, a motley group headed by the Hawker Sangram Samity leader Shaktiman Ghosh staged a noisy demonstration. Ghosh lay spread-eagled on the street with a handful of his supporters. The police shooed them away.

Later, Subrata Mukherjee, unfazed by the flop show, said there was no possibility of the CMC rehabilitating hawkkers. "Such clean-up drives would continue."

But he hit an unexpected roadblock when Trinamool Congress mandarins rushed to an afternoon press conference and declared they wouldn't allow the civic body to throw out hawkkers unless it finalised rehabilitation measures. The drive is being put on hold temporarily, they said.

The move, apparently dictated by Mamata Banerjee,

jolted Mukherjee and his mayor-in-council, determined to go ahead with the eviction as proof of their commitment to a cleaner, better Calcutta.

Peeved by the party fiat, Mukherjee has called an emergency mayor-in-council meeting tomorrow. But he was yet to receive any formal party communiqué, he insisted.

Mukherjee, however, conceded that he had no option but to follow the party line, for it was the Trinamool that was running the show at CMC. "If



Mamata can work out a rehabilitation package, I will accept it. But I still feel the answer doesn't lie in such measures. My personal views don't really matter. I will abide by what the party says."

The Mayor said he wanted the party to seriously debate the matter. It was a misconception that the hawkkers constituted a chunky vote-bank who could make a radical difference in the polls, he said. "There are only around 80,000 of them. Many of them aren't even valid voters. I don't think they matter at all."

Leader of the Opposition in the CMC Kanti Ganguly, however, dismissed today's effort as a "gimmick". "I have repeatedly asked the Mayor to spell out what exactly he plans, but till date he hasn't come up with an answer. This problem would not have arisen had the Trinamool not encouraged hawkkers to return to streets we had cleaned up," the Operation Sunshine mastermind said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 NOV 2000

Kamtapur stir land-related, feels Buddha

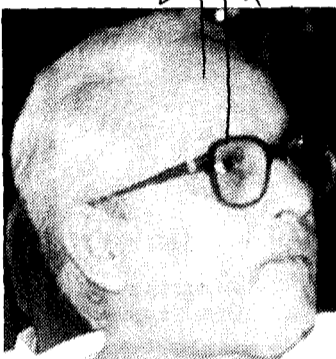
SUDIPTA CHANDA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Nov. 23. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya's reported statement that the state government needs to address the problems of land and language in North Bengal in the perspective of the Kamtapuri movement has assumed special significance here.

The chief minister's statement has also turned the CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas's recent denial that the question of land was at the crux of the Kamtapuri movement unconvincing.

Refusing to acknowledge that the Kamtapuri agitation is rooted in the problem of shrinkage of agricultural land largely usurped by infringing tea plantations and also occupied by infiltrators from Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, Mr Biswas said here on Sunday that the matter had never been reported to him.

All political parties of the region including CITU and AITUC leaders engaged in the tea industry have been crying



Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya

hoarse for quite some time, which went unrecognised by Mr Biswas.

The chief minister's belated acknowledgement of the problem, which had been rejected by his party's state secretary, has made it clear that the CPI-M (as distinct from the Left Front government), does not wish to commit itself politically on the land issue. It would rather want the Writers' Buildings to tackle the problem.

Political observers here feel that the chief minister's observation is correct and has

come at a crucial time when subversive forces are threatening to disrupt the peaceful coexistence of different communities in North Bengal in the name of deprivation.

The chief minister's comments are being viewed as "a positive step" by the CPI-ML (Santosh Rana) faction and the Sayatta Sashan Sangram Mancha, which is an amalgam of eight regional parties. Besides being votaries of autonomy for North Bengal, the two organisations are also in favour of land reservation for the indigenous population of North Bengal.

The CPI-ML (Liberation) and the Nagarik Adhikar Mancha, which is an all-party platform formed recently to promote communal harmony in the region, have also been vocal on the land issue.

Cautioning against the practice of using land unscrupulously, "that is taking toll on the water level of the region", the Liberation has also pointed out that shrinkage of land has also changed the agricultural production pattern in North Bengal "for worse".

THE STATESMAN

24 NOV 2000

Trinamul behind Kamtapuris, hints CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 29. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today criticised the Trinamul Congress, obliquely accusing it of supporting the Kamtapuri movement.

Without naming the Trinamul, he said: "It beats me how a movement backed by the Ulfa and the ISI can be supported in principle by any party."

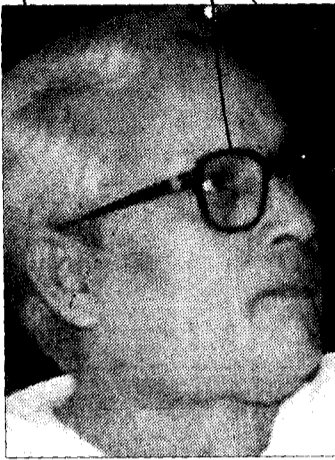
On whether he meant the Trinamul, the chief minister said: "It is up to you to understand". It didn't matter who supported the movement, he said, Kamtapuris would not be allowed to "foment trouble" in North Bengal and the administration was on the alert.

The 48-hour bandh called by the Kamtapuris had evoked no response so far, he said.

The chief minister, who left for Delhi this evening, said he would apprise the Prime Minister and the Union home minister of the situation in North Bengal. There was, however, no question of complaining to the Centre. "I do not complain about such trivial things."

"Yes, the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, whose cause the Kamtapuris are championing, had some genuine problems regarding unemployment, land and language," he said, but condemned those who were resorting to terror with Ulfa's help and training.

Mr Bhattacharya also dismissed Miss Mamata



Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya

Banerjee's charge that it was the Left which had first used corpses as a political tool during the food movement in the sixties, saying the Trinamul leader "does not know what she is talking about".

Mamata a liar: Anil

Miss Mamata Banerjee is "out and out a liar"; no other politician in the country can resort to such "colossal lies" as she does, Mr Anil Biswas said today.

Mr Biswas was responding to the railway minister's charge yesterday that it was the CPI-M who began politics with dead bodies when it demonstrated with Nurul Islam's body outside Writers' Buildings in the 1960s.

The CPI-M state secretary said only Miss Banerjee can

distort facts in such a way, since "her whole politics is based on falsehood".

"The truth is a huge procession was organised with the body of Nurul Islam (a class V student at Basirhat in North 24-Parganas) on 16 February 1966. The following day the body was buried at Tentulia in his father's presence.

The veracity of the statement can be checked either from reports carried by two vernacular dailies or from the headmaster of the school where Nurul studied," Mr Biswas said.

He said it was one thing to organise a procession with a body to show respect to the dead and another to carry a body to the state secretariat for demonstration.

"The Trinamul's attempt to march towards Writers' Buildings with the bodies of two of its workers killed in Midnapore was most reprehensible."

Mr Biswas said that when two Trinamul workers, Ram Rudra and Sachindranath Bhuniya, returned home at Pingla in Midnapore from Calcutta last week, villagers demanded their arrest for their alleged involvement in abduction and killing of CPI-M supporters.

"The two admitted to police that they had killed four CPI-M supporters. Pursuing their statement, police recovered the skeletons from a pond.

Now let people decide whether these men should be arrested or allowed to stay in their homes," Mr Biswas said.

THE STATESMAN

30 NOV 2000

Vajpayee heads a more stable Govt now

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, October 12

18/10 9-11 AM 9 AM
WHEN PRIME MINISTER A B Vajpayee hosted dinner for 35 Telugu Desam Party Members of Parliament on the lawns of his home, two months ago, he could not help drawing their attention to the bright full moon.

After hearing them - one by one - about problems of their constituencies, Mr Vajpayee had a hearty laugh and remarked, "why don't you join us and reach for the moon?"

Even if the assembled non-Hindi speaking group could not grasp Mr Vajpayee's literary style in all its flavour, they understood its political meaning.

A confident PM had made a renewed invitation to the TDP to join his government for no reason other than to enhance the NDA's cohesive unity and image as a strong, united political group.

Secondly, while his government would always be "sensitive and responsive" to the demands of the NDA partners, they could-by joining it-take good care of their political interests.

For the first time, a renewed mis-sive from Mr Vajpayee to a supporting party did not show any sign of worry or fear as opposed to the tension that characterised the BJP's ties with the AIADMK prior to the collapse of the first government in April 1999.

In other words, Mr Vajpayee leads a more stable NDA now.

So when Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee announced her resignation and threatened to pull out from the NDA party in protest against the hike in prices of petrol last month-end, there was no sign of palpitation in the Government.

Ms Banerjee soon realised that she could not appear inconsiderate when the PM is wheeled into a Mumbai hospital for a knee surgery.

The PM, on his part, showed willingness to oblige her by sending a letter to assure her of a "relook" into the matter.

Even if the crisis over the hike is far from over, as senior BJP leaders acknowledge, the NDA's sur-

vival is on account of two reasons. One is the TINA factor-there is no alternative. The Congress is dispirited and demoralised. The Communists are worried about the erosion of their base and the polls in West Bengal and Kerala. No one is interested in another political adventure yet.

Second, the coalition has managed to convey that the Government is here to stay-at least till the Prime Minister is around to provide leadership.

Centre will come up for scrutiny. Mr Vajpayee's leadership will not be under test but the flux in the political fortunes of the BJP and its allies in the States will unleash their own dynamics.

Significantly, no NDA partner other than the BJP now wants to celebrate the completion of first year of the Vajpayee Government.

Caught as they are in the contradictions of a coalition rule at the Centre, the allies of the BJP are not as proud of the achievements of the Government as the BJP is.

Why is there no celebra-

tion? The allies, whose principal reason to back the BJP is to oppose the Congress or the Left, do not share the optimism of the principal ruling party, the BJP. They are not too sure of the Government's new economic policies either, which are at the implementation stage and yet to show an appreciative impact on the masses.

On the other hand, "tough decisions" like the oil price hike threaten the support base of the allies,

who see themselves only as a regional force.

Equally disturbing is the friction between the BJP and its allies-like the Trinamool Congress, Janata Dal (United), and Samata Party and worsening strains in the ties between the DMK and its junior, PMK.

Their squabbles are not in the open but rob the NDA of the much-needed internal cohesion.

Further, Mr Vajpayee cannot do anything about these differences among the allies, who see their political interests clashing with the BJP or one another as the NDA moves into its second year.

The allies are also wary of the Sangh Parivar and its aggressive plans for the future.

No body is better aware of implications of the unresolved differences in the NDA than the BJP itself.

Calling for an eternal vigil, new BJP chief Bangaru Laxman told a conclave of party leaders at Nagpur recently: "Although the political waters are calm and no clouds of uncertainty hover about New Delhi, there can be no room for complacency."

ONE YEAR OF THE NDA GOVT

Is Mr Vajpayee's own pivotal position sufficient to take the coalition through the next four years?

A clear answer to this question may be available when the next round of Assembly elections take place in five States-Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh next year. The outcome is bound to influence the future of the NDA.

Even if local factors play a major role, the NDA's record at the

Road to reforms is always

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 13 OCTOBER

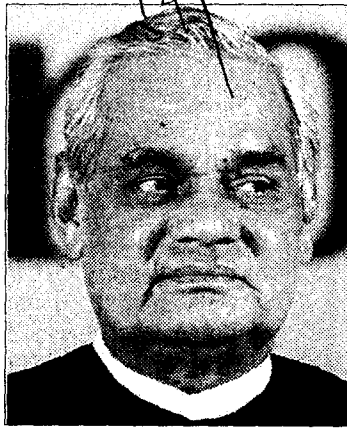
PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee hinted broadly on Friday that the Centre may not, in the immediate future, move to cut back on the recent hike of petroleum product prices.

In a statement issued from Mumbai's Breach Candy hospital on the occasion of his completing one year in office, Mr Vajpayee — who is recuperating after the recent surgery on his left knee — used the Centre's controversial decision to hike the price of petro products to emphasise that the move was an intrinsic part of the government's determination to pursue economic reforms even if it meant taking certain "hard decisions."

"The part of reforms is never easy or straight," he stressed in his statement, adding: "Sometimes, the government has to take hard decisions in the long-term interest of the nation."

Describing the move as a necessary challenge on the reform road, Mr Vajpayee — who recently told a duly chastised ally, Ms Mamata Banerjee, that the roll-back and its quantum will be decided solely by him at an "appropriate time" after his knee surgery but left the time frame calculatedly open-ended — maintained that the unprecedented hike in global oil prices had forced his government to pass on some of the burden to the consumers.

"We have to face such chal-



Vajpayee: Hard times ahead

lenges collectively," he stressed in a justification of the Centre's decision to reconsider the sensitive issue, only after the global crude prices fell to a good extent as compared to the present.

At times, such "hard" decisions entailed that the halves bore a greater share of the burden than the have-nots until the completion of the transition period, Mr Vajpayee held, adding: "Together, we shall overcome the challenges facing the country. Together, we shall take India to a better position next year."

The PM, however, chose to carefully indicate that the a reconsideration of the hike in prices will be in the offing after a significant fall in global crude prices which stand at \$34.5 per barrel. Assuring people that the government will "do its duty in a fair, impartial and determined manner," on all issues that impinged

directly on them.

In a bid to further shore up the defenses of his government on the petro-product price hike count, Mr Vajpayee chose to highlight his perception that the ruling regime had fulfilled most of the promises made in the NDA's manifesto.

Calculatedly underplaying the perceived "hardships," particularly on the economic front, Mr Vajpayee turned the strobe lights strongly on the fast gaining perception at the international level that India was a key emerging global player "whose voice is being heard with recognition and respect in the capitals of the world." On its part, the government had pulled out all stops to achieve the ambitious target of doubling the per capita income by the end of the decade and to ensure that hurdles in the path of faster growth for industry and entrepreneurship were removed.

On the domestic front, Mr Vajpayee chose to counterpose the social achievement of a declining poverty line and, on the agricultural front, a positive food security environment, to argue that the economic reforms path of the government had thrown up some tough times for the people. This was aimed in the long run at creating zero per cent unemployment and healthy overall social indices, particularly for today's have-nots.

Stability and good governance, the key soundbytes on which the NDA rode to power in the last election, found prominent mention in the PM's address.

The Economic Times

1 3 2002

PM claims wider support on Kashmir

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SF-14/10

MUMBAI, Oct. 13. — The Prime Minister today claimed increasing international support to India's position on Kashmir and resolved to fight terrorism "till the terrorists' guns fall silent."

In a message from Breach Candy Hospital on completion of a year in office, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said the situation in J&K and the North-east was improving.

The Prime Minister justified the increase in petroleum prices, saying the "hard decision" was taken in the long-term interests of the country. "The haves must bear a greater share of the burden than the have-nots in the transition period."

Emphasising the need for an accelerated reforms process, the Prime Minister said the growth should be such that the per capita income was doubled by the end of the decade. The reforms, he said, should yield more employment opportunities.

Mr Vajpayee said the NDA government's first year had been free of corruption scandals and vowed to set new standards in

BREACH CANDY BOMB HOAX

MUMBAI, Oct. 13. — There was a hoax call reporting a bomb at Breach Candy Hospital the day the PM underwent knee-joint replacement surgery. The anonymous call sent police and the SPG into a frenzy. A search of the hospital showed the call to be a hoax. It was traced to one Ismail Kasim Shaikh who called from a public booth in Kandivali in north-west Mumbai. He has been arrested, police said. — SNS

transparency and probity in public life.

The achievements of the past 12 months were not of any party or alliance but of a nation, Mr Vajpayee said. Thanking the people for reposing faith in the NDA, he said: "Today there is greater social cohesion and communal peace for which I compliment people belonging to all communities. We must now make it a permanent feature of our national life."

(Many world leaders, including President

Bill Clinton, have conveyed wishes to Mr Vajpayee, SNS adds from Delhi. Mr Clinton has lauded him for successfully carrying out his tight schedule during his USA visit.

Others who have sent "get well soon" messages include the King of Bhutan and Prime Ministers of Nepal and Algeria.)

The medical bulletin released by Dr Chittaranjan S Ranawat and Dr Farooq Udwadia said Prime Minister's vital signs were good and he was taking normal diet. He could stand and took a few steps with the help of a physiotherapist and walker.

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, said no visitors were being allowed. "The Prime Minister only took one telephone call from Mrs Sushma Swaraj as she is currently in Mumbai," Mr Mahajan said. Mr Vajpayee is learnt to have requested the doctors that he be permitted to meet people.

The city BJP vice-president has set up an e-mail account, ataljigetwellsoon@yahoo.com, to receive 'get well' wishes.

■ PM corrects IT Act anomaly, page 8

THE STATESMAN

1 - 1111 7 000

Saif, Cong leader discuss new party

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct 17. — PCC vice-president, Mr Pradip Bhattacharrya, yesterday met Mr Saifuddin Choudhury for "informal talks" on the latter's plans for a new party.

Mr Bhattacharrya was tight-lipped about the meeting, saying only that he would talk about it after Mr Choudhury launches his platform. "After all, it is only informal talks at this stage," he said.

The Congress's South Calcutta District Committee plans a seminar on progressive secularism which Mr Saifuddin Choudhury will attend, along with Mr Pranab Mukherjee, PCC president, and Mr Saugata Roy, vice-president.

Congress leaders sought to play down the implications of Mr Choudhury's attending the seminar. But party insiders said it was an important development.

Mr Choudhury said yesterday that the Congress, despite had its organisational weakness, was definitely a more secular party and "I do not see any reason why we cannot hold talks with them".

It could be premature to talk about an alliance between the

Congress and Mr Choudhury's new party. But sources in the party said this could not be ruled out.

Anil dig at Saifuddin

Mr Choudhury's former party colleague, Mr Anil Biswas, today asserted that the CPI-M would not be allowed to degenerate into a "bourgeois party". The CPI-M state secretary was addressing a meeting to mark the party's 80th anniversary — a speech that turned out to be an attack on Mr Choudhury's position.

Mr Choudhury's name was struck out from the party rolls after he sought drastic changes in the party programme "in the light of changed political climate". He had also alleged that the CPI-M, in the name of democratic centralism, was actually stifling democracy. The former CPI-M central committee member announced yesterday that he planned to float a "democratic, secular and pro-people" outfit.

Mr Biswas said today that wherever the principles of Marxism-Leninism were changed, the parties soon degenerated into "bourgeois units". "And the interests of

the working class can never be protected by bourgeois ideology," he said. He asserted that democratic centralism was the only way to implement the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism.

"In our party there is every scope of airing one's views contrary to majority opinion, but that freedom has to be exercised within the party forum," the CPI-M state secretary said.

In an apparent dig at Mr Choudhury's supporters, Mr Biswas said: "Regrettably enough, some party members believe perhaps there is not much democracy in the party since their dadas are saying so. Let me remind you of the words of our founding member, Muzaffar Ahmad, who said from the sick bed at a crucial juncture that the party is above friends and that it would not collapse like a pack of cards."

SFI leader joins Saifuddin: Former SFI leader Mr Subir Choudhury has handed over his resignation to the party headquarters. He has joined Mr Choudhury, whose press conference he attended yesterday. Mr Biswas said he had not received the letter till this afternoon.

THE STATESMAN

18 OCT 2000

After Atal, BJP sees only Advani

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Oct. 16: Trying to set at rest the succession speculation, the BJP today made it clear that only L.K. Advani, and not Jaswant Singh or alliance leaders such as George Fernandes or Chandrababu Naidu, could take over from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee if the need arose.

Without mincing words, the BJP said that in case its partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) refused to agree on Advani's leadership, it would break out of the coalition and "sacrifice" the government as in 1979. The Jan Sangh, the BJP's earlier avatar, had then pulled out of the Janata Party regime over the dual membership controversy.

"For the BJP, if there is any person next to Atal Behari Vajpayee, it is L.K. Advani. He has a unique position in the NDA and a very high position in the BJP. There can be no doubt in the minds of NDA allies that Advani is number two," senior leader J.P. Mathur said.

The succession speculation gained strength after the results of two opinion surveys, commissioned by a Delhi daily and a news channel on DD Metro on the NDA government's first anniversary, showed that an overwhelming

majority of respondents had voted for the home minister as Vajpayee's replacement if he were to step down. Jaswant, a favourite among non-BJP circles, trailed way behind.

BJP sources said the foreign minister, who remained close to Vajpayee even when he went through a lean patch after 1984, was the Prime Minister's "personal choice" as number two though the party felt differently.

The sources added that it is because of this difference that Vajpayee refused to name a number two to officiate during his absence from the capital.

Asserting that the BJP will not "allow" Vajpayee to "foist" Jaswant on the party, the sources said: "He can become the US President but he is not fit to be the Prime Minister of India."

But there was no confirmation from the party on the rumour that the foreign minister had threatened to resign after Advani's public swipe at him for the deal with the Indian Airlines hijackers.

Officially, the BJP brushed aside the succession issue as "pure speculation" and "irrelevant" at the moment. "The time for succession has not come. Vajpayee is there, he will continue to lead us and we hope he will also lead us in the 2004 elections," BJP spokesman Jana Krishnamurthy said.

But the sources admitted the speculation had a "basis" — the

persistent reports that Vajpayee may take "longer" than believed to recover from his knee surgery.

Even if he resumes office now, the sources added, he may not be able to put in as much time as in the past and would, therefore, delegate much of his responsibilities to a deputy without giving the person an official designation.

The BJP was given to understand that Jaswant was being considered for the job, something it is not happy about.

The RSS also shares the BJP's antipathy. *Sarsanghachalak* K.S. Sudarshan had scuttled Jaswant's chances of becoming the finance minister in 1998 and is reportedly unhappy with the pro-US tilt in India's foreign policy.

BJP hardliners, who are uncomfortable with Vajpayee's and party president Bangaru Laxman's "secular" approach, said they were happy with Advani's presence in the RSS camp in Agra yesterday, not as a "mere observer" but as a "dedicated *swayamsevak*".

"His presence did a lot to correct the equation between the RSS and the BJP which was slightly upset after the criticism of the Centre's economic policies. It gave the signal that the BJP is deferential to the RSS because even the second most important minister in the Cabinet was willing to be just a *swayamsevak* on the occasion," sources said.

■ Church frowns on Advani, Pg

THE TELEGRAPH

17 OCT 2004

Red signal for Didi

Mamata's moment has passed and it's advantage NDA

MAMATA BANERJEE'S strident assertion on Monday that there would be no increase in rail-passenger fares or freight rates, despite the recent hike in diesel prices, is not just a prelude to another populist railway budget in the future. It is also a reminder of an unresolved issue from the recent past. Only days ago, Banerjee had resigned from the Union cabinet on the issue of hike in the prices of petroleum products; she withdrew her resignation after the prime minister's assurance that the matter would be settled after his knee operation. Despite the calm since, there is no evidence that the Trinamool chief has abandoned her demand for a rollback. Meanwhile, reports from Mumbai have brought the glad tidings that the prime minister has walked up and down the corridor of the seventh floor of the Mumbai hospital with the help of a walker for almost 15 minutes. Surely the moment is not far when Vajpayee must take a decision on the vexed Mamata issue.

But perhaps the issue is not really as vexed for the NDA as it had earlier threatened to be — the scales have quite discernibly tilted in its favour since. When Mamata withdrew from the government, the NDA seemed to be in mortal danger of losing an ally on which it hopes to ride piggyback into Writers Building in Calcutta come assembly elections to West Bengal early next year. Mamata, on the other hand, seemed poised in a win-win situation. She would gain if the government caved in to her blackmail. But even if it did not, and she broke away from the NDA on the price-hike issue,

her pro-poor credentials would acquire a well-timed sheen. An alliance with a willing Congress may have taken care of the rest in the run-up to the elections in her state. Mamata's climbdown till after the prime minister's knee operation has, however, changed this scenario. While it gave valuable time to the NDA's firefighters, Mamata's stand has lost its crucial edge. Now, even if the Vajpayee government accedes to a token cut in prices of petroleum products, it will be seen only as a belated face saver for a troublesome ally. On her part, Banerjee has little choice but to accept what she gets. It would be considerably more difficult to up the ante on the same issue the second time round; the moment to emerge as the messiah of the poor has passed.

The Vajpayee government will undoubtedly keep this in mind as it takes its decision on whether to roll back or not and if yes, how much. It would also do well to take other considerations into account. According to Petroleum Minister Ram Naik's own admission, India's oil import bill for the current fiscal year is projected to soar to a whopping Rs 81,000 crore. This represents a 51 per cent increase over the Rs 53,500 crore that was spent on oil imports during the last financial year. International prices have gone up further since the Centre hiked domestic oil prices and with the West Asia crisis showing little signs of abating, the situation is only likely to worsen. Even as the government handles the pulls and tugs of short-sighted coalition partners within its ranks, it cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that there is a crisis out there which will not go away.

INDIAN EXPRESS

10 OCT 2000

Govt ready for J&K challenge: PM ⁽¹¹⁾

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 17. — The government is ready to deal with any situation in Jammu and Kashmir, the Prime Minister said today.

Speaking at a meeting of the BJP Parliamentary Party, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee confirmed reports about fighting among some militant groups in the state. The government is keen for peace but will take strong action against militancy, he said.

Mr Vajpayee said militants withdrew the ceasefire under the Pakistan's influence, BJP spokesman, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, said after the meeting. Mr Vajpayee agreed with some members' suggestion that the valour of the security forces fighting militancy and the role of village defence committees should be highlighted.

At a meeting of the parliamentary consultative committee attached to home ministry, Mr LK Advani said the government would continue efforts to bring peace to J&K through talks but security forces would remain alert to tackle militancy.

The government was open to talks with those who gave up violence, he said.

Pak soldiers killed: The Army last night repulsed a Pakistani attempt to capture a forward post near the Line of Control in the Naoshera sector of Jammu and Kashmir. Three Pakistani soldiers were killed and several injured, it was officially said today.

Five villagers, including a woman and two children, have been abducted by mercenaries from Dheri village in Poonch district and taken to PoK, a defence spokesman said in Jammu today, adds PTI. Militants fired a rocket at a police post at Banihal on the Jammu-Srinagar NH last night, adds UNI.

Hizbul says J&K not part of India: The Hizbul Mujahideen today said it was unrealistic to consider J&K as part of India. Reacting to the Prime Minister's Independence-Day speech, the Hizbul claimed that no country considered the state as part of India, PTI adds from Srinagar.

Sikh peace march: Over a crore Sikhs will take out a peace march to Kashmir on 24 November to coincide with the martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur, PTI adds from Delhi.

THE STATESMAN

2 (11)

Get well soon PM, and don't forget oil

BY DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR AND
DEBASHIS BHATTACHARYYA

Oct. 19: Mamata Banerjee today called on Atal Behari Vajpayee at Breach Candy hospital, where she "did not talk about her demands" but wished him a speedy recovery.

However, after the "courtesy visit", she expressed hope that the Prime Minister would "come out with a solution" when he returns to Delhi on Sunday.

"It was a courtesy visit. I did not come here to talk about my demands, but to see how he is. I am happy he is recovering fast," said the railway minister, whose resignation to protest against the oil price increase had thrown the government into turmoil just before Vajpayee was admitted to hospital.

Mamata pointed out this evening that the Prime Minister

had assured her before checking into the Mumbai hospital that he would call a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance to discuss her demands after he returns to the capital. Doctors today said Vajpayee will be released on Sunday.

"I am hopeful that the Prime Minister will come out with a solution when he returns. I have full faith in him," the railway minister, who had withdrawn her resignation after Vajpayee's written assurance to take a "re-look" at the hike, added.

The Prime Minister, who wants to return home in time for Diwali next Thursday, will have his hands full with Bengal and Bihar.

Communications minister Ram Vilas Paswan also met Vajpayee during the day to discuss the spurt in violence in Bihar. Later, home minister L.K. Advani

made an unscheduled visit. He left for Delhi immediately after his meeting.

The meeting between Mamata and Vajpayee lasted 45 minutes. It was interrupted only once by the nurse to change the Prime Minister's dressing. Mamata waited outside before being summoned inside again.

"She did not talk politics. Not a word about the petrol price hike. Such things can always come up when the Prime Minister is fully fit. Mamata is not such an insensitive person. She had gone there with one specific purpose: to wish the Prime Minister a speedy recovery. How can one exert pressure on a person who is recovering after a difficult surgery?" said an aide of the railway minister.

But sources in the Prime Minister's Office dropped hints that the mercurial ally was keeping

the pressure up. Read between the lines, the short visit was loaded with significance. Rarely in the recent past has Vajpayee given so much time to the railway minister.

The last time Mamata had gone to meet the Prime Minister — in September — she had taken Congress leader Priya Ranjan Das Munshi along. Her message was clear: she could walk into an alliance with the Congress in Bengal if the Vajpayee government trampled upon her wishes.

Sources said the Vajpayee administration and the BJP high command had been in touch with Mamata over the past several days. They added that Vajpayee asked Mamata to be "patient", implying that even if he does not meet her main demand, he could help in her political quest in several ways.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 OCT 2000

Advani defends rejection of Kashmir autonomy resolution

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 20 OCTOBER

UNION HOME minister L.K. Advani, on Friday, defended the Union Cabinet's decision to reject the autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly, saying that such a step would severely harm the country's interests.

The minister, who reiterated the regime's known position that there was no going back to the pre-1953 situation at the meeting of Parliament's consultative committee attached to his ministry, said that the Centre was prepared for greater devolution of powers to state governments. Countering a section of the Opposition's criticism against the outright rejection of the resolution, the minister said the move sponsored by the Abdullah government was not the right answer for the resolution of the conflict, but a "devolution of powers that would lead to efficiency in administration and speedier development."

The autonomy resolution, the home minister said, had recommended a return to the pre-1953 status, "which is not acceptable to the government as it will severely harm the interests of the people." On resumption of dialogue with militants in Jammu & Kashmir, the home minister said the government was "prepared to talk to the militants in the valley if they gave up arms and came to the negotiating table."



FAREWEL TO ARMS? Some of the 12 separatists who surrendered to the Indian Army pose with their guns immediately after their surrender in Poonch on Thursday. — AP

Mr Advani said India's stand of not holding a dialogue with Pakistan till it stops cross-border terrorism had been "appreciated globally."

Ramming home the government's point that there was better understanding in foreign capitals on the issue, the minister said: "Because of New Delhi's efforts, some major countries like the US, Canada, Britain, France and Israel have agreed to set up joint working groups (JWG) with India to tackle cross-border terrorism."

The minister, who is visiting Srinagar on Sunday along with defence minister George

Fernandes for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation, said the government's efforts, coupled with better coordination among intelligence agencies and security forces, had "yielded notable results in containing terrorism" in Jammu & Kashmir.

"The security forces neutralised over 1,210 militants in the state till October 15 this year, which is higher than the militants have killed since 1996," Mr Advani said.

India, he said, had been successful in mobilising world opinion against Pakistan for its activities in aiding and abetting cross-border terrorism.

The Economic Times

21 OCT 2000

WITHDRAW SUPPORT TO RJD GOVT: PASWAN

Vajpayee to review Bihar situation

2/10
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 20. The Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, today demanded that the Congress withdraw support to the Rabri Devi Government charging that it had failed to check violence in Bihar.

"The Congress has a greater responsibility as it is supporting the Rashtriya Janata Dal government," he told a press conference here.

The senior Janata Dal (United) leader said he had apprised the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, of the law and order situation yesterday in Mumbai, after his tour of the affected areas earlier this week.

Mr. Paswan said the Prime Minister had expressed concern and promised to discuss the issue on his return to the capital.

He alleged that the RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, had no interest except sticking to power and that his formula of taking Muslims and Yadavs along had come a cropper.

Mr. Paswan refused to join issue with the RSS chief, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, on Indianisation of the minorities, stating it had been clarified by the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, that the Sangh's views were its own. The NDA government was bound by its agenda.

On the presence of the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, at the RSS camp in Agra, Mr. Paswan

said all Ministers were bound by the Constitution to secularism and social justice.

Mr. Paswan, who has differences with the Janata Dal (United) leadership, reiterated his decision

to form a new party on November 23.

He said the JD(U) was a "sinking ship" and the leadership was doing little to consolidate the party.

Giant banner to bid adieu

By Our Special Correspondent

MUMBAI, OCT. 20. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who underwent a knee-joint replacement surgery at the Breach Candy Hospital here on October 10, will be discharged on Sunday.

According to Dr. S. E. Udawadia and Dr. N. Laud, his surgical wound was clean and he was able to flex his knee satisfactorily. A statement said Mr. Vajpayee was "comfortable and in good spirits". The vital signs are normal and he is walking with the help of a walker. He is "by and large free of pain."

PTI, UNI report:

"Mr. Vajpayee is progressing well and had his regular exercises and physiotherapy, took a walk for 15 to 20 minutes last evening and this morning, apart from attending to official work," PMO sources said.

Meanwhile, Mumbai has begun bracing itself for bidding adieu to Mr. Vajpayee on Sunday.

The citizens are hoisting a

kilometre-long giant banner bedecked with messages of best wishes and fond goodbyes to the Prime Minister, who has always enjoyed a close association with the metropolis.

The multilingual 'bye... bye banner' being hoisted along the road from Bhulabhai Desai Road, where the hospital is located, up to the monument of Haji Ali at Worli in central Mumbai, bears slogans hailing Mr. Vajpayee as a statesman, and bears parting kisses with signed greeting from Mumbaikars wishing him a long life, lasting joy and happiness.

UNI reports:

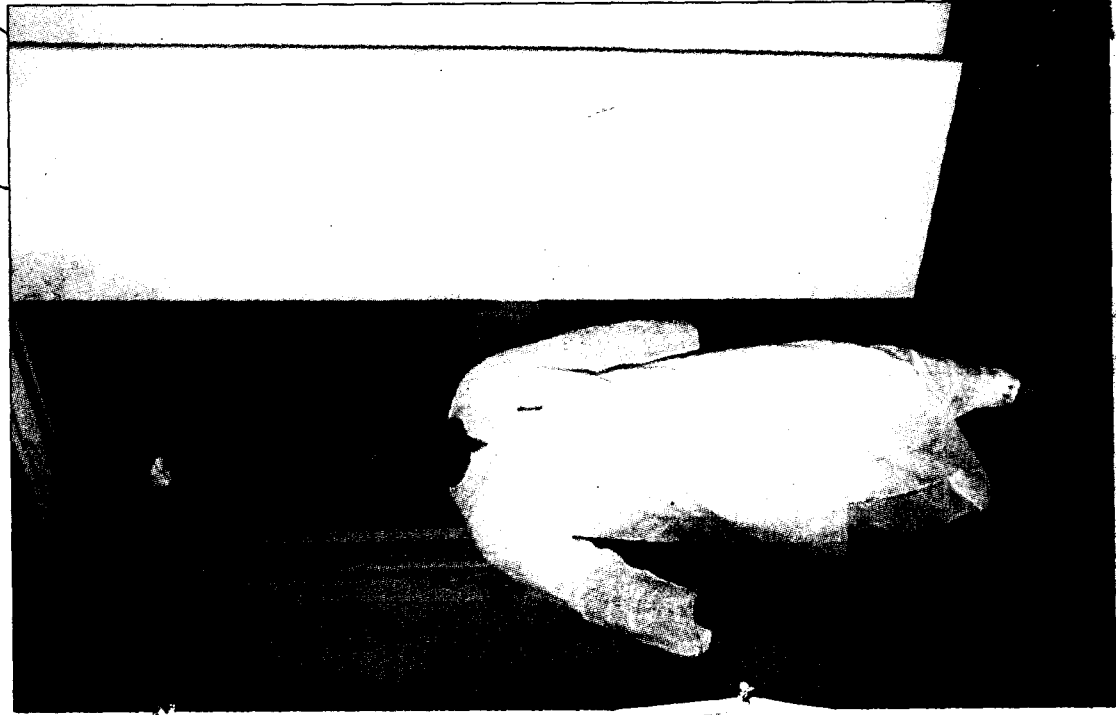
The Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, tonight called on the Prime Minister at the Breach Candy hospital. Mr. Thackeray wished speedy recovery to Mr. Vajpayee.

The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, film stars Dev Anand, Juhi Chawla and her husband Jai Mehta also called on him.

Left Front meets today ■ Successor to be sworn in on 5 or 6 November

Basu to step down, and this time it's final

55-1
27/10
9-8x 103



HE'S LEAVING: Mr. Jyoti Basu walks out of his chamber at Writers' Buildings on Friday. — The Statesman

Yes, no... maybe, no, yes...

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 27. — Mr Jyoti Basu said in October 1999 that he had wanted to step down a year ago. So he wanted to resign as early as October 1998, against his party's wishes.

Hence, the story of the chief minister's retirement began two years ago but it took another year for it to become public. This is what Mr Basu and his colleagues have said over the past year:

● **12 October 1999** — Mr Basu: "I'm ageing and there hasn't been any significant improvement in ... my health during the past one year....It (retirement) will be discussed in November."

● **12 Oct** — Mr Kshiti Goswami (RSP): "Who's there to replace Basu? We can't allow any Tom, Dick and Harry from the CPI-M to be installed at the helm of the administration."

● **13 Oct** — Mr Basu: "Even if I step down ... I shall be in the party and politics as long as I live.... Let it be discussed at the politburo... My party is full of competent people. So, there's no reason to worry about a successor."

● **27 Oct** — Mr Basu (to reporters): "Do you have to ask me this question (retirement) to keep your jobs?"

● **2 November** — Mr HS Surjeet: "In view of Basu's failing health, CPM will have to work out a system in which he can help."

● **11 Nov** — Mr Basu: "I don't want to lose my job by opening my mouth before the (politburo) meeting. Why are you asking the same question again and again? Politburo will meet soon."

● **18 Nov** — Mr Basu: "The party has asked me to continue and so I will continue."

● **26 Nov** — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya appointed deputy chief minister. The flip-flop continued in the year that followed.

● **6 January 2000** — Mr Basu: "I don't know how long I can go on like this... I wanted to resign at the end of last year, but my party wouldn't have any of it. So, here I am, trying my best. But I really don't know how long I will be able to carry on like this."

● **21 March** — Mr Anil Biswas: "There's no question of his (Basu) contesting the 2001 Assembly polls. He'll turn 86 next year and given his health, it won't be possible for him to contest..."

● **28 March** — Mr Basu: "Who's she? (Mamata Banerjee). Is she going to decide whether I will contest or not? Do I have to seek her permission now?"

● **30 July** — Mr Basu (after his stay at a Delhi hospital): "There's nothing called retirement in politics. I am fit now. I will continue work as long as my health permits."

● **10 August** — Mr Sitaram Yechury: "We ... created the deputy CM's post to lighten his responsibilities."

● **18 Aug** — Mr Biswas: "He's been pressuring us to relieve him ... We are not as inhuman as not to respond to him."

● **21 Aug** — Mr Biswas: "When our party decided to make Mr Bhattacharya deputy CM it meant he would be the party's choice for the post of chief minister."

● **27 October** — Mr Basu: "The state will get a new CM. The LF will meet on 28 October to choose my successor. There will be an oath-taking ceremony in the first week of November."

Mr Basu said. Besides, he is not leaving the party and will serve it "till death".

Mr Biswas said: "He is the most disciplined party member and you can find him working at Alimuddin Street party head quarters every evening... We will fight the elections under his leadership and he will campaign."

But Front partners reacted with shock to today's announcement. The Forward Bloc state general secretary was "really taken aback". "We were given to understand that Mr Basu will continue to lead the government till the Assembly election," Mr Ashoke Ghosh said. "Moreover, he is not simply a CPI-M leader... We will express our disapproval of at the meeting tomorrow." The RSP state secretary, Mr Deabrata Bandyopadhyay, said though no one was indispensable in politics, "it would have been politically appropriate had such a momentous decision been taken collectively by the Left Front."

His CPI counterpart, Mr Manju Majumder, said Mr Basu had no substitute. "We will spell out our stand on the matter at tomorrow's meeting."

Mr Saifuddin Choudhury was sad to hear the news. "Mr Basu has a towering presence in the country's politics. But, of course, he has the right to dignified retirement," he said over phone from Delhi, declining comment on Mr Basu's harsh remark a few days ago.

Miss Banerjee felt Mr Basu's retirement would help her own party's poll prospects but said she liked to "confront him". "It is unfortunate that when thousands are suffering after the devastation of floods, Mr Basu is running away from the administration... I have highest regards for him as a person and my fight is with his party and its policies," she said.

PCC vice-president, Mr Saugata Roy, said Mr Basu was a gentleman: "We opposed him both personally and his party inside and outside the State Assembly. But at the same time we knew that we were opposing an institution."

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 27. — Mr Jyoti Basu will retire next week, and this time it's official. The chief minister said today that his successor will be sworn in on 5 or 6 November.

He will retire before that; a Left Front meeting tomorrow will decide on the date and select his successor. This, however, is only a formality. The CPI-M state secretariat decided "unanimously" during the day that Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya will pick up the reins.

Most Left Front partners reacted with dismay, and pique that they were not part of the decision. Miss Mamata Banerjee criticised its timing, coming as it does soon after the devastating floods.

Mr Basu told reporters that his health has been hampering his work. He has been pressing for retirement for the past seven months, but party colleagues were reluctant to let him.

The CPI-M has finally come to accept a future without Mr Basu to run the country's longest-serving Communist government, though he will still "work for the party". The decision now has the blessings of Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, who had persuaded Mr Basu to change his mind the last time he raised the issue.

The CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, said: "We are not inhuman, we appreciate his health problems. Today before the state secretariat meeting we discussed the matter with the politburo and Mr Surjeet and decided we would accede to Mr Basu's request."

The Left Front, however, will make the "final decision" on Mr Basu's retirement and Mr Bhattacharya's succession when the CPI-M Mr Biswas explained that his party has "full respect" for all Front partners.

Neither Mr Basu nor Mr Biswas felt the CPI-M's prospects in the Assembly election would suffer. "We have our party to take care of that,"

On page 8

- It has been a good innings, says Basu
- Elated BJP predicts Mamata's ascent

Govt. flags off three Indian majors in insurance sector

Business Times Bureau

MUMBAI: The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) on Monday gave its nod to three major companies, Reliance Industries, HDFC and Sundaram Finance, to enter the insurance sector.

While the IRDA has okayed HDFC's joint venture with the UK-based Standard Life Assurance for life insurance businesses, the other two companies have been permitted to carry out only non-life insurance businesses. Reliance had also sought permission for life insurance, but the proposal is still to be okayed, a spokesperson for Reliance said.

"It will take some more time to be cleared," he added. Reliance has decided to go it alone in the life insurance as well as non-life businesses. The non-life insurance, christened Reliance General Insurance, will have an authorised capital of Rs 200 crore. IRDA has also given an 'in-principle' approval to ICICI, Max New York Life and Iffco's joint venture with Tokyo Marine. These companies will be given the go-ahead for their insurance plans after submitting the clarifications sought by the insurance regulator.

HDFC will be the first company in the country from the private sec-

tor to enter into the life insurance segment. The new company, with an authorised capital of Rs 200 crore and a paid up capital of Rs 168 crore, will be headed by its managing director Deepak Satwalekar.

According to HDFC's chairman, Deepak Parekh, the company will launch a host of new insurance products in another month's time. HDFC will hold an 81.4 per cent stake in the new company, HDFC Standard Life Insurance, floated for this purpose, while Standard Life will hold the remaining 18.6 per cent, a company spokesperson said.

The government has permitted a maximum of 26 per cent as the holding stake by a foreign partner. According to the HDFC spokesperson, Standard Life's stake stands reduced because the company already holds a ten per cent stake in HDFC through the foreign direct investment (FDI) route.

As regards ICICI, a spokesperson said the company did not get the final nod as the insurance regulatory authority has sought some clarifications from the Reserve Bank of India. The spokesperson further said that with new players, insurance products will be much more competitive, but she ruled out any possibility of an immediate cut in the premia rates of life insurance.

BREAKING BARRIERS

- HDFC is first private company to get into life insurance
- RIL, Sundaram Finance get nod for non-life insurance
- ICICI, Iffco, Max New York get in-principle approvals

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Saifuddin puts off party launch

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 23. — Mr Saifuddin Choudhury, former MP and CPI-M rebel leader, today put off the launching of a new party or forum, but said it would be floated in a few days.

The outfit will be "no threat" to any of the "established parties".

"Our aim is not to split either the CPI-M or the Trinamul Congress, but to present before the people our concept of socialism through democracy. But if followers of established parties find merit in our views and want to join us, they should not be prevented with use of force or other means," Mr Choudhury told a convention organised for the proposed launch.

The former CPI-M leader said he had "no ambition to become a chief minister or form a government". "We will perhaps sit in the Opposition Bench — if we win seats — but our aim is to usher in development through peaceful, democratic and secular means," he said.

He was opposed to the idea of forming a Left, democratic and secular party merely to add to



Mr Saifuddin Choudhury

the number of such formations and be locked in the contest of which one of these is the best.

"You practise your socialism, I mine," Mr Choudhury asserted.

In a direct attack on the Marxism followed by the CPI-M, he said the socialism he and his colleagues strive to achieve does not follow any "dictatorship" path, where decisions are "imposed from above".

"It is an obsolete concept that democracy is a monopoly of some evil forces used to capture the means of production. Today, democracy and socialism are no

contradiction in terms, but are complementary to each other. 'Socialism' practised in several countries became a spent force, because it was devoid of inner democracy that aims at reaching socio-economic-political benefits to the masses," he said.

In an obvious warning to the Trinamul, he said often political parties at national and state levels compromise with communal forces "like the BJP" for the sake of "capturing some power".

"But no party should gloss over the danger to the country's secular fabric for lust of power," he said. He urged the CPI-M and the Trinamul to immediately stop violence so that the state can develop.

Explaining the reason for deferring the launch of his party, he said so many people have wished to be members of it that it is decided to find a bigger venue in a few days and form the new party.

Mr Asim Chatterjee of the CRLI, Mrs Anjana Ghosh, RJD councillor of the CMC and Mr Tapas Basu, former CPI-M leader, formed the presidium.

THE STATESMAN

24 OCT 2000

Peace eludes Kespur as parties start talking

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ARSENIC:

(Continued from page 1)

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should have dealt with the problem of lack of awareness more seriously. The government has its own test laboratories, but few people whose areas are not affected, come here on their own, the minister said.

Dr S Sahay, in charge of Kothari Medical Centre, said the drinking water at his hospital is chlorinated and made bacteria free. The water, collected from four tube wells, is stored in underground tanks and is passed through iron filters. "We have not heard of arsenic contamination in this area, which is why we never have done arsenic tests," he said.

The hospital authorities believe action can only be taken once it is proved that the area has been affected. And this, Dr Sahay adds, is not negligence on part of the authorities. At Woodlands, arsenic tests were conducted last year, which showed no indication of contamination, said Mr AK Roy, HOD, engineering.

The water used in the toilets are taken from four bore well pumps, which, they claim, are 400 ft deep. Dr Chakraborti's tests show the water contains 40ug/l arsenic — much higher than the US-EPA's recommended value and the WHO guideline value, though below the 'maximum permissible limit'.

National Library director, Mr AR Bandopadhyay, said the water is supplied to the premises by the CPWD. "Certain things are taken care of at a larger level, so it is not really our responsibility to take the initiative of doing the arsenic tests," he said.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE, Oct. 25. — By the time today's much-vaunted Trinamul-CPI-M meeting, conducted by Mr JR Bhagat, IG (Western Range), got under way at Midnapore Circuit House to discuss restoration of peace and homecoming of evictees loyal to both parties, CPI-M cadres were allegedly attacking and tormenting at least two Trinamul men's families in Kespur.

At Jamunaber, they demanded the licensed gun of one Mr Gobinda Senapati. The man, couldn't produce the gun, for he had already deposited it with the Kespur Police.

But the enraged CPI-M cadres wouldn't buy any of this. They beat him up. Even his two sons, wife, daughter-in-law and other members of the family were hounded out of the house and the door was locked behind them. "They also prevented me from irrigating my 15-bigha farm land and demanded a Rs 100 per day as charges for feeding my cattle," Mr Senapati told reporters on reaching a relief camp here

BUDDHA HOPEFUL

CALCUTTA, Oct. 25. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today said local leaders of the CPI-M and Trinamul of Midnapore had explored ways to end violence in the district. He hoped the meeting, which was held in a cordial atmosphere, would yield results soon. The leaders had also discussed ways to help people driven out of their homes to return, he said. — SNS

along with his family.

Mr Madhusudan Samanta, of Kanunia had a much similar story to tell. CPI-M hoodlums had severely beaten up him up. Even his aged parents, Mr Ganesh Samanta and Mrs Parul Samanta, were beaten up before being driven out for having failed to leave the Trinamul Congress. His parents were under treatment in hospital with serious injuries. His cattle and other belongings had been looted, he said. Both cases were reported to the Kespur police.

After the meeting, Mr Bhagat

told reporters that steps would be taken for safe return of the refugees irrespective of political loyalties as soon as a list of such people was available. The parties had been given a week's time to submit their lists, the IG said.

Mr Mukul Roy, Trinamul leader, said 7,000 of his party-men had deserted their homes in Kespur, Garbeta and Chandrakona, while Mr Dipak Sarkar, CPI-M leader, put the number of such CPI-M supporters at 900. They were from Sabang, Pingla and Patashpur, he said.

The meeting was also attended by Mr MV Rao, DM, Mr Rajinder Singh, DIG, and Mr Gourav Dutta, SP, Midnapore.

Later, Mr Roy said he wasn't expecting any positive gesture from the district administration in getting the refugees back to their homes, particularly when the authorities were urging for "goodwill" to be shown by both the groups.

The Trinamul leader said the administration must make sure that processionists did not carry arms. There should also be surprise checks on licensed arms to flush out unauthorised guns, he said.

THE STATESMAN

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Basu hints at seats deal with Congress

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26/10

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 25. — Mr Jyoti Basu today indicated that there could be seat adjustments between the Congress and a third front proposed by the CPI-M plenum at Thiruvananthapuram.

He did not accept that it was a blunder to exclude the Congress from the proposed front. The Congress, though not a communal party, followed IMF-dictated economic policies like the BJP. Moreover, the CPI-M is opposing the Congress in some states and hence it cannot be included in the front, he said.

The chief minister said the CPI-M would appeal to the electorate to vote for Congress candidates in constituencies where the third front won't put up nominees. When pointed out that the BJP described the third front concept as "day dreaming", Mr Basu said "they will obviously oppose it."

He said the process of forming a third front began with talks with like-minded parties. "But it will take time" for the front to take shape.

He did not attach significance to amendments to resolutions moved by the party's central committee. The chief minister said he had no concern for Mr

Saifuddin Chowdhury, the expelled CPI-M leader. "No one is above the party."

On the expelled leader's decision to form a new party, Mr Basu said there were many parties in the country and that floating a party was not enough to get the support of state's "conscious people".

The state transport minister, Mr Subhas Chakraborty, said he was happy with the outcome of the plenum because otherwise things could have been worse.

The minister said initial efforts for party unity had been

lacked inner-party democracy.

Asked whether the acceptance of sharing of power at the Centre if the situation so warranted vindicated the stance of the rebel leaders, the CPI-M state secretary said nobody had left the party on that question.

Mr Biman Bose, Politburo member, said the special conference proved that the talk about lack of inner-party democracy was all bunkum. "The conference scrutinised nearly 7,000 amendments to the draft programme before finalising the document. It goes to show how the party tried to accommodate wide-ranging opinions...", Mr Bose said.

Mr Bose said the plenum had proved that the principle of democratic centralism could guarantee "true" democratic functioning. "The delegates could freely express their opinions. But true democracy demands once a decision is reached it will have to be accepted by all, no matter whether an individual agrees with it or not," he said.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee scoffed at the call for a third front. "I have been hearing about this for the past two decades. But where is it? Can you see even its shadow in any of the states and Union territories?"

■ Editorial: Plenum gone waste, page 6
■ Karat, Yechury left out in the cold, page 8

successful, but one would have to wait and watch the results. On Mr Chowdhury's expulsion, he said the party had taken a stand and "only time will show what will follow." Mr Chakraborty said he found Mr Basu's politics most acceptable and declared that he won't break the party since he had played an active role in its formation.

Mr Anil Biswas ruled out the possibility of asking former party leaders, including Mr Choudhury, to return. They had left alleging that the CPI-M

Medha begins fast against SC order



Ms Medha Patkar speaks to reporters at her dharna in Bhopal on Wednesday. — AP/PTI

BHOPAL, Oct. 25. — Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Ms Medha Patkar and seven dam oustees began a five-day fast here today to protest against the 18 October Supreme Court ruling clearing the construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam.

Ms Patkar described the majority verdict "illogical, inhuman, undemocratic and anti-people." "The majority judgement is a virtual surrender to the pressures of the state, its powerful machinery and other power-holders at the cost of the have-nots and the weak." — SNS

Bahuguna attacked: A young man, believed to be mentally deranged, today attacked noted environmentalist and Chipko movement leader, Mr Sunder Lal Bahuguna and his wife in Tehri Garhwal, injuring both, adds PTI. The couple were taken to hospital with head injuries, but discharged later in the day. The young man has been arrested.

THE STATESMAN

26 OCT 2000

'Limited autonomy for peace'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SILIGURI, Oct. 26. — Common opposition to the Kamptapuri statehood demand has brought past enemies, the CPI-ML (Santosh Rana faction) and the CPI-M, to the discussion table.

The two parties' leaders are working out ways to calm the volatile situation in North Bengal, with the Naxalites favouring limited autonomy for the region. The Naxalites want the state government to bring North Bengal under the ambit of Article 244 A of the Constitution, allowing the region wide powers drawn from the state and concurrent lists. They also want several corrective measures to check land disputes and boost education.

The CPI-ML faction has held several rounds of talks with the ruling Marxists on these topics. "The response has been encouraging," the CPI-ML politburo member, Mr Vaskar Nandy, said.

Further discussions might lead to a joint course of action, he hoped.

The Naxalites believe the political situation in North Bengal has three main reasons: discontent over loss of land, lack of primary education, and a general feeling of alienation. These are the factors that have catapulted the Kamptapuris to the limelight.

Land reservation for the local population, a check on infiltration, improved primary education and a right to self-governance alone can bring peace to the region, CPI-ML leaders say.

The Naxalites have a suggestion on the language issue too. They believe a child should be taught in his mother tongue at the primary level, with a bridge course letting him catch up on the mainstream languages later.

Education is the best weapon in the fight against bitterness and separatism.

THE STATESMAN

27 OCT 2010

My innings over, declares Jyoti Basu

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 27

TWENTY-THREE YEARS after he took power as a rare elected communist head of Government, the nation's longest-serving Chief Minister is finally taking the bow he had been yearning for, his party denying and nearly everyone expecting.

Jyoti Basu, 86, will quit office in just over a week from now. Friday, November 3, is likely to be his last day at Writers' Buildings. He is likely to attend his last Cabinet meeting on October 30, and deliver his last chief ministerial speech at the Road Congress inauguration at Netaji Indoor Stadium on November 4.

The patriarch's chosen successor, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, will inherit the throne.

"We will get a new Chief Minister," Basu announced today. "The Deputy Chief Minister will take over. I have asked the Chief Secretary to get in touch with the Governor and arrange for the oath-taking ceremony of the new Council of Ministers by the first week of November."

Bhattacharjee and his Council of Ministers are likely to be sworn in on November 6. The leader who would have been Prime Minister four years ago but for the blunder his party recently conceded, finally got his comrades to stop dragging their feet over the retirement he desperately wanted.

"My resignation had been very much on the agenda since December (1999)," the reluctant Chief Minister said immediately after the West Bengal CPI(M) cleared his proposal to quit. "We will take a (formal) decision at the Left Front meeting tomorrow."

But it is not as if the lodestar of Marxist politics in India is about to fade completely

out of public life. He will remain in politics for as long as he lives, Basu promised. "Though I will not remain Chief Minister any more, I am still with the Government. (And) I am with the party till death."

As he girded his starched white dhoti to ride off into a golden sunset, Basu looked back over his shoulder to savour the warm afterglow of the job he thinks he has done well. "It has been a good innings for me as far as governance is concerned. I am happy about it."

There have been failures, but Bengal's Leftist 'revolution' has survived, and for him, that's what counts. "It matters little that I was Chief Minister but more important is the fact that the Left Government is here for 23 years. That is no mean achievement. There are some weaknesses that we have to overcome."

His Government's major achievement, Basu said, had been to carry democracy to the grassroots. "During our time, we have been holding regular polls in the Panchayats and the Municipalities. I understand that the number of Municipalities has also increased. Regarding polls at the State and national levels, the Election Commission has certified the process of peaceful elections."

But the situation at the national level was upsetting. "I am worried about the developments in Delhi," Basu said. "Those who have come to power are barbaric and uncivilised." The only antidote, he said, was to rebuild the Third Front. "The United Front has collapsed. Some of the constituents have joined the NDA. We need to regroup ourselves to hold the secular forces together."

In West Bengal though, the "barbarians" hadn't a ghost of a chance, he was sure. "The (Left) Front is sure to come back again (after the Assembly polls)."

Ashis Chakrabarti
Calcutta, October 27

AS JYOTI Basu finally prepares to take his last bow, admirers and detractors join in asking, "Whither Bengal after Basu?"

To answer that question, it could be worthwhile to try and see what Basu meant for Bengal. Disaster, his critics say. Bengal under Basu, according to them, has been a wasteland, where hollow men ranted and raved, frightening all

talents out of it, where nothing worthwhile ever happened. Basu was the demolition man who never learnt to build anything. Rubbish, Basu's band of admirers in the party and outside would cry. To them, he is the last of the gentlemen politicians, who was also a darling of the masses, and who earned the respect not only of his party faithfuls, but of a wide cross section of the people. To them, he was the man who rose above his party's Marxist dogma and made communism an acceptable face, much like Vajpayee making the Sangh Parivar an acceptable icon.

So you have two Basus and two Bengals. Even assuming that "there are no full stops in India", no one quite denies that Basu's departure from the scene will change it dramatically. The scene may change for his party, the government and also for the State's politics. How much it will change and in what way may be matter of conflicting conjectures.

To begin with the CPI(M), Basu's exit as chief minister will definitely lead to the sharpening of the divide between the "conservatives" and the "liberals" in the party. The chasm that has shown up time and again in the recent past, has widened over the updated party programme. Basu himself has been unhappy with the positions taken by some younger leaders on several important issues, including the revised party programme.

Basu's exit and a split in the party could be too much for the CPI(M) to withstand on the eve of the next Assembly elections, when the party has to contend with an upbeat Mamata Banerjee.

When that happens, things would be far more difficult for Basu's successor — Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee — to handle.

It is quite possible that the party's grip over the government will be tighter in the name of 'collective leadership', as Bhattacharjee fails to live up to the task. But the result would be even greater chaos in the administration. Bhattacharjee's record in governance is not particularly reassuring. But then, the CPI(M) has only a Hobson's choice in him.

Even greater could be the fallout on the unity and functioning of the Left Front. With most partners bitterly resentful of the Marxists' playing the overlord, Basu's absence may see more of mud-slinging and disunity among the Front partners. Basu managed to hold it together. That is why panic-stricken Front partners like the Forward Bloc and the CPI have suggested that superannuated Basu take over the chairmanship of the Left Front.

Mud-slinging, disunity likely among LF partners

A thorough-Red

- Born July, 1914
- After St Xavier's School and Presidency College, goes to UK to train as barrister in the mid-1930s.
- Drawn to communism under the influence of Harry Pollitt and Rajni Palme Dutt
- Returns to India in 1939. Joins Trade Unions affiliated to CPI
- Takes Communist Party membership in 1940
- In 1946, becomes CPI member of the Bengal Provincial Assembly
- Arrested in 1962 in the wake of the Sino-Indian war
- Joins the CPI(M) after the split in the CPI in 1964
- In 1967, becomes Dy-CM in the first non-Congress Ministry of the United Front
- Defeated for the first time in the 'rigged' Assembly elections in 1972
- CM of the first Left Front Government in 1977 and ever since
- In June 1996, misses Prime Ministership of the UF Govt. after his party turns down a proposal to join the Govt. Basu calls the decision a 'historic blunder'
- In January 1999, the UF again proposes his name for Prime Ministership in a bid to stall a BJP-led coalition Govt, but the move fails
- Towards the end of 1998, offers to quit on health grounds, but the party takes nearly two years to let him go.

ON PAGE 3

- Comrades crestfallen, Opp indifferent
- Follow the leader: Somnath wants to quit WBIDC
- Eminent citizens react

Bhujbal's probe casts shadow on Chief Minister

HT Correspondent
Mumbai, October 27

IT IS a Diwali "gift" that Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh is unlikely to forget. Yesterday, Deputy Chief Minister Chhagan Bhujbal announced that he had ordered a criminal investigation into the Pune land de-reservation case that involves the Chief Minister (as alleged by the BJP).

On Friday, Maharashtra political circles were buzzing over the timing and the need for Bhujbal to order an inquiry into the case, which is sub judice.

It may be recalled that Deshmukh filed a Rs 100-crore case against the BJP for dragging his name into what is now known as the Pune land de-reservation case. According to BJP spokesperson Atul Bhatkalkar, several areas that were under the "no development zone" in and around Pune City were converted into residential zones by the Urban Development Ministry, which falls under the Chief Minister's purview. Deshmukh filed a case against the Bhatkalkar.

Bhujbal, of the NCP and the Home Minister, created a rumpus on Thursday when he announced that the CID would look into the scandal. As the matter gathers momentum, both the Congress and the NCP sought to downplay it. Bhujbal said there was no question of investigating Deshmukh. The inquiry, he said, was against the middleman and not the CM.

Minister of State for Home Kripa Shankar Singh, Congress, told *The Hindustan Times*, that Bhujbal had not sprung the surprise to keep Deshmukh and his party under control. "I was aware of the inquiry as was the Chief Minister," he said.

GoM meeting to decide on DTH guidelines today

29/10
Sudha Nagaraj
NEW DELHI 28 OCTOBER

THE CENTRE is determined to go ahead with the introduction of direct-to-home (DTH) telecast service despite the industry's concern about the commercial viability of the premium service. The group of ministers on DTH is scheduled to meet on Sunday to discuss and perhaps finalise several pending issues on the subject.

The most important issue slated to be decided is the mode of dissemination. The GoM has to decide whether DTH should be made available through Doordarshan exclusively, providing for licensed operations by private companies. The other option is to throw the service open to all, with a regulatory mechanism worked in.

The second option brings with it the bogey of foreign equity and related concerns on security and cultural invasion. Said minister for information and broadcasting Sushma Swaraj: "The GoM had asked the I&B ministry to apprise them on two issues — what is the worldwide practice on DTH and why DTH at all? We



Swaraj: Direct approach

have responded and I think we will be nearing a decision very soon," she said. "As for cultural values, the convergence Bill is making way for a content regulator who will protect our interests," she added.

Most countries have been guarded while granting foreign equity in DTH. While the US, France and Japan allow 25 per cent, Canada allows 33 per cent participation.

According to a top I&B official, the government is very keen

to push ahead with the proposal as it is a matter of keeping in tune with technological advancement. "It is technologically feasible and it is time to decide whether to allow it and if so on what platform.

"Security concerns are easily addressable because DTH passes through earth stations. The government has stipulated in all cases that broadcasters should retain and preserve 90 days of material. So we have the power to inspect at any time and if security is being compromised, it can be detected and action taken."

Law minister Arun Jaitley has been entrusted with the task of working out the conditions to be attached for DTH operations.

But what about commercial viability? Some hinge their hopes on the increasing number of cable TV subscribers.

At present, it stands at 30 million households and is expected to rise to 48 million by 2005. Among them is a sizeable chunk of potential DTH subscribers, it is felt.

N. Bhaskar Rao, chairman, Centre for Media Studies, is vehemently opposed to the arithmetic.

The Economic Times

29 OCT 2000

Basu quits, Buddha next CM

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 28

HT/10
29/10
CHIEF MINISTER Jyoti Basu tonight formally submitted his resignation to Governor Viren J Shah, hours after a Left Front meeting put its seal of approval on his resignation and endorsed the name of Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee as his successor.

Bhattacharjee will take oath as the second Chief Minister of the Left Front Government—in power for 24 years—on November 6 after the Governor returns to the city from Darjeeling.

At the Left Front meeting held at the CPI(M)'s Alimuddin Street headquarters this evening, Basu requested Front leaders to accept his resignation. He was ill and in no position to shoulder the burden of running the State Government any more.

Present at the more than one-

hour meeting was Front chairman Sailen Dasgupta, CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas and Politburo member Biman Bose, RSP State secretary Debabrata Bandopadhyay and PWD Minister Kshiti Goswami, CPI leader and Minister for Water Resources Nandagopal Bhattacharya, Forward Bloc State secretary Ashok Ghosh and others.

It was sad that his retirement plans had been leaked to the press before he could discuss them with partners in the Left Front, Basu is said to have told senior Left Front leaders. "But I would request you all to

9.8.10
accept my resignation. This doesn't mean I won't work for the Front and the CPI(M). I would, till my last breath." The patriarch stood steadfast on his decision despite a clamour from some Front partners to reconsider his decision. After the meeting, the Left Front chairman conceded that the partners were upset with Basu's decision. But when he told them that his physical condition didn't permit him to work for more than two hours at a stretch, they had no way but to accept his decision. "This is a crucial juncture. The Assembly elections are drawing close and the

reins of Government ought to be handed over to a younger person who would lead from the front," the outgoing Chief Minister told the Front leaders.

"The Front had earlier selected Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee Deputy Chief Minister. So, it unanimously backed him to be the successor.

The new ministry will be sworn in on November 6. It won't have a Deputy Chief Minister, but the rest of the Cabinet will remain much the same," Dasgupta said. Basu, even after his retirement, would continue as a Politburo member and attend Left Front meetings.

He would come to the party headquarters every evening and would "act as chief adviser to the Left Front". And if health permits, he would lead the Left Front charge in the 2001 elections.

● Related reports on Pages 3 and 5

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2000

H9-12
MR. BASU MAKES HIS BOW 26/10

THE MUCH TALKED about, and debated, retirement of Mr. Jyoti Basu as Chief Minister of West Bengal has become a *fait accompli*, with the CPI(M) and its partners in the ruling Left Front finally bringing themselves up to conceding his insistent plea. The Front leadership, which was reconciled to not having the advantage of seeking a fresh mandate with Mr. Basu as its Chief Ministerial candidate, would have liked him to continue at the helm till the elections were over. It was precisely with that end in view the CPI(M) politburo came up with the proposition of a Deputy Chief Minister to share Mr. Basu's burden as the Head of Government — that was in November last year. In fact, given the successive political preoccupations such as the civic polls, the Panskura parliamentary by-election and the more recent orchestrated campaign by the Trinamool Congress for bringing the State under the President's rule, it was generally believed that Mr. Basu would not insist on stepping down till after the elections, which are some six months away. That hope has however been belied. Considering the delicate state of his health, which showed up rather disturbingly when he was attending the party's central committee meeting in Delhi a few months ago, there is clearly no way he could have been forced to stay on any longer without the party leadership being seen as totally insensitive to the octogenarian leader's well-being. After all, Mr. Basu had on two earlier occasions agreed to put off his retirement in deference to the leadership's wishes. Moreover, there is considerable force in the argument that the interests of the party and the Left Front would be served better if Mr. Basu's successor-nominee (Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya) is given the reins of government much ahead of the elections so that he will get a fair opportunity to strike a rapport with the people.

Though inevitable in its own way, the retirement of Mr. Basu, which at the personal lev-

el marks the end of the longest-ever reign by a Chief Minister, is bound to be a major handicap to the Left Front in general and the CPI(M) in particular especially from the electoral standpoint. Over the two decades and more of his helmsmanship, he came to acquire a patriarchal, charismatic image that served as the unique selling point at the hustings. To Mr. Basu goes the credit for institutionalising coalition politics in West Bengal and he has been the binding force between the CPI(M) and the other constituents of the LF, a testimony to which is found in the responses of the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party to his demitting office. Of late, fault lines, even if feeble, have surfaced in the CPI(M), what with internecine squabbles and group politics affecting its image. As for the LF, there has been a palpable lack of cohesion in its functioning and approaches. Given these weaknesses and the negative signals the electorate at different levels has beamed in recent times, the ruling coalition seems to be very vulnerable on the electoral front. And the advent of the Trinamool Congress, whose maverick leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, is seeking to build herself up to emerge as a 'giant-killer', has if anything served to heighten the LF's vulnerability manifold. That the CPI(M) and the LF should be denied a leader of Mr. Basu's stature as the Chief Ministerial candidate in such a context is what renders the challenge that awaits them in the Assembly poll a formidable one. True, the services of Mr. Basu will be available as poll campaigner and possibly also as chairman of the LF, depending on what role the CPI(M) central leadership chooses to assign him. But the fact remains that, apart from the limitations his ill-health is likely to place on his endeavours in such capacities, they cannot by themselves ensure the LF's return to power. The question is one of the CPI(M) and, by extension, the LF learning to cope with the problems arising in the wake of Mr. Basu's exit.

THE HINDU

30 OCT 2000

Lanka crush Indian resurgence dream

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 29

THE MOTERA Mauler just could not stop smiling. First, throughout his epic-making innings of 189 off 161 balls, grinning every time he hit one of his 21 fours and four sixes. Again, the famous smile flashed often as the Sri Lankan bowlers reduced the Indians to their lowest total ever in One-Day Internationals. India's 54 is the lowest ever at Sharjah and the third lowest in the history of ODIs. Pakistan were bowled out for 43 by South Africa in 1994. India almost beat that mark.

Sanath Jayasuriya, the Sri Lankan captain, however, reserved his widest smile for the last. As he grinned ear-to-ear while taking the Coca-Cola Trophy in Sharjah today, with the biggest-ever victory margin of 245 runs, his counterpart Sourav Ganguly maintained a stunned silence.

Sri Lanka could not have had a more convincing victory. In fact, they appeared to be winners from the first match itself, when they beat India quite comfortably. With an all-win record in the league stages, Jayasuriya's smile just kept getting wider.

The final was a study in contrast between the two innings. While the Sri Lankan batsmen played like devils possessed, the Indians behaved as if there was a devil in the wicket. Russell Arnold was the perfect back-up for Jayasuriya, with a brisk 52 off 62 balls as Sri Lanka reached 299 for five.

In bowling too, the differences were as wide as Jayasuriya's grin. For Sri Lanka, Chaminda Vaas wiped out the top order with five wickets for 14 runs, leaving Muttiah Muralitharan to polish off the tail, conceding just six runs for his three wickets in six overs.

The Indian bowlers, on the other hand, were smashed to all parts of the ground.

This is like India's worst nightmare. After entering the final of the ICC Knock-out meet, India couldn't have sunk to a greater depth. The wounds this time are deep and the healing process will take time.

Match report, photograph on P16

Shah accepts Basu resignation

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 29

CHIEF MINISTER Jyoti Basu's penultimate public meeting tomorrow will focus on the anti-Centre politics that his comrades and he have often pursued. The Left Front will present the outgoing head of its Government with a memo against the "anti-people" oil price hike and alleged Central apathy toward flood victims, which the Chief Minister will forward to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The new role that the CPI(M) has thought up for Basu - national-level leader, focal point and chief architect of the proposed anti-BJP, anti-Congress Third Front - will not, however, be in evidence at the Sahid Minar assembly.

None of the Chief Minister's old friends in the National Front and United Front - former Prime Minister V P Singh for instance -

will be present. Even Harkishen Singh Surjeet, CPI(M) general secretary, has no plans to attend, politburo member Biman Bose revealed.



Governor Viren J. Shah accepted the Chief Minister's resignation today and asked him to continue till Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee takes over on November 6. Basu will, however, continue to occupy the chief ministerial residence at Indira Bhavan, Bose said.

On Saturday, November 4, the Chief Minister will inaugurate the national-level road congress at Netaji Indoor Stadium, and receive a farewell of sorts from party and LF colleagues and members of the new Government.

At Sahid Minar tomorrow, the Left Front with its new constituent

the Soshit Party, will renew its offensive against the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance Government. "We will hold similar meetings in all the district headquarters," Bose said.

He brushed aside Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee's claim that the LF Government could have brought down LPG prices by tempering sales tax a little. "She is trying to divert public attention to a non-issue. If she is so concerned about tax rates why is she not asking her BJP colleagues to slash import duty on crude petroleum?"

It was beneath his dignity to react to Mamata's comments on Basu's retirement, Bose declared. "Had she been impartial, she would have given the same advice (that the Government should resign and announce fresh polls) to the BJP-led Uttar Pradesh Government that has recently witnessed a change of Chief Ministers."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 OCT 2000

MAMATA WRITES TO VAJPAYEE

Cabinet skips petro prices rollback

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 30. The Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, today wrote to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, suggesting ways to reduce the impact of the hike in prices of kerosene and cooking gas, but the Cabinet today did not take up the issue at its meeting.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, she recalled that Mr. Vajpayee had given her a written assurance that the prices of oil products would be reviewed after his return from knee surgery in Mumbai. But the rollback proposal was not considered at the Cabinet meeting, she said.

Ms. Banerjee, who had earlier resigned from the Cabinet in protest against the price hike, withdrew it only after the Prime Minister's assurance. But he had noted in that statement that the review would be done after monitoring the international prices. As of now, these have shown a hardening trend especially after the flare-up in West Asia. The situation has worsened with the rupee having simultaneously depreciated against the dollar.

The Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, who had already stated that the oil pool deficit was rising by Rs. 200 crores a month in the new scenario, declined to comment on the issue after the meeting. He said the final decision rested with the Prime Minister.

Bill on NBFCs

The Cabinet, however, decided to bring in legislation for regulation of non-banking financial institutions (NBFCs) and approved an ordinance for creation of a dedicated fund for financing development and maintenance of the national highway network. It also decided to maintain the fare to be paid by Haj pilgrims at Rs. 12,000 a head for the pilgrimage in 2001.

The new dedicated fund for development and maintenance of national highways would be part of the existing central road fund (CRF), under which an

additional cess on petrol and diesel was collected. The CRF has already collected over Rs. 5,000 crores.

Announcing these decisions, the Union Minister and Cabinet spokesperson, Mr. Pramod Mahajan said the Bill on NBFCs would replace the provisions relating to financial companies in the RBI Act. The new Bill would include a prohibition on acceptance of deposits by unincorporated bodies and is expected to be introduced in the winter session of Parliament. The aim was to ensure that the NBFC sector grew in a healthy manner.

It was also decided to close down the Vadodra-based Petrofil Cooperative Limited, set up in 1974 for the manufacture of man-made fibres such as polyester filament yarn. The company had been incurring losses for several years now.

Besides, it decided to repeal 21 "outdated" pieces of legislation as part of the administrative reform process. The laws that are to be removed from the statute book include the Life Insurance (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1956, General Insurance (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1971, and the Allianz and Stuttgarter Life Insurance Bank (Transfer) Act, 1950.

The other laws being deleted are: the Civil Courts Amins Act, 1856, the Bombay High Court (Letters Patent) Act, 1866, the Acting Judges Act, 1867, the Procedure of the High Court for Uttar Pradesh, 1869, the Presidency Magistrates (Court-fees) Act, 1877, Punjab Courts (Supplementing) Act, 1919, the Federal Court Act, 1937, the Federal Court (Enlargement of Jurisdiction) Act, 1947, the Abolition of Privy Council Jurisdiction Act, 1949, Rajasthan High Court Ordinance, 1949, the Bhopal and Vindhya Pradesh (Courts) Act, 1950, the Mysore High Court (Extension of Jurisdiction to Coorg) Act, 1952, the Manipur Court-Fees (Amendment and Validation) Act, 1953, the Goa, Daman, and Diu Judicial Commissioner's Court (Declaration as High Court) Act, 1964, the Colonial Prisoners Removal Act, 1984, and the Unclaimed Deposits Acts of 1866, and 1870.

Consensus on Ajit Jogi as Chhattisgarh CM?

By Our Staff Correspondent

RAIPUR, OCT. 30. The supporters of the former Union Minister, Mr. V. C. Shukla, have been isolated and a broad consensus appears to have emerged in favour of the AICC spokesman, Mr. Ajit Jogi, at a Congress Legislature Party meeting here today to elect the leader to be sworn in as the first Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh. The State comes into existence on Wednesday.

The formal announcement on the CLP leader's election would be made tomorrow after the views of all the MLAs were considered, the AICC observer, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, told reporters. The opinion of a majority of the CLP members would also be ascertained. He said, obviously referring to some television reports yesterday indicating that Mr. Jogi's name had been cleared by the party high command, that the MLAs had been told to ignore the TV reports.

After the CLP members were addressed by the senior leaders, there was a short lunch break and the second session began at 4 p.m. with the AICC observers hearing the views of the MLAs on a one-to-one basis. Earlier, some MLAs from the V. C. Shukla camp, angry at the CLP leader's election process, were said to have pressed for an election. Others, however, said it was not needed if the majority was in favour of electing the leader through a consensus.

Digvijay throws weight behind Jogi: Page 9

Governors for three new States

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 30. Mr. Surjit Singh Barnala, senior Akali Dal leader and former Union Minister, was today appointed the Governor of Uttaranchal.

Mr. Prabhat Kumar, who is retiring as Cabinet Secretary tomorrow, was named the Governor of Jharkhand while Mr. Dinesh Nandan Sahaya, a former Indian Police Service officer, was appointed the Governor of Chhattisgarh.

According to a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique, the appointments would be effective from the date they assume charge of their respective offices.

With the announcement of the gubernatorial appointments, the stage is set for fine-tuning the administrative details. While Chhattisgarh will come into being on November 1, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand will come into existence on

THE HINDU

31 OCT 2000

Mamata mum on rollback at Cabinet meet

31/10 Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 30 OCTOBER

THE FIREBRAND Trinamul Congress leader, Ms Mamata Banerjee, demonstrated none of her fire as she refrained from raising the subject of petro price rollback at the Cabinet meeting on Monday, inspiring speculation that she may have run her course on this particular issue.

Emerging from the meeting, Ms Banerjee said she had written a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Vajpayee suggesting "alternative" solutions to the oil pool deficit crisis.

Refusing to divulge the contents of the letter which she described as "confidential," she also said her letter came after she received a phone call from Mr Vajpayee on Sunday night.

In an attempt to impart her letter with greater political significance than it perhaps merits, she said, "he said he wanted to meet me. I replied that I will await his conve-

nience," she said, dismissing questions about her motives for keeping quiet in the Cabinet meeting on Monday. The letter, she said, was merely a reminder to the PM about his promise to her.

Mr Vajpayee's promise of a "relook" at the petro price issue after his return from Mumbai was interpreted by Ms Banerjee's party as an indication of possible rollback.

However, with international oil prices hovering over the \$31-mark on Monday, the government cannot possibly roll back the price hike without incurring severe economic costs.

Ms Banerjee cannot be unaware of the economic compulsions for the price hike, but her silence and tacit acquiescence to the realities of governance may be construed as a retreat.

However, as someone facing the hustings in Bengal in another few months, she cannot possibly display a tactical political defeat on an issue she raked over the coals, so to speak.

This was also evident in her assertion today that she will make a formal decision on the political future of the emotive question on November 2-3. The contents of the letter, therefore, is crucial.

Ms Banerjee's "alternative" solutions also have a dubious pedigree. In her last railway budget, she attempted to silence critics of her refusal to raise passenger fares by proposing just such an "alternative" solution — of leasing railways land adjoining the tracks to companies setting up optic fibre networks in the country.

The ambitious Right of Way project remained on paper, since it has not resulted in a single rupee in extra revenue for the railways.

For his part, the PM's managers will be waiting for Opec countries, Iran, Qatar, Algeria and Kuwait to raise their output by 5,00,000 barrels to stabilise world prices, though its impact on domestic Indian decisions is still uncertain.

The Economic Times

31 OCT 2000

Minister links Trinamul to Kamtapuris

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 30. — The Trinamul Congress, along with the Ulfa, is a friend of Kamtapuri activists, Mr Asok Bhattacharya said today. Police of the North Bengal districts will carry out joint raids to flush out "terrorists" associated with Kamtapuri activists, the state urban development minister said.

He also showed reporters a letter that the Kamtapuri People's Party chief had written to Congress MP, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, thanking him for highlighting the plight of the oppressed and backward section of North Bengal.

Trinamul Congress leaders, he claimed, meet Kamtapuri activists, and "protect" them. He said also that "the Kamtapuris are getting support from the Ulfa and undergoing training in Bhutan. They have amassed a lot of money and built up a stock of arms and ammunition."

Mr Asok Bhattacharya was speaking to reporters after a meeting called by Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya. The home secretary, Mr Sourin Roy, and DGP, Mr Dipak Sanyal, attended the meeting. Mr Buddhadev did not comment on what the meeting discussed.

It was learnt, however, that he has asked police to intensify vigil in Jalpaiguri, Siliguri and Jooch Behar and try to instil confidence in people. Joint



A Left Front rally at Siliguri on Monday, protesting against Saturday's assassination of Dipankar Ghosh at Phansidewa. — The Statesman

operations will be conducted in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling borders. There have been quite a few some murders that were attributed to Kamtapuri activists, as well as threats and

extortions. Mr Asok Bhattacharya blames it on the Centre's move

to create smaller states of Uttaranchal, Vananchal and Chhattisgarh. "This has

inspired the Kamtapuris to resort to terror and press for a separate state. We won't tolerate this. The movement will be countered politically. Our party secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, will hold meetings to explain the government stand," he said.

Siliguri bandh peaceful

The 12-hour bandh called by the Left Front in Siliguri subdivision was observed peacefully today. The bandh was called in protest against the killing of the CPI-M leader and additional public prosecutor, Dipankar Ghosh, at Phansidewa.

Ghosh was shot dead while returning from his tea plantation. The assailants fled on his two-wheeler. There has been no arrests so far, police said.

The town wore a sombre look today as life came to a standstill. Shops and other business establishments remained closed. Motor vehicles and rickshaws stayed off the roads. The bandh was total in Siliguri proper with even the small tea and food stalls keeping shutters down.

The bandh also affected movement to and from Nepal at the Mechi border near Naxalbari. People had to walk long distances to reach their intended destinations. The effect of the bandh also spilled over to adjacent areas in Jalpaiguri district. Bandh supporters also put up road blocks at various points on the state highway.

TEA FOR TERROR 10

^{3/1/10}
Secessionism, in north Bengal, is rapidly becoming an unmanageable problem. The Rajbanshis have been demanding a separate Kamtapuri state for a while now, and their demands — founded on familiar ethnic, linguistic and territorial claims — are becoming increasingly violent and disruptive. And the state has so far shown every sign of being inept and evasive in dealing with the situation. There have been several killings recently, apart from many episodes of extortion and abduction. What used to be passed off as sporadic is now amounting to a serious crisis in five districts of north Bengal — Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, parts of Darjeeling and North and South Dinajpur. One sector emerging as particularly vulnerable to this form of violence comprises of the small tea estates near Siliguri and Jalpaiguri. Several features of Kamtapuri terrorism emerge from a consideration of the recent plantation killings here.

First, there is a complete absence of concrete evidence in the aftermath of most of these episodes. This makes it impossible to bring specific charges against the Kamtapur People's Party or its banned terrorist front, the Kamtapur Liberation Organization, for any of these incidents. Police raids on the committee leaders of these outfits have revealed no weapons, although an examination of the lethal bullets indicate the use of AK-47 rifles. This, in turn, points to the Kamtapuris' links with the United Liberation Front of Asom, who are known to train and assist Kamtapuri terrorism locally and from Bhutan. Second, the violence directed at the small tea-planters gets taken up into the local corruption that implicates them in irregularities related to real estate promotion. The dubiousness of some of these small plantations makes it difficult for them to claim entitlement to proper protection from the militants. Dipankar Ghosh, a planter killed recently, was also identified with the Communist Party of India (Marxist). The Kamtapuri movement is often perceived as being hostile to the CPI(M), although many of the former's cadre are drawn from the latter's frontline organizations. Finally, and perhaps most urgently, the West Bengal government will have to restore to the region a sense of security and of economic potential, both of which are being gravely compromised because of the intensification of terror among the common people. Tea planters and the Forward Bloc have severally marshalled their own security forces. But this cannot be taken for granted by the government. The police, army and special combat forces will have to get their act together without delay. So must the state government, which has so far made vague suggestions about the involvement of the Inter-Services Intelligence, and then gone on to do very little about it. Meanwhile, the terrorism is getting more systematic (especially with the approaching elections) and West Bengal will have fewer reasons, each day, to be smugly setting itself apart from the escalating violence incapacitating the Northeast.

THE TELEGRAPH

1971

Basu fit certificate for Buddha

BY A STAFF REPORTER

Calcutta, Oct. 30: Jyoti Basu today said Buddhadev Bhattacharya was the fittest to be his successor because of his capability and experience.

"He (Bhattacharya) is neither a new entrant nor a child. He is in politics from his childhood days and has gradually built himself up through student and youth movements. He will be able to run the government well," the outgoing chief minister said.

But he added that Bhattacharya would have to work in tandem with all the Left Front partners. "Though an individual has a vital role to play, his is not the final say. There is the party, the organisation, programmes and policies, which are also of utmost importance," Basu said.

Speaking to reporters in his office at Writers' Buildings, Basu said Bhattacharya will lead from the front in the Assembly elections and "we will help him".

Basu today addressed his last public rally as chief minister. (Picture above by Amit Datta)

Justifying his decision to retire, Basu said he was too ill to shoulder the heavy workload of the government. "I have been chief minister for over 23 years and have tried to do whatever my party instructed. I became chief minister not for myself but to work for the people. If I cannot work, why should I remain in the chair? Let someone who can work take over," he added.

The chief minister reacted sharply to the Trinamul Congress' charge that he was fleeing

the battlefield. "Let them give me a medicine to remain strong and healthy, I shall continue in my chair," he said.

Asked about his plans after retirement, Basu said he was stepping down as chief minister but was not quitting politics or his party. He would follow the party's instructions.

Basu felt the formation of a third front was essential to oust the BJP-led coalition at the Centre. "We all have to try to form a powerful third front. Though it is

a tough job, we have to try seriously," he said. Asked if he would like to head the front, Basu said it was not important who would be the leader but it is vital to form the front first.

Trying to explain his popularity, Basu said: "I do not know the reason, but I have been getting love and support from the people for the past 23 years and I am grateful to them. Perhaps people love me because I am running the government for so many years."

People had lined up outside

Basu's office today with bouquets and donations to the chief minister's relief fund.

Basu spoke to reporters tirelessly and even called Bhattacharya to pose with him. "You are now information minister and the press photographers want to take a photo of both of us. Sit beside me. After a few days, you will have to sit on my chair."

The state government will preserve the wooden chair from which Basu ruled Bengal.

■ More reports on Page 8

THE TELEGRAPH

31 OCT 2000

BJP in a fix as Sushma rejects spokesperson's post yet again

Kalyani Shanker
New Delhi, August 31

Cabinet Reshuffle

FINDING A replacement for BJP spokesperson Venkaiah Naidu appears to be holding up Cabinet expansion plans. Efforts to persuade Ms Sushma Swaraj to take up the post have not succeeded. There is also speculation that the Cabinet expansion may take place after the Prime Minister returns from his trip abroad, if it does not take place on September 4.

New BJP president Bangaru Laxman had personally requested Ms Swaraj to take up the responsibility, to which the sulking Ms Swaraj said a firm "no."

This is the third time she has refused to accept the party post since 1998. She is reportedly hurt after being sidelined since becoming the Delhi CM and the party losing the Assembly elections. Since then, her chances of getting a Cabinet berth dimmed as she was clubbed with two other former Delhi Chief Ministers — Madan Lal Khurana and Sahib Singh Verma.

She sportingly accepted the party decision to have her contest against Congress president Sonia Gandhi during the 1999 polls from Bellary. Though she lost, she gave Mrs Gandhi a stiff fight. However, she did not find a Cabinet berth, and, as a sop, only got a Rajya Sabha berth from UP



According to top BJP sources, Mr Laxman will be finalising his team in the next three days. He is scheduled to meet Prime Minister A B Vajpayee in a day or two. BJP sources indicated the party chief may zero in on a panel of spokespersons and the names circulated include party general secretary Narendra Modi and senior leader K N Govindacharya.

Mr Venkaiah Naidu at the moment is functioning in three capacities currently — as a general secretary, spokesperson and the co-ordinator between the Centre and the party.

The PM has indicated he would like to have Mr Naidu in his Cabinet, and that was the reason Mr Naidu cancelled his trip to the US last week to be available for the swearing-in ceremony.

Mr Naidu, who was among those considered for the party's top position, personally prefers the party job but has left it to the PM and Mr Laxman to decide. He is tipped to get the Information and Broadcasting or the Power Ministry.

The power portfolio at the moment is with the Prime Minister after the demise of Mr Rangarajan Kumaramangalam. The I&B Ministry, at the moment is with Mr Arun Jaitely, who is also holding the law portfolio, after Mr Ram Jethmalani's exit.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2000

Cabinet approves major reforms in telecom sector, FDI

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Barely a week before Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's U.S. visit, the Union cabinet on Thursday approved major reforms in the telecom sector and the foreign direct investment (FDI) regime, seeking to boost the government's market reforms credentials.

Close on the heels of the opening up (August 15) of long-distance telephony to the private sector, the cabinet decided to convert the government's department of telecom services (DTS) into a public limited company, called Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, on October 1.

The cabinet also opened up the FDI regime, allowing the automatic clearance of 100 per cent foreign equity in all sectors, barring cigarettes, alcohol, narcotics and atomic substances, in units to be located in the special economic zones.

In another move, automatic clearance was allowed for 100 per cent foreign equity in several telecom and IT segments, such as Internet service providers (ISPs) not having gateways, electronic mail and voice mail. For other services such as basic and cellular telephony, the foreign equity cap continues to be 49 per cent.

DTS will be corporatised, with a paid-up share capital of Rs 5,000 crore and an authorised capital of Rs 10,000 crore. Corporatisation will mean that the government will no longer be in the business of providing telephone services.

The decision, however, quickly drew flak from the telecom employees' unions, which held that the new corporation would not be financially viable and could jeopardise the target of providing communication linkages in far-flung areas. They also apprehended that the government would eventually divest half of its stake in the new company.

Communications minister Ram Vilas Paswan said the interests of employees would be fully protect-

ed after corporatisation and that the government was now negotiating with the unions on various staff-related issues.

The slew of policy reforms approved by the cabinet included liberalisation of the royalty payment regime and the facility of automatic clearance for offshore venture capital companies to investment in domestic venture capital undertakings as well as other companies.

The liberalised royalty payment regime will make automatic the payment of a royalty of eight per cent on exports and five per cent on domestic sales by wholly-owned subsidiaries to offshore parent companies. Also, the payment of two per cent royalty for exports and one per cent for domestic sales will be allowed automatically on use of trademarks and brand names of the foreign collaborator without technology transfer.

The cabinet also cleared a plan for restructuring the income-tax administration. The restructuring will involve the abolition of posts at the lower level and the creation of posts at higher levels of chief

commissioners and commissioners. The present staff strength of the income-tax department at 77,989 will stand reduced to 55,234 in the process.

In another

decision, the cabinet allowed the open market sale of rice to the extent of three million tonnes during 2000-2001 to reduce stocks which have mounted to 14.4 million tonnes against the buffer requirement of 10 million tonnes of rice. A high-level committee will fix the prices for open market sale.

The Union cabinet also decided to introduce in Parliament a constitution amendment bill to extend the embargo on fresh delimitation of constituencies upto 2026 but increase the number of reserved scheduled castes and scheduled tribes seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies on the basis of 1991 census.

BYE-BYE DIRECT CONTROL

- Government decides to corporatise DTS as Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd from October 1, with a paid-up share capital of Rs 5,000 crore
- Interest of employees will be fully protected, says communication minister
- Policy reforms approved by the cabinet include liberalisation of the royalty payment regime and the facility of automatic clearance for offshore venture capital companies

✓
Move to freeze LS, Assembly seats till 2026

Cabinet clears I-T dept revamp, DTS privatisation

5/11
119

9-11-93

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 31. — The Cabinet today gave its nod for restructuring of the Department of Income Tax — to increase productivity and cut manpower. It also decided to bring in a constitutional amendment in Parliament's winter session to freeze the Lok Sabha and Assembly seats at the current level till 2026.

The constituencies, however, will be re-organised in such a manner that the number of voters in all of them remain more or less the same.

A proposal for cadre review and restructuring of the Indian Economic Service was also approved.

The Cabinet hopes to downsize I-T staff marginally by introducing automation, an official spokesperson said after the Cabinet meeting.

The decision was aimed at increasing revenue collections, productivity and improving services to tax payers. It would also cut back expenditure, improve career prospects and standardise work norms, the spokesperson said.

The quantum of direct tax collection has gone up to about Rs 55,000 crore from Rs 10,000 crore in the early nineties. The number of tax-payers also shot to 250 lakh from 80 lakh during the same period.

After the decision is implemented, there would be a phased reduction of over 2000 jobs over the next five years. Available manpower would be retrained and redeployed.

Better services would cut down on delay, meaning a saving on payment of interest to tax payers.

The Cabinet also gave its approval for creation/upgradation of four posts at the additional secretary level and 14 at

the level of joint secretary in the Indian Economic Service. "It will widen the envisaged scope and role of the IES in new economic departments," the spokesperson said.

SC/ST seats

The Cabinet today agreed to increase SC/ST seats in proportion to the population on the basis of 1991 census. The number of reserved constituencies in the Lok Sabha is expected to increase by seven after this exercise.

TELECOM PROTEST

NEW DELHI, Aug. 31. — Seven telecom employee organisations will protest against DTS corporatisation tomorrow, despite Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's assurance that workers' interests would be safeguarded after Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited is installed.

Nearly 32,000 telecom staff of West Bengal and Sikkim will demonstrate for two hours tomorrow outside telephone exchanges to protest against the government's "irrational" moves. — UNI

The Union communications minister, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, has welcomed the decision, calling it unique. He said this was the first time that the Centre had protected the interests of the scheduled castes.

The spokesperson said the legislation on seats freeze aims at continuing the embargo on delimitation till 2026. It would boost measures to stabilise the population. The last such exercise was undertaken on the basis of the 1971 census through a constitutional amendment in 1972.

In 1975, Indira Gandhi had

put a freeze on delimitation of constituencies till the 2001 census to boost family planning norms. The decision is in line with recommendations of the government's Population Policy.

Readjustment and rationalisation of territorial constituencies, without altering the number of seats allotted to each state, would remove imbalances caused by uneven growth of population in different constituencies.

DTS corporatisation

The Cabinet today also gave the green light to the launch of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited on 1 October, as part of the government's decision to corporatise the Department of Telecom Services, reports UNI.

The company would have an authorised capital of Rs 10,000 crore and a paid up share capital of Rs 5,000 crore.

Making the announcement, Mr Ramvilas Paswan and Mr Arun Jaitley told reporters that the government was considering major concerns of DTS employees about their financial viability, job security and post retirement benefits. A group of ministers had already met twice and another meeting would be held to look into the concerns of the employees.

16th Law Commission

The 16th Law Commission of India was constituted today for three years with effect from tomorrow. The 15th Law Commission's three-term expired today. Chairman of the outgoing Commission, Mr Justice BP Jeevan Reddy, will be the chairman of the next commission too.

■ Another report on page 10

Bill in winter session to freeze LS, Assembly seats till 2026

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 31. The Union Cabinet today decided to set up a Delimitation Commission and entrust it with readjustment and rationalisation of both Parliamentary and Legislative Assembly constituencies. The Election Commission had been wanting to do the delimitation work.

The Cabinet, which met here, also approved the introduction of a Constitution Amendment Bill in the winter session to give effect to the decision taken by the Government a few months ago to freeze the number of seats in Parliament and Assemblies till 2026, but at the same time to readjust and rationalise the constituencies' territory according to the 1991 census. It also decided to re-fix the number of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes on the basis of the 1991 census.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, the Dalit leader and Union Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, said the SCs/STs population has gone up by three per cent since 1971, when the number of seats for

them was last reserved. Delimitation assumes urgency, especially in Uttar Pradesh where elections are due next year. In Uttaranchal, to be carved out from the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh, 60 Assembly constituencies have to be demarcated from the existing 20-plus. The Election

Highlights of Cabinet decision

- Freezing of the Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies for the next 25 years at the existing level.
- The number of reserve seats for THE SCs/STs to go up by seven in proportion to the increase in population.
- Nod for proposal to set up Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited with an authorised capital of Rs. 10,000 crores.
- Nod for restructuring of the Central Board of Direct Taxes.
- Rules for foreign direct investment in four sectors including telecommunication liberalised.

Commission had been repeatedly emphasising that though it was the prerogative of the Government to decide on the number of constituencies, the task of re-organising them to ensure a uniform size should be left to it. For, as an impartial constitutional body, it was in a position to undertake delimitation without fear or favour. The EC also pointed out that on several occasions it had undertaken the task, in the absence of a delimitation commission or committee. This happened when States such as Goa were constituted.

It also wrote to the Centre immediately after the last Lok Sabha poll. The EC's stand, however, has not found favour with several political parties, including the Congress(I). At an all-party meeting convened by the Government in May this year, political leaders differed on a proposal to entrust the job to the Commission.

Parties such as the Congress(I) felt that entrusting delimitation to it would increase the load of an already overburdened Commission. Political parties had been equally divided on the subject at an all-party meeting convened by the Commission in April.

THE HINDU

Mamata raises quit spectre

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Sept. 3: Mamata Banerjee today threatened to resign from the Vajpayee Cabinet for not being able to bring "peace" to Bengal villages.

The Trinamul Congress leader and railway minister made the threat at the party's policy-making body which met until late tonight after the *maha mahamichhil* (grand procession).

Sudip Bandopadhyay, Trinamul MP, said Mamata decided not to force the issue after she received at least six phone calls from BJP leaders, including home minister L.K. Advani, when the meeting was going on at Nizam Palace.

"Mamata said she wanted to quit as she had failed to mount pressure on the BJP-led government to declare five Bengal districts as disturbed, let alone impose President's rule," he said.

He said a team of Trinamul leaders would call on the Governor tomorrow and submit a memorandum demanding that Midnapore, Birbhum, Hooghly, Bankura and Burdwan be declared "disturbed".

Mamata also announced that she will undertake a three-day visit to trouble-torn areas in Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly tomorrow. After that, she will convene another meeting of the policy-making body.

Sources said Mamata told today's meeting that when people belonging to minority communities, scheduled castes and tribes and women and children were

being attacked, the Centre should intervene. "We will have to convince the Vajpayee government that the situation in the state warrants immediate central intervention. Otherwise, what is the use of my being a Union minister from Bengal?" Mamata wondered.

Even if today's threat was not for real, the BJP-led government can expect the Trinamul leader to keep up the pressure for action on Bengal till the elections.

By being seen as pressuring the Centre to act, she keeps the Left Front on tenterhooks, especially if Jyoti Basu steps down. With Basu out of the way, it becomes that much more easy for Delhi to act. As of now, high-level government sources ruled out interfering in Bengal.

Trinamul leader Pankaj Banerjee said Mamata will continue "the threat until the Centre meets our demand".

If having to live with an increasingly demanding Mamata was one piece of bad news for Delhi, the other was the hint of a group of BJP workers joining Trinamul. After leading a mammoth procession through the city, Mamata declared at a rally that some BJP leaders were about to switch parties. "Parasbabu has told me he wants to join Trinamul," she said.

The induction of Paras Dutta, former general secretary of the Bengal BJP, is expected to be formalised shortly. Sources close to Dutta said at least 1,200 supporters, including key party functionaries, will follow suit.

"Those who are being sidelined have no option but to join Trinamul," said another former general secretary Rahul Sinha.

BJP state president Asim Ghosh, however, claimed only a few would cross over to Trinamul. "This will not affect the relations between the parties," he added.

With the chipping away at the BJP block about to begin, the denudation of the Congress camp continued apace. Two MLAs — Motahar Hossain from Birbhum and Phani Bhusan Roy from Malda — joined Trinamul today.

Mamata's *maha mahamichhil* — in protest against the "reign of terror unleashed by the CPM" — turned out to be a huge show resplendent with colourful tableaux

and effigies depicting the "end of Marxist rule in West Bengal".

The procession snaked its way from the foot of Gandhi's statue on Mayo Road, along Jawaharlal Nehru Road and C.R Avenue towards Shyambazar.

At one point of time, when the head of the procession was nearing Shyambazar, the tail was yet to leave the Esplanade area.

It took Mamata nearly four hours to reach Shyambazar where she addressed the rally from atop a vehicle as no dais had been built on her instructions in deference to rules which do not allow it.

"In Bengal, the state is sponsoring terrorism. CPM cadre are taking over village after village in rural Bengal with arms supplied by the administration," Mamata said.

"There is absolute dictatorship going on in Bengal. Our struggle will continue until the CPM is ousted from the state," she said to thunderous applause.

She appealed to people to exercise austerity during the Pujas and contribute to the rehabilitation of thousands who were made homeless in the troubled districts.

Govt to sell 4 refineries to IOC, BP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 4. — The Union Cabinet today decided to sell its four stand-alone refineries to Indian Oil Corporation and Bharat Petroleum for about Rs 1,800 crore. This will make the two PSUs stronger and fetch more value when the government goes for IOC's disinvestment later.

The Cabinet also decided to close down non-viable NTC units, but offered to give attractive VRS to its staff. The

NCT has 119 mills, of which 11 are in West Bengal. A case-by-case approach will be taken by the textile ministry on the units, which will be referred to the BIFR.

The government has decided to revise the price of petrol only after 19 September, when the Prime Minister returns after his US tour. Till then, the petroleum ministry will assess the impact of the 10 September OPEC meeting.

Petroleum Minister Mr Ram Naik said IOC would take over the Chennai refinery, where the government has 52.5 per cent equity worth Rs 601.38 crore. IOC will also take over the Bongaigaon refinery where the government equity is 74.46 per cent (Rs 460.97 crore).

Bharat Petroleum will take

over the Kochi refinery, where the government has 55.04 per cent equity of about Rs 701.15 crore, and 19 per cent equity (Rs 173 crore) of IBP in Assam's Numaligarh refinery.

The takeover would enable these refineries to have a better marketing set-up, Mr Naik said. Their restructuring process will be completed by 2002. But he refused to say if the revenue from the sale of the refineries would be used on oil activities or to bridge the revenue deficit.

OBC list grows

NEW DELHI, Sept. 4. — The Cabinet today approved the inclusion of new castes/communities in the OBC list. It will now include new castes from several states, including West Bengal. — SNS

Today's decision will have a far-reaching impact on IOC's disinvestment. Ten per cent of its share will be disinvested sometime later.

It has been decided to extend purchase

price preference (PPP) scheme to state-owned companies by March '2002 for supplying equipment to projects promoted by other PSUs, clearing the way for bidding of seven power projects by NTPC for a total capacity of about 6,000 MW. This will largely benefit Bhel, adds PTI.

The inter-ministerial group on disinvestment has decided to engage an advisor to finalise the sell-off of Hindustan Zinc Ltd and has fixed a time-frame of 180 days to complete the process. The government has already offloaded 24.08 per cent of its share.

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

- 5 SEP 2000

PM dials Mamata to stall quit move

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE, Sept. 5. — Two days after Miss Mamata Banerjee threatened to quit the Union Cabinet in protest against the Centre's "failure" to intervene in West Bengal, the Prime Minister today called her up and suggested she remain "quiet" till his return from the USA.

The railway minister said Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee rang her up in Bishnupur and told her that he would consider her stand on West Bengal's law and order.

She said she would urge the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of the NDA after his return to discuss the issue of imposing the Disturbed Area Act in five districts.

The imposition of the Act, Miss Banerjee said, was recommended by the six-member NDA team in its report to the convenor, Mr George Fernandes. The team had visited strife-torn Kespur and Garbeta.

BJP president Mr Bangaru Laxman told *The Statesman* that Miss Banerjee's threat to

Basu differs with Indrajit

CALCUTTA, Sept. 5. — Mr Jyoti Basu today said he did not agree with CPI leader Mr Indrajit Gupta that both Trinamul and the CPI-M were responsible for the violence in Midnapore. "We don't agree. Our supporters, who had been forced to abandon their homes, are coming back."

He blasted Miss Mamata Banerjee for demanding imposition of Article 356 in the state. "She believes in violence. You people have projected her. What she says is utter nonsense," he told reporters. — SNS

resign was not aimed at pressuring the Centre, adds SNS from New Delhi.

She knew the limitations of the government, he said. She was just trying to tell the people of West Bengal that she was trying her best to get them a reprieve from Left Front "misrule". She had not said she

would withdraw support to the NDA, he added.

Most BJP leaders have sympathy for Miss Banerjee's struggle against the Left Front. But she has no option but to resign in the face of the NDA government's inability to accept her demand for central intervention. "After all she has to do her politics in West Bengal. She can nominate anyone in her place," one of the leaders said.

BJP leaders also feel Miss Banerjee cannot carry a credible fight against the Left Front without resigning from the Cabinet. As for the BJP's role, party leaders are resigned to the fact that they will have to be led by Miss Banerjee in West Bengal.

The most important thing is to dethrone the Left Front, a top BJP leader said, and hoped that the party would not allow "personal ambition" of state leaders to come in the way.

- Mamata opens rly project, page 4
- Editorial: Balancing act, page 6

THE STATESMAN

- 6 SEP 2000

Govt ends VSNL hold on ISD

Private operators will be allowed entry from April 2002

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, SEPT 6

ON the eve of Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to the US, the Government today decided to end the monopoly of Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd (VSNL) on international telephone calls (ISD) from April 2002, advancing it by two years. The opening up of International Long Distance (ILD) comes three weeks after the government opened National Long Distance (NLD) or STD calls also for private operators.

As reported by *The Indian Express* on September 5 the decision to advance the ending of VSNL's monopoly and open international calls for private participation ahead of the PM's departure for the US, was taken after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) here today.

The exact parameters for entry of private companies in the field of ILD will be

VSNL to offer STD services

- Permission to enter NLD to provide STD services
- Rs 100 crore entry fee for NLD to be reimbursed to VSNL
- Rs 400 crore bank guarantee for NLD not to be charged from VSNL
- Revenue share for NLD paid to govt would be reimbursed for five years from 1.4.2000
- VSNL to get Category 'A' all-India ISP licence.

decided later after consultations with the Telecom Regulatory Authority. But the PM will be able to announce the new ILD Policy during his US visit for any American companies waiting to be impressed.

The consumers are expected to benefit from the new policy, since costs of international calls are expected to fall by as much as 30 to 40 per cent. At present a call from India to the

minute, while the same call from the US to India costs as little as Rs 20. The difference can broadly be considered to be monopoly costs/profits. With the sector opened up, costs are expected to fall dramatically.

In return for dismantling VSNL's monopoly two years ahead of the scheduled date of March 31, 2004, the government has also worked out a compensation package for VSNL.

The package will allow VSNL to enter into the National Long Distance (NLD) sector. As a gesture of compensation, VSNL will be reimbursed the Rs 100 crore-entry fee. VSNL will not be required to pay the Rs 400 crore performance bank guarantee (PBG) till such time that it retains its public sector status. This clearly means that if after disinvestment the government share in VSNL drops below 51 per cent, these sops will not be available to the company.

The government will also reimburse

Govt ends VSNL hold

VSNL for the revenue share paid by it to the government for operating NLD services in the country for the first five years beginning from April 1, 2001.

The package of compensation offered to VSNL for ending its monopoly ahead of schedule also includes an 'A' category licence for internet service provider (ISP) operations. VSNL currently offers internet access in six cities and the 'A' category licence would enable the

public sector firm to offer the service across the country.

The government has also appointed Solomon Brothers as consultants if any additional component of compensation is required to be extended to the VSNL. The consultant is expected to submit its report within two weeks.

Subject to assessment by the consultant the government has made provisions for some extra compensation for VSNL.

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 SEP 2001

Fernandes to assess Mamata's grievance

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 6

7/9 Centre State
HP1

THE CENTRE today decided to depute Defence Minister and NDA convenor George Fernandes to West Bengal to assess the gravity of the political violence in five districts of the State.

Constrained by limited options for meeting Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's demand for Central intervention, the Government today decided to make use of Mr Fernandes's services to buy time until the return of Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee from his US trip.

The announcement regarding the Defence Minister's assessment mission was made this evening after a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence. The meeting, chaired by Mr Vajpayee, was also attended by Home Minister L. K. Advani, the Home Secretary, heads of the intelligence agencies and the Attorney General.

Mr Fernandes is to leave for Calcutta in his capacity as NDA convenor on Friday. A team of NDA MPs had earlier visited the various trouble spots in the State and recommended that all the five affected districts be declared disturbed, to pave way for the deployment of Central paramilitary forces.

Ms Banerjee is understood to have spoken to the Prime Minister today regarding her party's demands. She is, however, reported to have assured him that she would not take any precipitate action during his absence from New Delhi.

Reliable sources said the Prime Minister was reportedly briefed about the disturbed law and order situation in the affected districts on the basis of Governor's two recent reports, intelligence input and the State Government's response to Home Ministry's advisories.

The sources indicated that even as the West Bengal Government's response to the Union Home Ministry's "advisories" had been inadequate, the Centre may send yet another advisory to the State regarding the ongoing sense of insecurity among the opponents of the Left Front.

Maintaining that the options of either dispatching a Central team for a spot assessment or summoning the State Government's senior civil and police officers to Delhi, though discussed at today's meeting, were disfavoured owing to the fear of stiff reaction from the Marxist-ruled State.

On their part, senior Home Ministry officials are understood to have shown considerable reluctance to opt for the Central team proposal against the backdrop of their embarrassing experience in June 1998. The West Bengal Government at that time had directed its officers not to interact

with the Central team, saying that law and order was the sole responsibility of the State.

The Trinamool Congress leader has been demanding the imposition of President's rule in West Bengal and also wants Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum, Hooghly and Burdwan districts to be declared disturbed. The Centre, however, has ignored the demands, infuriating the Trinamool.

Basu's challenge



WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER Jyoti Basu has challenged the Centre to enforce Article 356 in the State as demanded by Trinamool Congress leader

Mamata Banerjee on the law and order issue. "I want to know when Article 356 will be enforced in West Bengal. We are ready for it," an angry Basu said. He blamed the media for projecting and promoting "a violent lady who speaks nonsense."

Detailed report on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

• 7 SEP 2000

49-13

India urges OPEC to cut oil prices

8/9

By Sushma Ramachandran

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 7. With world oil prices soaring to a 10-year high, India has appealed to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to raise output and bring prices down to around \$ 26 per barrel. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is expected to raise the issue with world leaders at the United Nations millennium summit as well as with the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton.

This was disclosed here today by the Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, who said letters had been sent individually to all OPEC members urging them to take a decision on increasing output at the forthcoming meeting of the OPEC in Vienna on September 10.

The Minister told *The Hindu* that he had pointed out in the letters that developing countries like India were not able bear the huge burden of such high prices. These should be reduced to around \$ 26 per barrel which is a "sustainable" level. In this context, he recalled that the OPEC had assured in March that prices would be kept within a band of \$ 22 to \$ 28 per barrel. Instead, prices continued to firm up and today reached a new high of \$ 34.90 per barrel.

Mr. Naik said this was three times higher than the rate of around \$ 11 to \$ 12 per barrel prevailing during January- March 1999. Experts say an increase of one dollar per tonne will now translate into an increase of Rs. 200 crore in the oil import bill every month.

On raising domestic oil prices, Mr. Naik said a decision can only be taken when the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister return

from U.S. He said a combination of measures was being considered, including cutting excise duties, raising internal production and increasing prices of products. As to why diesel prices had not been raised periodically since these were supposed to be linked to international prices, he said prices of some products were raised only in March. "We have to see how much people can bear and not merely go by world prices," he said.

THE HINDU

20 SEP 1999

George arrives today to review WB law & order

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 7 SEPTEMBER

DEFENCE MINISTER George Fernandes will be coming to Calcutta on Friday to assess the law and order situation in West Bengal, placating railway minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee who has been demanding President's rule in West Bengal on account of the deteriorating law and order situation in the state.

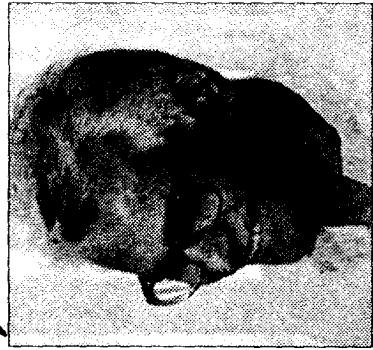
This decision was taken at a meeting convened by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee shortly before he left for the US. The meeting was attended by home minister L.K. Advani,

home secretary Kamal Pande, heads of the intelligence agencies and attorney general Soli Sorabjee.

The meeting was called in the wake of Ms Banerjee's threat of quitting the Cabinet if President's Rule was not invoked in West Bengal.

Ms Banerjee had also convened a meeting on Thursday night to discuss the issue. This meeting has been cancelled following the decision to send Mr Fernandes with Trinamool leaders saying in Calcutta that they will wait till Mr Fernandes' mission is completed.

The home ministry has been seeking regular reports from the



Fernandes: Mission critical
state government and conveying its views on West Bengal, which is witnessing a spate of political violence.

A team of MPs of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) had earlier visited various troubled areas in the state and recommended that the five affected districts be declared "disturbed" to facilitate deployment of central paramilitary forces.

Reports from Calcutta quoting the chief minister Jyoti Basu said he would not be meeting the defence minister. "It is a free country. Anyone can come. He (Fernandes) will see for himself how Trinamool Congress leader is instigating violence. It will be clear to him who are spreading terror and who are for peace."

Trinamool Congress' apex decision-making body's chair-

man Pankaj Banerjee told newsmen that Mr Fernandes would visit troubled areas in Midnapore and Ankura.

The assessment in Delhi is that Ms Banerjee, who realises that the Centre cannot invoke Article 356 in West Bengal, would use these events to put pressure on the state government. Her party is also planning a series of agitations during the run up to the election. Her party managers said that a big political event is planned in Calcutta on November 25 and she could formally announce her resignation from the Cabinet on that day for concentrating her energy to fight the CPI(M).

The Economic Times.

28 SEP 2000

Fernandes is welcome to visit State: Basu

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, September 7

CHIEF MINISTER Jyoti Basu has expressed happiness over Defence Minister George Fernandes' one-day visit to the State tomorrow.

"He is welcome. It's good that he is coming. He can go anywhere he likes. Ours is a free country and anyone can come here. Let him see for himself who is instigating terror and violence and who is for peace," he said at the Writers' Buildings today.

Fernandes would tour some strife-torn districts amid persistent Trinamool and BJP demands for imposition of President's rule and for declaration of some areas as disturbed.

Basu said as per the programme received by his Government, Fernandes would visit Bankura and Midnapore.

Asked if he would meet Fernandes, Basu

said: "No. I have no time. We have no contact with him. I have no appointment with him."

The Chief Minister said his Government had received a letter from a joint secretary in the Union Home Ministry on the basis of a report submitted by an NDA team that visited the violence-hit districts recently.

"We have sent three reports on the law and order situation to the Centre in recent months."

Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee too declined to attach much importance to such reports, saying: "There is nothing unusual in such reports. The Centre often seeks such reports and these are sent routinely."

Bhattacharjee ruled out any possibility of Central intervention in the State, either under the existing provisions of the Constitution, or through any special Ordinance, as is being speculated in certain circles.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

SEP 7 1977

George mum on President's rule

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9/9 9.67 AM 521

GARBETA, Sept. 8. — Mr George Fernandes toured Midnapore's Kespur, Garbeta and Chandrokona areas today and found the situation there "very grave and beyond imagination". But he didn't comment on the Trinamul's demand for President's rule in the state, or imposition of the Disturbed Areas Act.

"My clothes were drenched in the tears of the victims of violence," said the NDA convener. He will submit his report to the Union home minister, Mr LK Advani, tomorrow.

"I had not given much credence to what Miss Mamata Banerjee said about Midnapore and its adjoining districts. But I beg her pardon now. The situation I see bears out what she had said," he told reporters after the tour. He had spoken to victims in Kespur, Garbeta and Chandrokona. Mr Fernandes couldn't visit Bankura: for want of time.

Miss Banerjee said he had noted her briefing on the situation in Kespur and Garbeta. The attack on a Trinamul relief camp at Sihar, Bankura, on Wednesday reflected "state-sponsored terrorism".

The minister flew in an IAF helicopter to Midnapore town, where Mr Ajit Panja and Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay received him. Miss Banerjee, who was in Midnapore too, was not at the helipad.

Mr Fernandes found "really painful" the plight of members of SC/STs "tortured by CPI-M cadres" for their loyalty to the Trinamul "Earlier, we had information that there were clashes between CPI-M and Trinamul men. But now, going round the villages and talking to the victims, I gather Trinamul men are being gunned down, their houses looted, women molested and raped because they were with the exploited and tortured," he said.

A few hundred Trinamul "refugees" from Kespur, staying in a relief camp in Midnapore town, stopped his convoy to demand President's rule. They wanted an end to "CPI-M atrocities".

THE STATESMAN

- 9 SEP 2000

Mamata puts Bengal in NDA court

OUR BUREAU

9-8
WB
9-1
10/9

Sept. 9: Trinamul Congress leader and railway minister Mamata Banerjee wants the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to review Bengal's law and order as soon as Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee returns from the US.

Mamata feels a special NDA meeting should be convened with Vajpayee as chair to consider defence minister George Fernandes' report on "CPM-sponsored terror in the state".

Fernandes, who is also NDA convener, is believed to have written a strongly-worded report to be submitted tomorrow to the Union home ministry. The report apparently castigates the Bengal government for its "utter failure to

protect the rural poor belonging to the minority community, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes".

The West Bengal government said it has not yet received any missive from the Centre, even as North Block officials insisted in Delhi that a two-page advisory had been sent. Asked how soon Delhi expected Writers' Buildings to respond, a senior home ministry official said: "Ideally by Monday, but one cannot expect much when the chief minister continues to say nothing much has happened in Midnapore."

North Block is not contemplating any move to even refer to Article 356 in Bengal's case — let alone impose President's rule. But it reserves the right to summon top state government officials if a

reply is delayed.

"That option is always open. If the officials are summoned, they will be told that the Centre is concerned with the deteriorating law and order in some parts of the state and immediate remedial action is needed," an official said.

Even if the Centre does not summon officials, the Union home ministry will be able to make its displeasure known during the two-day annual conference of state directors-general of police on September 27 and 28.

Mamata, who had earlier threatened to take "a drastic step to protest the Centre's inaction", is expected to await the outcome of Fernandes' visit before deciding her next course of action.

Trinamul sources said Mamata will go to any length, short of pulling out of the NDA, for action from the Centre to curb the violence in rural Bengal.

Trinamul chief whip Sudip Bandyopadhyay, who accompanied the defence minister to the trouble-torn areas of Midnapore yesterday, said the party was expecting "a positive response" from the Centre. "The defence minister has been witness to our party workers' plight. We expect him to take up the matter with the home minister and the Prime Minister," he said.

The sources said Mamata is anxious to rehabilitate her party supporters evicted by CPM cadre from different villages in Midnapore, Hooghly and Bankura.

THE TELEGRAPH

1.0 SEP 2000

Basu quit date not fixed

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Sept. 9. — The CPI-M wants Mr Jyoti Basu to continue as chief minister, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet told him yesterday.

The two leaders decided at their meeting last night that no date would be set for Mr Basu to step down, the CPI-M state secretary, Mr Anil Biswas, said today.

Mr Basu raised the question of his health at the meeting, Mr Biswas said. Mr Surjeet, in the city to discuss party matters with state leaders, "appreciated" Mr Basu's arguments.

Why is the CPI-M not letting Mr Basu retire despite his latter's pleas of ill health? Mr Biswas's answer was: "We are

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not inhuman. We are aware of Mr Basu's state of health. That's why the post of deputy chief minister has been created. The party has decided that Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya will succeed Mr Basu as chief minister. Party leaders will speak to Mr Basu again before deciding when he retires."

Whether Mr Basu will retire and how soon has been the question dominating political circles for sometime now.

There have been reports in the media saying Mr Basu will step down after the 15th of this month.

Mr Basu too has issued conflicting statements on the subject. He has repeatedly said his health may not permit him to continue for too long. But he

has also said a true Communist never gives up.

Mr Biswas said Mr Surjeet discussed the national situation and the "political-organizational tasks in the state" with CPI-M leaders here yesterday.

They talked about issues to be taken up at the party's state committee meeting scheduled for 13 and 14 September, which Mr Surjeet will not attend.

On Mr George Fernandes's remark that there was no democracy in the state, Mr Biswas said: "They should talk less and work more. What's the use of talking repeatedly on imposing President's rule on the state? Let them match their words with deeds."

THE STATESMAN

10 SEP 2001

Fernandes comes back from Bengal with horror stories

■ Democracy about to be killed, Mamata's life in danger, says the Defence Minister

AJAY SURI

NEW DELHI, SEPT 10

THE Government today declared that "all options" on West Bengal are "being examined." The comment came from Union Home Minister L K Advani, moments after Defence Minister George Fernandes handed him the report on law and order situation in the state.

The structure of the Constitution in the state, held Fernandes two days after his whistle-stop tour of the West Bengal, "is under attack and democracy is about to be killed there."

The Union Home Ministry is seriously contemplating rushing a team of senior officials to West

Bengal (on the line of what it had done in Tamil Nadu when Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister). Another possibility being toyed with, North Block sources disclosed, was to summon top state officials to New Delhi.

What has added to the grimness of the situation, point out officials, is that in the past fortnight alone the Home Ministry has sent three advisories to West Bengal, expressing concern over the "lawlessness" in the state. Significantly, the third advisory has demanded thorough explanation from the state Government. Last evening, it is learnt, Advani spoke on telephone with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in United States and for about 15 minutes briefed

him on the West Bengal scenario.

"The decision on sending a Central team to the state will be taken shortly," senior North Block officials told *The Indian Express*.

But Fernandes made it clear today that with Vajpayee and other senior cabinet colleagues abroad, the final action which would decide the fate of West Bengal could be delayed by a few days. In the same breath, however, he sounded cautious when he held, "We do not want to have a repeat of Bihar experience when it was put under President's rule."

"I am really scared about (Trinamool Congress chief) Mamata Banerjee. Her life is in danger in West Bengal," the Defence Minister told mediapersons. ~~Lashing out~~

at the state Government, he alleged that that the ruling CPI(M), its electoral base eroded in large parts of the state, was resorting to terror tactics of the worst kind, murdering Trinamool supporters and committing rapes on women who refused to support Marxists.

In several areas, said Fernandes, people in large number had fled their homes and were huddled together in camps, but even there their life was not safe.

"We don't know how to apologise to Mamata Banerjee," Fernandes remarked, explaining that though she had been claiming about the the large-scale lawlessness in Bengal for a long time, nobody in the Government took her

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

from the front page

George back from tour

seriously. He added, "we didn't believe her to the extent we should have. Had we known the real situation earlier, something could have been done to stop it from reaching this pass."

Fernandes described in detail his experiences, "the scariest of my life", in number of places in the state such as Bankura, Garbetta, Midnapur and others which he visited a few days ago. While in one village, he held, a woman who dared to fight 'panchayat' elections was raped by four men, another was stripped and paraded and in yet another village was shot dead from a point-blank range in front of hundreds of terrified Trinamool supporters.

In Bankura, said Fernandes, the wrath of CPI(M) had fallen on some 2,000 people, all of whom had now found shelter in Ramakrishna Mission. "Mamata and Ajit Panja recently went to the Mission and spoke with them. But no sooner did they leave the building than it shook with a series of explosions."

INDIAN EXPRESS

1.1 95

Fernandes' report motivated: Basu

HD-13
11/9

CALCUTTA SEPT. 10. The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, tonight described as "irregular and motivated" NDA convenor Mr. George Fernandes' comment that the law and order situation in the State was worse than that of Bihar.

Mr. Basu said the Defence Minister's comment was made to "please" the Trinamool Congress.

Asserting that the law and order was the best in the country, he said the Trinamool Congress-BJP combine had indulged in violence in three police station areas of Midnapore district. Stating that Mr. Fernandes had adversely commented on the State's law and order situation "to please the Trinamool Congress which has only eight MPs," Mr. Basu said, "his comments are irregular and motivated. I was surprised to see that he made such comments after having heard only one side."

Mr. Fernandes had not contacted the State Government before or after his visit, "nor did he care to talk to us", he said.

Mr. Basu said he was yet to go through the letter sent by the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pandey to the State Chief Secretary, Mr. Manish Gupta, seeking a report on the State's law and order situation. "I will see the letter tomorrow," he said.

Remarks irresponsible

The CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, also

lambasted Mr. George Fernandes for making "irresponsible remarks" on the West Bengal Government and said every attempt was being made by the NDA Government to target Left parties.

"I don't understand the basis of passing a verdict after visiting three villages," Mr. Surjeet told PTI, reacting to the comments made by Mr. Fernandes after submitting a report to the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, on the recent killings in Midnapore.

He said the Centre could neither impose President's rule in the State nor declare the area as disturbed as the latter would require State's permission.

A tout's role: CPI(M)

At the same time, another CPI (M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, today criticised the Centre for adopting "anti-people" and "anti-poor" policies, and the Trinamool Congress for spreading violence and terrorism in different parts of West Bengal.

Addressing a meeting organised by the ruling Left Front at Bolepur, Mr. Chatterjee said Mr. George Fernandes played the role of a tout by supporting the false allegations of the Trinamool Congress against the Left Front Government. "He (Mr. Fernandes) had no time to shed tears for Christians who were killed in the past two years, but he rushed to Midnapore to please Mamata," he added.

THE HINDU

1.1 SEP 2000

Bengal worse than Bihar, says George

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 10. — The whole structure of the Constitution seems to be crumbling in West Bengal, Mr George Fernandes told reporters today after submitting his report to the Union home minister on the state's law-and-order situation.

He also fears that Miss Mamata Banerjee faces a threat to her life from CPI-M cadres. The defence minister, who is also convener of the ruling NDA, feels, on the basis of what he saw in Midnapore on 8 September, that the Centre should "think about taking a decision on the ... situation".

But he has not recommended President's rule. "My job was to submit the report, which I have done giving my observations and comments. It is for the government to decide on Article 356." He also said any decision would have to wait for the Prime Minister's return.

The situation in West Bengal, he said, is worse than in Bihar. Nowhere, he asserted, were women abused and raped by ruling party cadres in the way they were in Bengal.

Mr LK Advani spoke to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee over the phone after receiving Mr Fernandes' report. He was quoted by the PTI as saying that the Centre had sent three "advisories" to the state government asking it to bring the situation under control, but

RIDICULOUS: CPM

NEW DELHI, Sept. 10 — Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet has dismissed Mr George Fernandes' report on West Bengal as "ridiculous". He said it wouldn't be easy to impose President's rule in the state, with even NDA partners opposed to invoking Article 356.

On the defence minister's claim that Miss Mamata Banerjee's life is in danger, the CPI-M general secretary said: "She is always in West Bengal, and doesn't even attend to her ministerial duties. Yet people say she faces a threat to her life." — SNS

■ Photograph on page 8

there had been no response.

Mr Advani and Mr Fernandes are the only two members of the Cabinet Committee on Security who are in the country right now. The other three, the Prime Minister, the foreign minister and finance minister are in the USA.

Mr Fernandes recalled that the ruling coalition once before burnt its fingers when it tried to clamp President's rule in Bihar, a move that was scuttled when the Congress refused to support it. "Our experience of imposing President's rule in Bihar was not happy. We don't want the experience repeated." That would mean that the

government would not venture to invoke Article 356 in West Bengal without the Congress' support. The NDA does not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha, where any proposal must have the Congress' backing to be endorsed.

The other option is to declare Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly districts "disturbed" under the Disturbed Area Act. The Centre would have to amend the law to bring the districts under its scope: the Act could be amended by promulgating an ordinance.

"The government has options, but these have to be seriously weighed and deliberated before the Centre can come to any conclusion," Mr Fernandes said.

"CPI-M cadres have unleashed a reign of terror in the villages of Midnapore, where I spent seven hours listening to people in distress," he said. The victims, he said, were members of the oppressed classes, SC/ST and Muslims.

This did not happen even in Bihar. "In no state have ruling party cadres killed and raped women for so long on political grounds as in West Bengal." He did not agree with Mr Jyoti Basu that only four police station areas were "disturbed". "Large parts of the state are experiencing political violence. I have submitted in my report the names of 42 people who've been killed by CPI-M cadres since the rural polls, because they voted Trinamul."

THE STATESMAN

11/9 2000

Fernandes a liar, says Basu

Buddha open to talks with Mamata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Sept. 11. — The chief minister today rubbished Mr George Fernandes's report on West Bengal as "lies", but his deputy offered to talk to Miss Mamata Banerjee on the raging violence in three districts.

The Trinamul chief said she would consider the offer if it came officially. "But the state government must first take steps to stop the CPI-M's aggression and armed raids to capture villages over which it has lost control."

He would not mind meeting Miss Banerjee if it ensured an end to the political clashes, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya told reporters. "I have no aversion. She is the railway minister. If she wants to discuss with me, I have no problem."

The deputy chief minister, however, did not think it was time yet to convene a state-level meeting of political parties — meetings at the local level were paying dividends, he said.

Mr Basu's reaction to the defence minister's comment — that law and order in Bihar was better than in Bengal — was violent.

"Why doesn't he bother to look into the CII report? He stays in Bihar. I have seen all these people. Let them do whatever they want to. The people of West Bengal will give a fitting reply."

Mr George Fernandes's report, he said, was "full of lies. I have told the chief secretary that you need not reply. I will give the reply tomorrow". Mr Basu's reply, it is learnt, is ready, and will be sent to Mr LK Advani by tomorrow afternoon.

Mr Basu brushed aside Mr Fernandes's claim that Miss Banerjee's life was in danger. "She has enough security," he Basu said. "She gets Z-category security. There are some Z-category regulations. At home, she gets round-the-clock security. Outside, she is provided with adequate security cover. Actually, these people are in the habit of lying."

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya agreed. "Whenever she addresses a meeting anywhere in the state, we make it a point to send more police personnel to the venue. ... After all this, how could Mr Fernandes say that there was a threat to Miss Banerjee's life?" The defence minister's report, he said, was "biased, one-sided and politically motivated to appease Miss Banerjee".

"The defence minister didn't bother to talk to me, the chief minister, chief secretary, home secretary or even the Midnapore DM and SP. All he did was to visit some areas and pass sweeping comment on the state's law and order."

According to Mr Bhattacharya, the Centre's letters to Writers' Buildings show how "ill-informed" it was on the state. "One letter talks about trouble in Bankura, Birbhum, Burdwan, Midnapore. In another, Burdwan is dropped and North and South 24-Parganas included. Another excludes Bankura. Because of this, we have doubts about the Centre's information. This shows lack of awareness."

■ Editorials: Will not let go!
page 6
More reports on pages 3 & 8

THE STATESMAN

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FERNANDES REPORT A 'PACK OF LIES'

Basu dares Centre to impose President's rule

By Our Special Correspondent

CALCUTTA, SEPT. 11. Burying all talk of his retirement, the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, today said he would personally lead West Bengal's counter-campaign against Delhi's effort to impose President's rule on the marxist-ruled State.

At Writers' buildings, Mr. Basu described the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes' report on the law and order situation in the State as "a pack of lies".

He made it clear that his Government would counter with the help of, among other things, the Confederation of Indian Industry's situation report on Bengal

and other States. "I have told the Chief Secretary not to reply to Mr. Fernandes' report that we have received from the Centre. I will reply to it myself tomorrow," the Chief Minister said.

Mr. Basu dared the Centre to take any action as demanded by the Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo, Ms. Mamata Banerjee.

"Let them do whatever they like. We have seen such things in the past."

When his attention was drawn to Mr. Fernandes' likening the law and order situation in the State to that of Bihar, Mr. Basu said the

former had done so because he came from Bihar.

Mamata meets Governor

Meanwhile, Ms. Banerjee as well as the State Congress(I) leader today met the Governor, Mr. Viren J. Shah, separately to press for appropriate steps against the ruling Leftists for what they said was state-sponsored terrorism.

According to observers, the communists are now expected to try and gain a great deal of political mileage out of the anti-Centre campaign. The ruling CPI(M) would whip up passions through a vigorous campaign against the BJP-led Central Government's move to destabilise the country's longest-serving communist gov-

ernment in Bengal. Also the issue is expected to unite the party which has lately been witnessing dissension in its ranks.

Ms. Banerjee who is leading a campaign for imposition of President's rule may find herself in a spot as Delhi is not expected to fulfil her wishes jeopardising its own position.

'No rule of law'

Later addressing a press conference, Ms. Banerjee, reiterating her demand for imposition of President's rule, said the law and order situation was "far worse" than Bihar. "Political killings are taking place, industries are being closed down, there is no rule of law. The situation is far, far worse than Bihar. This is 'worst Bengal'. Here the protector has become the aggressor," she said.

Evading a direct reply on whether she was happy with the stand taken by the Vajpayee Government regarding the State, the Trinamool leader said she had not spoken to the Central Government. Attacking the Chief Minister, she said, "Mr. Basu is an egoist, he behaves arrogantly. He considers himself a superman, but he should try to be a super human being."

PTI reports:

The West Bengal Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadev Bhattacharya, said Mr. Fernandes' report on the State's law and order was "pre-conceived, biased and politically motivated", and denigrated the State Government.

Parties' reaction: Page 11

THE HINDU

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

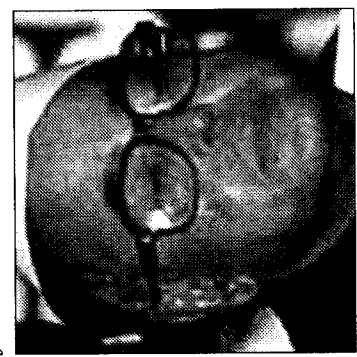
NEW DELHI, Sept. 12. — There are firm indications from the Congress headquarters here that the party will not support the NDA on invoking Article 356 in West Bengal to hold the Assembly polls under Central rule.

According to well-placed sources in the party, the decision was taken after Mr Pranab Mukherjee, West Bengal Congress president, briefed Mrs Sonia Gandhi on the political situation in the state. But the party, it seems, would like to keep the Centre guessing. When Mr George Fernandes, NDA convenor, approached Mr Mukherjee, seeking support to let the government invoke special provisions of the Constitution, he evaded making a direct reply.

"We are neither supporting nor opposing the demand. It is a constitutional matter to be decided by the government. Let them decide first, then we will see," Mr Mukherjee said today. Senior leaders admitted that it won't be easy for the ruling alliance to dismiss the Jyoti Basu government on the pretext that the constitutional

SYA
W/O
main rival for power in the state. "We don't stand to gain much even if the elections are held under President's rule and CPI-M cadres are prevented from rigging the polls. The major beneficiaries would be the Trinamul Congress and the BJP. Why then should the Congress come to the NDA's rescue," one of them said.

The party would much rather keep its options open so far as its national-level ties with the CPI-M are concerned. Mrs Sonia Gandhi had not forgotten Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet's support during her abortive attempts at power immediately after the Vajpayee government's fall in 1998, the Congress leaders said. The CPI-M, with 33 MPs, is the third single-largest party in the Lok Sabha.



Mr Pranab Mukherjee

situation is far worse," a senior AICC general secretary said. As part of its a long-term strategy, the Congress seems to have decided to go soft on the CPI-M in West Bengal. The Congress, in any case, is a fringe player in West Bengal's electoral politics and Miss Mamata Banerjee, some senior leaders admit privately, has emerged as the Left Front's

unlikely to back Art 356 call

SEND PARAMILITARY

CALCUTTA, Sept. 12. — The state Congress today demanded immediate deployment of paramilitary forces in Midnapore, Bankura, Birbhum, Burdwan and Hooghly where, it said, political clashes had become a daily occurrence.

Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, PCC vice-president, said the Centre would do well to act fast and save innocent lives and property in the five districts where the "CPI-M has let loose a reign of terror with direct help from the administration".

"The NDA government is trying to fool people by its promises of action, but so far it has sent emissaries only with powers to draft reports destined to gather dust," Mr Manash Bhuniya, PCC general secretary, said. PCC leaders charged Mr LK Advani with playing politics by saying that the Centre could not impose President's rule without Congress support. "The Constitution is clear on this. The Centre can clamp President's rule for two months without having to seek parliamentary approval," he said. — SNS

Three killed in fresh Midnapore flare-up

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE, Sept. 12. — Three people were killed and at least 30, including two policemen, were injured early today in gunbattles between CPI-M and Trinamul supporters in three villages in Belda and two villages in the Patashpur areas of Midnapore.

Midnapore SP, Mr Gaurav Dutta, who was camping at Belda, said two of those killed — Chitta Pal and Ganga Prasad Das — belonged to the Trinamul, while Binoy Krishna Chandra was a CPI-M supporter.

Senior district Trinamul leader, Mr Sisir Adhikary, alleged that the CPI-M's musclemen had stormed Trinamul-held villages with police help after capturing some areas in Garbeta and Kespur.

The three men killed were reportedly from Gangutia, Ichhadangri and Keshramba in Belda.

Violence began at the crack of dawn when about 400 CPI-M supporters raided the villages, killing two Trinamul men on the spot. One CPI-M supporter was killed when Trinamul supporters returned fire, it was learnt. Altogether, 12 men were injured.

Twelve houses belonging to Trinamul supporters were ransacked. Clashes also took place at Lalua and Bhuban in Patashpur area, when about 300 CPI-M supporters attacked Swamiji Sabuj Sangha, a Trinamul-run club. At least 18 people, including two policemen, were injured.

In Calcutta, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said Belda was a part of trouble-torn Narayangarh and Patashpur areas. "Garbeta and Kespur are incident-free now. But I am worried about Pingla, because it's a large area. I will talk to Opposition leaders in this regard," he said.

THE STATESMAN

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2000

OF SWAYAMSEVAKS AND SEMANTICS

THE PRIME MINISTER, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's clarification on the controversy over his speech, at a function organised by BJP sympathisers in New York, deserves a qualified welcome. The sharp burst of criticism against the speech called for an answer. Some of Mr. Vajpayee's remarks may have passed off at a political rally but they seemed wholly inappropriate in the context — that of a Prime Minister on an official visit abroad. Mr. Vajpayee, who described himself as a "swayamsevak" at the gathering, has explained that he used the expression in the broad sense of a "volunteer" and not (by implication) in the narrower (and arguably more common) sense of a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Mr. Vajpayee has also sought to deny that he was making a veiled reference to Ayodhya when he talked about what the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would do if it were to receive a two-thirds majority in Parliament.

Overall, the Prime Minister's clarificatory statement will take some of the heat but of the controversy over his Staten Island speech, which has provoked a slew of angry statements from Opposition parties. The Prime Minister's remarks were treated as evidence of the BJP's doublespeak on Ayodhya and he was charged with having committed an act of impropriety by lending the impression that he was present at the function in his capacity as the leader of a political party rather than the Prime Minister of the country. Mr. Vajpayee's allies in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, many of whom are uneasy with the BJP's Hindutva agenda, may be relieved by the clarification. However, the Prime Minister's description of the uproar over this speech — as a "needless controversy" created by "wrong reporting and speculative interpretation" — is

hardly convincing. To suggest that the controversy is created by the media is a favourite line with politicians when they are trying to wriggle out of sticky situations they have created themselves. And although Mr. Vajpayee's clarification is positive and will generate a sense of relief, the controversy was largely of his own making.

Consider the facts. The Prime Minister chooses to attend a meeting which is promoted as a gathering for a representative group of Non-Resident Indians but in truth is a function that is organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and, not surprisingly as a result of this, awash with saffron. Having taken the unwise decision to attend such a function, he then goes on to make a series of allusive remarks which, given the play on words and the context in which they were uttered, gives the unambiguous impression that the Prime Minister was sporting his Hindutva badge. Mr. Vajpayee may say that wrong meanings were read into his words but it doesn't take a degree in semantics to make a reasonable conjecture about why the Prime Minister indulged in such verbal jugglery at the VHP-BJP sponsored Staten Island function. Restricted by the impositions of office, on the one hand, but spurred by the desire to play to a gallery that was packed with fawning party sympathisers, on the other, the Prime Minister appears to have chosen to indulge in some clever verbal play. The imprecise meanings and the ambiguous formulations seem very much as if they were intended for the consumption of the large numbers of politico-religious leaders at the Staten Island meeting. Therefore, the Prime Minister's statement that he was misrepresented does not carry much conviction. Those who stir up a hornet's nest can hardly complain about being stung.

THE HINDU

14 SEP 2000

NDA divided over Central rule in state

President calls Advani for Bengal update.

ST-1
19/9

J. Vasgama

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 13. — The President today called the Union home minister for an "update" on West Bengal and reportedly took exception to a Cabinet minister (Mr George Fernandes) making public his report submitted to Mr LK Advani.

Mr Fernandes's report had said the constitutional machinery was crumbling in the state and democracy was under threat.

Mr KR Narayanan and Mr Advani held talks for 15 minutes at Rashtrapati Bhavan. A home ministry official, however, described Mr Advani's visit as a "courtesy call".

Mr Advani reportedly told Mr Narayanan that Mr Fernandes had visited Midnapore on 8 September as NDA convener, not as a Cabinet minister, and that his report was submitted in that capacity. He reportedly mentioned the "advisories" which the home ministry sent to the state government on the law and order situation.

The objection raised by Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, state home minister, that Mr Fernandes, being a Union Cabinet minister, didn't bother to even call Midnapore district officials to know the government's point of view before con-

cluding there was "a breakdown of the constitutional machinery" too has attracted the President's attention, officials said.

Mr Advani has briefed the Prime Minister, now in Washington, about his meeting with Mr Narayanan, officials said.

North Block officials said the Centre was not contemplating imposing President's rule. Nor did the question of declaring some parts of the state "disturbed" arise because the recommendation for that has to come from the state government. To bypass the state, the Act will have to be amended which is a complicated issue, officials said.

Both BJP and NDA appeared split today on Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for Central rule.

A Telugu Desam member of the alliance's fact-finding team to the state spoke out for his party against sacking Mr Jyoti Basu. And the BJP central leadership found itself disagreeing with its state unit that called again for using Article 356.

Slowing down events somewhat, however, the railway minister herself ruled out quitting the NDA — at least for now. She would "wait and watch", Miss Banerjee announced in Calcutta.

And the Congress — crucial to an imposition of President's rule — remained firmly perched on the fence.

Mr S Venugopalachari, TDP and chairman of the fact-finding team to Midnapore, said in Delhi today that he was opposed to clamping President's rule on West Bengal — this opinion was in his capacity both as team chairman and deputy leader of the TDP in Lok Sabha.

Law and order in certain parts of Midnapore was bad enough for the Centre to consider declaring them "disturbed", Mr Venugopalachari said, but added he was not sure if the situation was equally bad in the rest of the state. And Mr George Fernandes had reached a different conclusion he must have had access to sources of information not available to him, Mr Venugopalachari said.

The TDP leader relayed the report to reporters on the defence minister's instruction today. Mr Venugopalachari was reportedly put under pressure from other members of the NDA team except Mr (Krishnan of the MDMK, M Suresh Ramarao Jadhav (Shi Sena), Mr Prabhunath Singh (Samata Party), Mr Sanjay

■ See BENGAL: page 8

BENGAL:

(Continued from page 1)

Paswan (BJP) and Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay (Trinamul Congress) had wanted him to recommend Article 356, it was learnt, but the chairman had said no.

TDP leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr K Yerran Naidu, told The Statesman that his party would oppose use of Article 356 unless there was concrete proof of a breakdown of constitutional machinery. "Our support to 356 in Bihar was an exception." Even on declaring the violence-prone areas "disturbed", the Centre must first consult the state government, he said.

In its eight-page report, the NDA team has demanded that the Centre take steps to protect "the innocent, the downtrodden and the poor from the clutches of the ruling CPI-M and an administration that colluded with their political masters.

"Democratic norms should be restored without further delay ... Central forces may be deployed to restore law and order ..."

In Chennai, BJP spokesman, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, said the Centre was "watching and exploring ways to save the people of West Bengal", but had not suggested that President's rule was the solution.

In Calcutta, party state unit chief, Mr Ashim Ghosh, refused to comment on Mr Naidu's statement. But he insisted the state BJP was for use of Article 356.

Mr Naidu felt the Left Front, "if it was not afraid", should let an all-party delegation assess the West Bengal situation. On Mr Jyoti Basu's remark yesterday that the NDA was made up of a "bundle of cattle", Mr Naidu said the chief minister "has lost his mind, and the state leadership has lost its balance".

"He (Mr Basu) is stooping to such levels only because he wants to retain power. The CPI-M is resorting to suppression and oppression through violence against political opponents," Mr Naidu said.

According to Mr Naidu, the CPI-M raised a hue and cry whenever Central teams sought to visit West Bengal and Kerala, the states it is in power. "But they have no hesitation in suggesting such teams for other states."

THE STATESMAN

14 SEP 2000

Basu's defence rubbished

President briefed on Bengal • NDA team against Central rule

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 13

THE CENTRE today dismissed as unsatisfactory and lacking in substance, West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's response to the Home Ministry's advisories seeking his assessment of the law and order situation in the face of persistent clashes between the CPI-M and Trinamool Congress activists.

Mr Basu's three-page rejoinder was received in the North Block this afternoon and studied at length by Home Minister L.K. Advani and senior officials. A copy was subsequently sent to NDA Convenor and Defence Minister George Fernandes, with the request that he make public the Centre's reading of the situation.

As a possible next step, the Centre is likely to send a team of officials to the Left-ruled State. According to Mr Advani -- who also briefed President K.R. Narayanan today on the Government's assessment of the

West Bengal scene -- the decision to assign central officials for an on-the-spot study was taken before the Prime Minister embarked on his US visit.

Over the past few days, Mr Advani has been in constant touch with the Prime Minister. He has been discussing the West Bengal situation. Mr Advani reiterated that any major decision would be taken after the PM's return.

But Parliamentary arithmetic and a lack of consensus within the ruling coalition on imposition of President's rule -- as demanded by Ms Banerjee -- are obvious hurdles in the way of the Centre's alleged efforts to please the Trinamool leader.

In fact, a fact-finding NDA team which visited West Bengal on August 11-12, has not recommended invocation of Article 356 in Bengal. Speaking to newsmen in Chennai, even BJP spokesperson Venkaiah Naidu was quoted by news agencies today as having rejected the Trinamool's demand for Assembly elections under

President's rule.

In their report submitted to Mr Fernandes this morning, the NDA's parliamentary team, headed by TDP MP S Venugopalachari, advised the Government to declare some troubled areas of the State as "disturbed zones" where Central forces could be deployed to contain further deterioration of the law and order situation.

But as pointed out by Mr Advani himself, even this option would require an amendment to the Disturbed Areas Act to make it applicable to West Bengal.

On Mr Basu's letter, the NDA convenor said: "The Chief Minister has avoided going into specific instances of killings and violence that I had pin-pointed in my report to the Home Minister."

Mr Fernandes also strongly rebutted Mr Basu's charge that he did not meet any CPI-M functionary during his West Bengal visit.

"Jyoti Basu and his men treated my visit as if I was an intruder in the State," charged Mr Fernandes.

Mr Fernandes dismissed as "absolute nonsense" Mr Basu's charge that he rushed to Bengal to placate Ms Banerjee, who had threatened to quit as Union Railway Minister in the event of the Centre's non-intervention in the State's affairs.

Mr Fernandes also treaded cautiously on the President's rule question.

He drew newsmen's attention was the NDA's Bihar experience, where Rabri Devi had to be reinstalled for want of ratification of President's rule by the Rajya Sabha.

He said the arithmetic hasn't since changed in the Upper House, where the ruling combination continued to be in a minority.

Meanwhile, Ms Banerjee today ruled out any immediate possibility of quitting the NDA government on the question of imposition of President's rule in West Bengal, but said she would think it over if the situation warranted.

Mamata's demand a sign of her desperation? — Page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 SEP 2000

The killing fields: Fact versus fiction

Ashis Chakrabarti
Calcutta, September 13

THERE WAS a wave of applause and wild slogan-shouting as the man, in milk-white kurta pyjama and flashing a smile, climbed on the dais. The scene was the CPI(M)'s student-youth rally here yesterday that, as usual, immobilized large parts of central Calcutta.

No, it wasn't Jyoti Basu who usually causes a stir in his flock as he arrives on the scene. Sushanta Ghosh, a junior minister in Basu's Cabinet, is the new Marxist hero, whom Mamata Banerjee has christened the "killer of Keshpur". Just as Mamata hailed her partyman Mohammed Rafiq as the hero who gave her Keshpur as well as Panskura (Lok Sabha seat), for the CPI(M) he was an unmitigated villain.

Ghosh and Rafiq together represent the many shades of the current cult of political violence in Midnapore, Bankura and Hooghly districts of West Bengal. The air, not just over trouble-torn Keshpur, is so thick with political skulduggery that it is often difficult to see the horizon of truth through the haze. Fact and fiction are woven into the ranting of partisan rhetoric.

Let's take fiction first. There is absolutely no truth in allegations, made by the BJP's Union Minister of State Shahnawz Hussain during his two recent visits here, that the violence in

Midnapore district, in which Keshpur and other troubled areas fall, has communal overtones.

Equally baseless is the allegation that women and people of the backward communities are the main victims of violence. Obviously, such allegations have been made with an eye on the Constitutional provisions which make it easier for the Centre to intervene in such scenarios. Also, despite stray incidents elsewhere, the spell of violence is confined to three districts of Midnapore, Hooghly and Bankura and has not swept the whole State.

Just as fictional is Jyoti Basu's claim that it's all



BASU'S BENGAL GROUND REALITIES

quiet in Midnapore "except in three thanas". Or the claim by some of his party leaders that the Midnapore menace has been blown out of proportions by a pugnaciously anti-Left media.

The fact is Keshpur is real. The fact is it is not the media but the marauding bands of both the Marxists and Mamata created, not just Keshpur, but hotbeds of violence in contiguous areas in Midnapore, Hooghly and Bankura districts.

There are no innocents in these killing fields. The Trinamool Congress claims as many as 234 of its supporters have been killed in these three dis-

tricts since the panchayat bypolls in May. According to the CPI(M), 66 of its supporters were killed in Midnapore, 12 in Hooghly and seven in Bankura over the past two years. Even assuming that the figures are not wholly true, there is no denying that political violence has increased in these areas in recent years. Which, in turn, shows how the administration threw up its arms, leaving the fields open to the combatants.

The important difference between the current spell of political violence and that in the 1960s and the early 1970s is that today there is not even a semblance of what passed for ideological battles in those years.

For both the CPI(M) and the Trinamool, end justifies the means. For the Left, it is to retain power and for the Trinamool to capture power — by blood, lies and all possible manoeuvres.

Land continues to be a major issue. In fact, in Midnapore the violence is a direct fallout of old landholders' desperate bid to come back and reclaim their land from the bargadars (sharecroppers) by taking advantage of a weakened popular support for the CPI(M).

But the land hunger alone does not explain today's violence for the simple reason that the benefits of land reforms have reached a plateau, leaving large sections of the rural masses dissatisfied.

(Tomorrow: Effects of Mamata's call for Central help)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 SEP 2000

ADVANI REFUSES TO BUY CM'S LOGIC

Centre criticises Basu for ineffective handling of crisis

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 SEPTEMBER

THE CENTRE chided the West Bengal government on Friday for not "satisfactorily dealing with its concerns" over the ongoing political violence in the state and insisted that the latter not only recognise its Constitutional duties but also fulfil them effectively and convincingly.

In a letter addressed to chief minister Jyoti Basu, Union home minister L. K. Advani noted with dismay that the former's letter dated September 13, 2000, had not addressed the concern expressed by the Centre time and again over the political mayhem in West Bengal. "If the state administration is taking effective steps to control the violence, there is very little evidence thereof by way of results," he said.

Mr Basu's letter to Mr Advani had focused largely on Mr George Fernandes' visit to West Bengal but offered no clarifications on the observations made in the report submitted by him. Although the letter recognised that maintenance of public order was a prime concern of the state government, Mr Advani reminded Mr Basu on Friday that the earlier advisories of the Union government as well as Mr Fernandes' report had largely spoken of political violence and not law and order in general.

Recalling that there had been 176 political clashes in Midnapore in which 64 people

had died, 58 incidents in Hooghly, 28 in Burdwan, 20 in South 24-Parganas and 16 in North 24-Parganas, the Union home minister's letter observed that "the graph of political clashes and related violence has been steadily rising in parts of West Bengal, and especially in those districts where the political alliance opposed to the ruling coalition has been gaining ground."

Stating that this kind of violence posed a grave danger to democracy, Mr Advani cited reports with the MHA saying that political violence was often taking the form of large organised armed gangs descending upon villages that had "conspicuously voted against the ruling party."

"Up to 35,000 persons are reported to have fled from their villages and are living in the open," alleged the Central missive and said many of the displaced were from the weaker sections and the minorities.

Mr Advani also gave a fitting reply to Mr Basu's Fernandes-bashing. Stating that the Centre's concerns were based not solely on the defence minister's assessment but on official reports received over a period of time, the home minister recalled that the Union government had shared its concerns with the state in a series of letters dated April 17 and June 26, besides advisories dated July 10, August 29, September 4 and 8.

Public Affairs

15 SEP 2000

State seeks Army help on floods

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Sept. 19. — Incessant rain in the past 48 hours has flooded large parts of Birbhum and Murshidabad. Nadia and Burdwan have also been affected. The flood has claimed 12 lives so far. The situation is getting worse, said the state government, which has sought the Army's help.

Arrangements have been made to drop food packets in Birbhum and Murshidabad tomorrow. The state government has released Rs 40 lakh as contingency grant for the two districts. More rain has been predicted there over the next 24 hours.

Till late tonight, at least 34 blocks of Birbhum and Murshidabad and a part of Katwa in Burdwan were hit. Of the 12 casualties, seven were in Rampurhat town, Birbhum. Over 150,000 are said to have been affected in Birbhum and Murshidabad.

The constant release of water from Tilpara and Masanjore worsened the situation. About 1,31,900 cusecs have been released from Tilpara and 96,400 from Masanjore. More will be released tomorrow.

SFI 20/9
The government has asked the barrage authorities to give prior information to the district authorities on the release of water to ensure that people can be moved to safer places.

Rains have also paralysed life in Malda. The Mahananda and the Fulohar's levels are fast rising, while that of Ganga remains above danger level. In Birbhum, places like Nalhati,

N BENGAL CUT OFF

CALCUTTA, Sept. 19. — All road and rail links between North and South Bengal snapped today. Stretches along the NH 34 are under water. So are the Bandel-Katwa-Azimgunge, Andal-Saithia and Rampurhat-Nalhati rail routes. Teesta Torsa Express and nine other Express and Mail trains were stranded. — SNS

Rampurhat, Shiuri, Mohammed Bazar and Khairashol have been submerged. According to food minister Mr Kalimuddin Shams, the district is experiencing one of the worst floods ever.

Military personnel have reached Bir-

bhum with relief materials. They are yet to reach the far-flung areas of Murshidabad. The state administration has also requested the BSF's help.

"The flood situation is slowly spinning out of control," Murshidabad district magistrate Mr Vivek Kumar said. Flood waters have almost submerged the entire district, he said.

Behrampore town is under water, having recorded a rain

■ See FLOODS: page 3

THE STATESMAN

20 SEP 2000

Flood toll mounts to 37, lakhs homeless

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, September 20

THE FLOOD situation took a turn for the worse today with the toll shooting up to 37 and lakhs in 52 blocks of Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia and Burdwan losing their homes to the rising waters.

Rain continued to pummel the districts and with the rivers rising menacingly, the sluice gates of the Massanjore Dam and the Tilpara Barrage had to be kept open. Reports of house collapse, snake bites and the sinking of a rescue boat reached Writers' Buildings where Deputy Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee briefed the press and met senior officials to take stock of the situation.

Conditions have deteriorated in parts of Rampurhat, Salar, Behrampore, Burdwan and Katwa where it rained heavily even today.

Katwa, which stands at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Mayurakshi, is the worst hit. Bulk of the discharge from Massanjore is being routed through these two rivers. Gushing waters from Bhagirathi have submerged Behrampore town. Telecom links have snapped and power supply to the town has been hit. Mayurakshi, Bhagirathi, Ajoy, Bhairav and Basuloi are flowing above the danger mark.

Rail links to north Bengal remained cut off and many trains

from Sealdah and Howrah were either cancelled or diverted. Arterial roads were cut at points to drain accumulated water.

The Army has made some inroads in Rampurhat and Nalhati in Birbhum, though vast stretches of Murshidabad, including Kandi, Berhampore town and Katwa remain inaccessible. Army helicopter from the Panagarh base could not take off today,

On Page 4

- Bad weather grounds IAF choppers
- Fear of cholera epidemic in flooded districts
- Train routes to N Bengal, Guwahati cut off

frustrating the State's bid to air-drop food packets to the victims. About 4 lakh villagers have been shifted to relief camps. But the rescue move fell far short of the rising demand, Bhattacharjee conceded.

The Ganga is threatening Malda town at Kaliachak and Manikchak, creating breaches in the embankments. The strong currents have washed away mud huts in the area. The new Seventh Embankment is still putting up doughty resistance, standing in the way of disaster.

A special Army helicopter from Purnea will fly to Malda tomorrow to pick up Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta and Panchayat

Minister Surya Kanta Misra, who are stuck at the Malda Circuit House. The Deputy Chief Minister has requisitioned three more Army columns to undertake rescue operations in Katwa, Kalna and Murshidabad.

Met office experts today assured the Deputy Chief Minister that the depression was making a northward move from central Bihar and the adjoining areas of West Bengal and things could improve within a few days.

Minister of State for Irrigation Ganesh Mondal, however, feared that the discharge from Massanjore could have a cascading effect on the entire course of the Bhagirathi, inundating more villages in Nawadwip, Kaliganj, Nakashipara, Phulia, Shantipur and Chakdah in Nadia, Harinkhola in Hooghly, Sheherabazar, Kalna, Katwa, Memari, Nandanghat, Aushgram and Purbasthali in Burdwan and Beldanga, Barwan, Khargram and Hijal in Murshidabad.

The irrigation department released 1.36 lakh cusecs water from the Massanjore and Tilpara today, while the release stood at a high 1.52 cusecs last night. Chief Secretary Manish Gupta has despatched dry food and clothing for the affected in Behrampore. Thirteen trucks loaded with these materials left the city today. The situation in north Bengal showed some signs of improving today with the rivers receding to their normal levels.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 SEP 2000

Rain hobbles Army

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 9 51 11

CALCUTTA, Sept. 20. — Vast areas in Katwa and Burdwan towns have been inundated following heavy rain over the past 24 hours. The floods in the state have so far claimed 34 lives.

Nearly four lakh people have been evacuated. The Army had begun rescue operations in Birbhum but was facing tremendous difficulties, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said today.

Army helicopters could not fly because of inclement weather, hampering airdrop operations in Birbhum and Murshidabad. Efforts are on to start operations early tomorrow.

Army personnel also couldn't conduct rescue operations in Murshidabad because of the heavy shower and rough waves in the Ganga. Jawans couldn't even enter some areas in Nabagram and Kandi this morning.

Mr Bhattacharya said the low pressure zone had moved farther north towards Bihar and was lying somewhere near Hazaribagh.

57-1 21 9
He requested striking telecom officials to go back to work in view of the crisis. The government, he said, was sympathetic towards their demands, but their help was needed as most telephone and telex lines in the districts were out of order. It had become almost impossible for the state government to contact the DMs and SPs.

Eighteen people have died in Birbhum as their mud houses collapsed. The deputy chief minister said 26 blocks in Murshidabad, 17 in Birbhum and 8 in Nadia were hit worst. Almost the entire Katwa subdivision in Burdwan is submerged. Vast areas of Ayushgram, Memari, Burdwan town and Purbasthali are under water.

The Ajoy is flowing above the danger mark at several points. A Central Water Commission alert in the afternoon said it might rise further at night because of heavy rain in the river's catchment area in Bihar for the third consecutive day today.

About 4,200 cusecs were released

from Hinglo Dam today, raising fresh fears that the embankment may be washed away at vulnerable points. Flood water has been running through a kilometre-long breach in the embankment at Narayanpur, washing out many villages. The embankment damaged by last year's flood hasn't been repaired.

Mr Ganesh Mondol, minister of state for irrigation, said 1.36 lakh cusecs were released from Tilpara and Massanjore dams today. The DVC said they hadn't released water from Maithon and Panchet today.

The Army managed to start operations in Rampurhat and Nalhati in Birbhum and Katwa in Burdwan this afternoon. Six Army columns have been deployed in the districts and one has been kept on reserve.

Mr Bhattacharya said water from the Bhagirathi had entered Murshidabad town. One lakh people in Murshidabad and Birbhum districts

■ See FLOODS: page 3

THE STATESMAN

Oil price hike: Centre in Catch-22 situation

S.P.S. Pannu
New Delhi, September 22

THE CENTRE will have to go in for a delicate balancing act between harsh economics and hard politics to arrive at the extent of the across-the-board increase in the prices of cooking gas, petrol, aviation fuel, diesel and kerosene.

At tomorrow's NDA's Coordination Committee tomorrow, if the Government side, led by PM Vajpayee and Petroleum Minister Ram Naik, succeeds in convincing its allies, the hike could be as early as tomorrow night, officials say.

The Government is alarmed because surging crude prices are threatening to saddle it with an oil pool account deficit of Rs 23,000 crores by March 2001 without a hike. The choice is limited because it cannot carry on with the deficit beyond Rs 12,000 crores.

For Mr Vajpayee, it is a crucial personal test in balancing economic imperatives and political compulsions. The allies like Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and the TDP do not like to be seen associated with hard decisions because of local factors.

Ms Banerjee is unlikely to support a hike of Rs 40 per LPG cylinder when the Assembly polls are only a few months away.

According to current indications, the cost of cooking gas (LPG) is likely to go up sharply as the subsidy burden has gone up to over Rs 170 per cylinder. The price of diesel is a good Rs 5 per litre below the import parity price with which it is supposed to be matched

every 30 to 45 days. However, since diesel is a politically sensitive commodity the government has not been able to increase the price of the fuel since October, 1999. While there is no option but to increase the price of diesel, the increase is likely to be cushioned by further raising the price of petrol and aviation turbine fuel.

With international crude prices continuing to soar above \$ 30 per barrel, the nation's subsidy bill on petroleum products, at the existing level of domestic prices, is projected to shoot past the Rs 37,000 crore mark.

Petrol, the rich-man's fuel, was being priced around Rs 4 above the international market price. Similarly aviation fuel was being priced about Re 1 above its international price. The extra collections from these two fuels were being used to pay the subsidy on LPG and kerosene.

However, with international prices skyrocketing, the price of petrol is merely Re 1 above its international price which is expected to yield only an extra Rs 1, 800 crore to finance the huge subsidy bill. The price of ATF has fallen even below the inter-

national price and as a result would entail a subsidy bill of Rs 160 crore. The ex-storage price of kerosene was last revised in March this year from Rs 2 per litre to Rs 4.50 per litre. PDS kerosene at present carries a subsidy of around Rs 8 per litre. While some increase has become necessary, the price of this poor-man's fuel cannot be increased much.

The government is also likely to go in for a reduction in the customs duty on crude in order to offset part of the required increase in petro goods prices.

SUBSIDY ON PETROLEUM PRODUCTS AT EXISTING PRICES

Diesel	20,600
Kerosene	9,600
LPG	6,800
Aviation Fuel	160
Total	37,160

Graphic by VINEY

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 SEP 2000

Centre raises DA for staff, dearness relief for pensioners

Oil price hike okayed

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 23. — Decks were cleared tonight for a hike in petrol, diesel, LPG, kerosene and aviation turbine fuel prices, with the Cabinet and the NDA authorising petroleum minister Mr Ram Naik to do the needful for tackling the whopping Rs 24,000 crore oil pool deficit.

"I have briefed the Cabinet about the prevailing scenario in the wake of shooting international prices. We have no option but to increase prices of all the five products under the administered price mechanism," said Mr Naik.

He said: "There will not be any announcement today. It will be made in due course."

Mr Naik had briefed the Cabinet on the oil price front before making the same pre-

sentation at the NDA meeting this evening at the Prime Minister's residence. He reportedly described the recent oil price spiral in international markets as the third oil shock after the one in 1974 and the Gulf War in 1990.

Some NDA leaders had argued that the hike could wait till after the festival season. But the burgeoning oil pool deficit would not allow the petroleum minister that much time.

NDA convenor Mr George Fernandes stressed after the NDA meeting that a decision on oil price hike had to be taken as "there is no way out". None of the NDA partners had objected to the hike, he said.

On the likely quantum of increase, he said it was for Mr Naik to decide. Mr Fernandes pointed out that oil price in the

international market had almost doubled in the last few months. He, however, said Mr Naik should ease the burden of the hike.

Earlier, UNI had reported that the government was trying to ease the impact on consumers by reducing the Customs and Excise duties and through the issue of oil bonds.

Cabinet decisions

The Union Cabinet today raised the dearness allowance to Central government employees by three per cent. The Cabinet also approved the hike of dearness relief for pensioners with retrospective effect from July.

This will need a financial outlay of Rs 1194.96 crore.

The parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, told newsmen after the Cabinet

meeting that DA for Central government employees had been raised from 38 per cent to 41 per cent. The move will put an additional burden of Rs 592.62 crore on the government.

The Cabinet decided to hike the bonus for railway employees. According to the decision, railway employees will be entitled bonus for 54 days instead of the usual 51.

The government has adopted the productivity-linked criteria in deciding the bonus.

The Cabinet amended the Nabard Act 2000, enabling Nabard to issue bonds before September. This is expected to help raise additional funds.

The Cabinet okayed a joint venture with Telematics Kenys Ltd which will invest \$21.9 million as 30 per cent equity.

THE STATESMAN

28 SEP 2000

Cabinet drops petro-bomb, nation braces for price shock

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The third petro shock is finally here. The National Democratic Alliance and the Union cabinet on Saturday gave the green signal to petroleum minister Ram Naik to raise the prices of petroleum products to cope with the staggering Rs 24,000 crore deficit in the oil pool account.

However, the indications Saturday night were that the ministry would take a day or two to work out the modalities and the quantum of the hike. The prices of petrol, diesel, kerosene as well as LPG are expected to be revised upwards.

Mr Naik, who briefed the Prime Minister before the cabinet meeting, held the view that since the crude oil price had gone up in the international market from \$11 to \$36 per barrel, an increase in the domestic market prices was neces-

sary. He later told journalists that although a hike appeared inevitable, the announcement about the quantum would not come later in the night. "It will come in due course," he said, adding that the decision would involve scaling down customs and excise duties and raising oil bonds.

Mr Naik said he had already discussed the situation and the financial implications of the oil price hike in the global market with finance minister Yashwant Sinha. He said his decision would involve both duties and oil bonds.

In a briefing on the cabinet meeting, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said that although the cabinet had been apprised of the enormous financial burden on the oil pool account as a result of the fluctuations in world market prices, it had decided not to take any decision simply

because the petroleum ministry was competent to act on its own.

"The petroleum minister briefed the cabinet about the global impact of oil prices, which has been described as the third oil shock. It has put an enormous burden on the oil pool account, and the estimated deficit is around Rs 24,000 crore," Mr Mahajan said.

Mr Mahajan clarified that the petroleum ministry was competent enough to adjust petroleum prices and technically, it did not require the cabinet's approval. "Under the rules, the petroleum ministry is competent to adjust oil prices," Mr Mahajan said.

The government is apparently working on an arrangement so that the consumer does not face the brunt of the hike. A part of the hike will be absorbed by the central and state governments as customs and excise duties.

Bengal situation: Confused NDA puts the ball in Centre's court

NEW DELHI: Caught in a dilemma over dealing with the situation in West Bengal, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Saturday left it to the Centre to take steps to "prevent the destruction of democratic institutions" in the state.

"The NDA requests the Union government to take whatever steps it deems necessary to prevent the destruction of democratic institutions in West Bengal," a resolution unanimously adopted at the NDA coordination committee meeting here said. While some of the NDA constituents, like the Trinamul Congress, have been demanding the imposition of President's rule in the state, or at least declaring some of the areas "disturbed", some other partners, like the TDP and the DMK, are opposed to the invocation of Article 356.

Expressing anguish at the vio-

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 SEP 2000

Laxman backs Trinamool demand for Article 356

Arindam Sarkar
Midnapore, September 23

THE CENTRE must immediately intervene in West Bengal in whatever form is necessary to stop CPI(M) cadres from killing and forcing their opponents out of their homes in Midnapore and its adjoining districts. BJP president Bangaru Laxman made this assessment after a whistle-stop visit to some villages in Midnapore.

Laxman arrived in Midnapore today with a high-level BJP delegation from Calcutta that included among others Union Minister of State for Communications Tapan Sikdar, State BJP president Ashim Ghosh and party MLA Badal Bhattacharya.

NDA partners are meeting this evening in Delhi to discuss the situation in Bengal, Laxman told reporters.

"The local people and the State BJP leadership want the Union Government to impose Article 356 in the State. I shall convey this to Prime Minister Atal Behari



Vajpayee and Home Minister LK Advani," Laxman said, adding, "The Government I am sure will take appropriate action."

But the BJP, Laxman explained, being the largest partner of the NDA is aware of the difficulties in intervening in the State. The major hurdle is that the BJP is not in a majority in the Rajya Sabha, which will have to ratify the decision to impose President's rule.

The Congress, he charged, is playing a wait-and-watch game while the people here are suffering. "I want to know from Sonia Gandhi if she will support the Government's plans in

Parliament. We already have a bitter experience in Bihar. Let the Congress make its position clear. I will then convince the Government to act," the BJP president said.

Rubbishing Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's claim that peace prevails in the troubled districts, Laxman shot back, "Today I visited camps where Trinamool-BJP supporters have taken refuge. All of them have been hounded out of their homes by CPI(M) cadres. I don't know why the CM makes such wild claims."

Laxman was also critical of the language Basu is using these days to blast his political opponents. "The Chief Minister has described the NDA as a bunch of cattle. He has called Mamata Banerjee names. This kind of language does not suit a person who hold the Chief Minister's post. Such statements are only inciting his party cadres to go on the offensive," Laxman said.

"But the writing on the wall is clear. The Marxists are on their way out. Even scientific rigging won't help. The people are moving away from them," Laxman remarked.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 SEP 2000

INCREASE WILL BE WITHIN A LIMIT, SAYS NAIK

Decks cleared for oil price hike

By Sushma Ramachandran

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 23. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) tonight gave the green signal to the Government to tackle the oil crisis facing the economy, paving the way for "hard decisions" to resolve the situation. The Government, on its part, made it clear that it would opt for a combination of price hike, cut in duties and oil bonds to curb the mounting oil pool account deficit. The Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, has said the announcement will be made "in due course of time". (According to PTI, Mr. Naik tonight said a decision would be taken before month-end.)

Evidently, the Government would like to watch the market situation before taking a final decision on the oil price hike especially with the latest U.S. move of releasing 30 million barrels of oil from the country's strategic reserves. Prices in the international market have already begun to move downward.

In any case, despite widespread speculation, NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, who briefed newsmen after the coordination committee meeting, stressed that no one opposed a hike. The oil crisis was discussed at length after a briefing by Mr. Naik, and various suggestions were put forward. Everyone understood the problem with the oil pool deficit set to touch Rs. 24,000 crores.

The only caveat by the NDA, Mr. Fernandes said, was that "care should be taken to see there is no extraordinary burden put on the people while at the same time taking care of the pool deficit". But the package of measures, including tax cuts, was being left to the Government's discretion. He said everyone — "the whole world" — was aware of the gravity of the situation.

However, there are some doubts still over whether the increase will be across-the-board

on all products or a selective one even though Mr. Naik told reporters, after the Cabinet meeting in the morning, that prices of all products under the administered price mechanism (APM) would have to be raised. Subsequently, however, the Information Technology Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, hinted that some product prices might be raised but others could remain unchanged. Mr. Naik briefed the Cabinet on the oil price scenario and later did so for the NDA constituents.

Enquiries here reveal that differences persist between the Finance and Petroleum Ministers over the quantum of cut in duties on petroleum products. The Fi-

nance Ministry is questioning the figures for revenue collections being quoted by Petroleum Ministry officials. North Block insists that the bonanza expected in both excise and customs due to the steep increase in world oil prices will not be as much as is being projected. Thus the extent of duty reduction, whether in customs or excise, is still being worked out.

Mr. Naik appealed to State Governments to reduce sales tax on petroleum products by five per cent to soften the impact of the price hike on the public. He briefed the Cabinet about the prevailing scenario in the wake of skyrocketing international prices.

The Minister made it clear that

there would not be much delay in making the announcement.

Mr. Naik, who said the decision to raise prices need not go to the Cabinet, pointed out that the oil pool deficit had become unmanageable. It was expected to reach Rs. 24,000 crores by year-end.

He stressed that there could be no further delay in raising the prices, as the burden of the high international prices had not been passed on to consumers in March when kerosene and LPG prices were raised. "We have reached the limit," he said but stressed that the price increase would be kept within a limit which could be borne by consumers.

U.S. to release oil from reserves

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, SEPT. 23. A day after the Vice-President and Democratic nominee, Mr. Albert Gore, called for the release of oil from the Strategic Reserves, the Clinton administration moved in that direction saying that about 5 per cent, or 30 million barrels, would be made available in the market. The Bush campaign has alleged that it was politics and not policy that prompted the decision.

"This is not political. The President wants to help the American people get home heating oil," the Energy Secretary, Mr. Bill Richardson said. Mr. Richardson is said to have been one of the officials to have argued for flooding the market with oil from the Strategic Reserves so as to bring down the prices.

Others like the Treasury Secretary, Mr. Lawrence Summers, had apparently argued against the idea saying it would have a marginal impact on the prices. Mr. Summers has since changed his position and backed the Vice President's call. Unnamed senior administration officials have been quoted as saying that while the final decision was taken by the President, Mr. Bill Clinton, it was not as though the Vice-President or some of his top aides had nothing to do with the move.

The administration's move to release oil from the Strategic Reserves is primarily intended to keep people living in the North East or the New England States from paying higher prices for heating oil.

Administration officials are being cautious on the

decision. A point has been made in the last two days that the administration was not "selling" oil from the reserves, rather it is being "exchanged" for oil in the future.

At a time when the Vice-President was lashing out at the oil industry and its supporters for the rising prices, the Bush campaign, led by the Texas Governor, wasted no time in criticising the decision to dip into the Strategic Petroleum Reserves saying the Vice-President last winter had opposed the idea of using the reserves to offset price rises. "I believe the Vice-President has made this decision with the support of the President for short-term political gains," Mr. Bush said.

The Clinton administration may be trying to make the point that its decision had nothing to do with politics, but not many seem to be taking this at its face value. Newspaper reports here say that prior to making a public call for leaning on the Strategic Reserves, Mr. Gore had called the President to inform him that he was going to make a campaign speech to this effect. Electorally, the East Coast is critical for the Democrats and the Vice-President appears to have a solid lock in the area.

Prices fall

Reuters reports from London:

Oil prices slumped as U.S. Energy Secretary, Mr. Bill Richardson, prepared to announce plans to release 30 million barrels of crude oil over 30 days from government reserves.

THE HINDU 24 SEP 2000

NDA gives Centre free hand on Bengal

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 23. The ruling coalition partners in the National Democratic Alliance today took the unprecedented step of adopting a resolution virtually condemning the CPI(M)-led Government in West Bengal while requesting the Centre "to take whatever steps it deems necessary to prevent the destruction of democratic institutions in West Bengal."

While this gives a free hand to the Centre to take whatever action it thinks fit, some of the allies have already separately stated that they do not think it would be wise to invoke Article 356 of the Constitution to dismiss the West Bengal Government, and as for

using the Disturbed Areas Act, the NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, today spoke about the "problems and difficulties involved".

The one-page resolution on the West Bengal situation adopted at the NDA meeting at the Prime Minister's residence this evening criticised the State administration for remaining a "silent spectator" to the violence, if not actively being involved in it, and charged the CPI(M) cadres with "killing and maiming" activists and supporters of the Trinamool Congress and the BJP. It spoke of "gang-raping" of women and "looting and burning of houses." The resolution said that the victims of CPI(M)'s depredations were "mostly Muslims, Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and women and children".

As expected, the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, spoke at length and suggested using the Disturbed Areas Act. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, gave an account of the exchange of letters between him and the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, once again charging him with using "intemperate language".

Briefing presspersons later, Mr. Fernandes confirmed that Ms. Banerjee had "mentioned the Disturbed Areas Act". Mr. Fernandes also gave his own impressions of his visit to the State.

However, Mr. Fernandes conceded that Ms. Banerjee was herself "aware of the problems

involved in invoking the Disturbed Areas Act," thus hinting that it may not be possible to invoke it or even amend the law as being talked about.

West Bengal and the increase necessitated in the administered prices of petroleum products were the two substantive issues discussed at the NDA meeting which was attended by almost all the allies, including Mr. Murasoli Maran (DMK), Mr. Suresh Prabhu (Shiv Sena), Mr. Vaiko (MDMK), Mr. Nitish Kumar (Samata Party), and Mr. Kushabhau Thakre (BJP). Mr. Ramadoss of the PMK could not attend as he was the victim of a violent assault recently on which members expressed their concern.

Govt. to raise Rs 5,500 cr from oil hike

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The much-dreaded oil price hike is not likely to occur within the next 48 hours but is certain to be slapped before the next week-end. The government is still working on the intricate calculations of the price hike for each major petroleum product — petrol, diesel, kerosene, LPG and aviation fuel — and expects to raise about Rs 5,500 crore from consumers.

Of this amount, how much would come from petrol or diesel or LPG depends on the increase the petroleum ministry decides in their administered prices. Given the economics of the situation and the NDA government's need to court populism, the prices of petrol, LPG and aviation fuel are likely to see the highest increases.

"We have to see that the increases are spread evenly," petroleum minister Ram Naik informally told newsmen here on Sunday.

Besides penalising consumers, the government is also considering tightening its belt to bridge the yawning Rs 24,000 crore oil pool deficit. Comprehensive guidelines are being issued to all ministries and government agencies to curtail their consumption of petroleum products. These include denial of official transport to government staff one day a week. "We want a 10 per cent cut in consumption; the government is the biggest consumer of petroleum products,"

Mr Naik said.

The figure of Rs 5,500 crore that the government hopes to mop up from the oil price hike is arrived at on the basis of the 'one-third formula' Mr Naik suggested to the cabinet and the NDA steering committee on Saturday. Under the proposal, left to be worked out in detail by the petroleum ministry, one-third of the oil pool deficit burden will be tackled through financial measures, one-third will be met through oil bonds, and one-third will be passed on to consumers.

At the current level of consumption, and on the presumption that world market prices of crude

remain in the region of \$30 a barrel, Mr Naik said he expected the oil pool deficit to reach Rs 23,600 crore by the end of the current fiscal

next March. The ministry opened the year with a deficit of Rs 6,000 crore, and "I expect to keep it at that level," Mr Naik said. This translates into the ministry's need to raise about Rs 16,000 crore by the end of March next year. And on the basis of the "one-third formula", the burden on consumers will be Rs 5,500 crore.

He said finance minister Yashwant Sinha had agreed to transfer to the oil pool account the Rs 4,429 crore the petroleum ministry had deposited with the Centre. Additional funds will be raised through oil bonds.

► See Edit: Postpone & Perish, Page 10

BARRELS OF BURDEN

- Govt. aims to mop up a third of amount from consumers
- Details of actual levy to emerge late next week
- Ministries, govt. agencies told to tighten their belts

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 SEP 2000

Absent allies force go-slow on oil price hike

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 24: The staying away of allies like the Telugu Desam Party, Akali Dal, the PMK and the Indian National Lok Dal from Saturday's National Democratic Alliance meeting and the absence of finance minister Yashwant Sinha appear to have stalled the Vajpayee government's decision to announce the oil price hike.

Sinha, who is currently attending an IMF meeting at Prague, is expected here on September 29. He will discuss the issue with petroleum minister Ram Naik on or after the 29th be-

fore announcing the hike. Sources said the government has already decided to hike the price but the "point is the quantum" of the increase.

Reluctant to allow the allies to cry for a "rollback" yet again, the Centre is adopting a cautious approach.

Efforts are on to convince those who stayed away from the meeting of the compulsions behind the proposed hike.

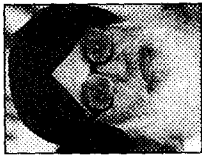
The Trinamul Congress, which will contest the Assembly elections in West Bengal early next year, has already expressed reservations over the price hike.

Though Desam is not part of the NDA, its leader and Andhra

Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu was invited by NDA convenor George Fernandes to the meeting, but Naidu declined.

Sources said last Thursday Fernandes had invited Desam parliamentary party leader Yerran Naidu to attend the meet.

On Friday, Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee also requested Yerran Naidu to be present at the meeting. Yerran Naidu contacted Chandrababu Naidu for permission.



On Friday, Fernandes also spoke to Chandrababu Naidu but the latter declined to attend the meeting or send a representative.

Naidu and Badal

Sources said senior Desam ministers and politburo members advised the chief minister not to be party to unpleasant decisions like the oil price hike and action against the West Bengal government.

Mamata Banerjee is likely to discuss the Bengal situation with Naidu tomorrow. She left

for Hyderabad on Naidu's invitation to discuss some key railway projects.

The government is working on a three-pronged strategy to tide over the crisis created by the oil pool deficit: issuance of bonds (petro bond is yet to be cleared by the finance ministry), reduction in excise and customs duty and increase in prices to cover one-third of the Rs 23,600 crore deficit.

"We will pass or, only one-third burden (about Rs 8,000 crore) to consumers," Ram Naik told reporters.

When asked if the Centre would substantially hike prices and then roll back part of it,

he said: "We will consider all the aspects while raising prices of products.... Rolling back doesn't give credit to the government."

Naik said he would write to all the chief ministers requesting them to slash sales tax by five per cent to reduce the burden on the common man.

Stating that the finance ministry was expected to mop up about Rs 41,000 crore from excise and customs as against the budgetary target of Rs 27,000 crore during 2000-01 on account of spurt in global crude prices, Naik said the finance minister had agreed to cut duties to pass on some of the surplus

accrual.

THE TELEGRAPH

Hungry flood vic

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Sept. 24. — The overall flood situation in the state improved marginally today as the sun shone brightly for the first time in days and most rivers began to recede, but victims continued to complain of inadequate and delayed relief.

Police fired in the air at Devagram, Nadia, as an angry mob tried to snatch food packets from policemen whom they blamed for "unnecessary" delay in distribution of food.

No one, however, was injured. At Ranaghat block I, there was a scuffle between policemen and flood victims over distribution of food packets.

The home (police) minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said the two incidents were "very unfortunate" and asked district authorities to handle the situation with patience.

Flood victims broke into a godown and took away food-grain stocked for people below the poverty line at Baninala village in Kotwali. A grocery at Rathtaala bazar in Krishnagar was looted last night.

About 400 people, believed to be CPI-M workers, attacked the office of Trinamul-controlled gram panchayat at Jhakra in Chandrakona, Midnapore. They

BOATMEN'S DITCH

KRISHNAGAR, Sept. 24. — As soon as the torrential rain began on 17 September night, Nabadwip boatmen hid their boats away. They had decided this long ago, they explained, because they hadn't been paid for helping last year's relief operations.

Shortage of country boats has handcuffed the administration. Nadia zilla sabhadhipati Mr Radhu Nath Biswas said: "The boatmen must have been paid by now, else they could have written to us." The DM, Mr Vivek Bharadwaj, has criticised the boatmen. — SNS

alleged that relief given to victims was not enough. The Chandrakona block Trinamul president, Mr Prabir Kushari, said block authorities were discriminating against the panchayat in allotting relief. He also said about 1,200 flood victims in Kuapur, where the gram panchayat is also controlled by his party, got almost no relief and were being cared for by private institutions.

Eighty thousand cusec of water was released from DVC against over 150,000 cusec yes-

terday. The volume of water released from Mayurakshi and Tilpara was also reduced, the state finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta, said.

Relief was a problem in Murshidabad too, where all major rivers have started receding but which continues to be cut off from the rest of the state. The Bhagirathi receded by 26 cm at Gorabazar today, and the levels of the Padma and Mayurakshi sank too. There was bright sunshine through the day, but weathermen predicted light showers soon.

IAF helicopters dropped food packets and medicines in Behrampore town. The district magistrate, Mr Vivek Kumar, said, "We are trying our utmost to restore rail or road link with Calcutta, so that relief material can be brought in." To make matters worse, some trucks carrying relief were looted in the district.

A special train carrying relief in the Ranaghat-Krishnagar-Lalgola section could not proceed beyond Panchberia station with flood victims squatting on the tracks. Victims had also "occupied" tracks at Kalyani Ghoshpara and Kalyani Simanta stations, an ER official said.

■ See RELIEF: page 3

THE STATESMAN

7 SEP 2002

'Mute girl not raped recently'

CALCUTTA, Sept. 24. — The medical report on the 18-year-old deaf and dumb undertrial, allegedly raped in a prison van by her police escort, says she wasn't raped recently but there are "some old abrasion (scratch) marks" on her body.

The two co-prisoners, with the girl in the van, reportedly told police they were present inside the van when she was dropped at Presidency Jail. — SNS

Nurse molested

CALCUTTA, Sept. 24. — A doctor of a nursing home in Ultadanga was held for allegedly molesting a trainee nurse last evening. — SNS

Medical seminar

CALCUTTA, Sept. 24. — The Indian Medical Association today organised a seminar on the use of Cisapride — a drug for heartburn, indigestion and constipation. Dr A Konar, gastroenterologist, said Cisapride may cause side effects like diarrhoea in some cases.

World Heart Day: The Cardiological Society of India held an awareness campaign on heart attacks at Kankurgachhi to mark World Heart Day. The Police commissioner, Mr DC Vajpai, inaugurated a padayatra in which students participated. — SNS

RELIEF:

(Continued from page 1)

The administration could not reach the worst-affected Kandi subdivision. The Army continued with rescue operations at Nabagram, Lalgola and Beldanga. Large areas of the Domkal subdivision and the trading town of Dhulian still face the threat of erosion. The SDPO, Domkal, Mr Prasun Banerjee, said: "Erosion in places like Raninagar, Binpara and Sarkarpara will become severe with the sudden rise and fall in the Padma water level."

Though most rivers receded, some continued to overflow their banks. The Bhagirathi, which receded in Murshidabad, overflowed its banks in Barrackpore, filling up canals. The Rupnaryan has been flowing above the red mark at Gopigunge and Ranichak, close to Ghatal town in Midnapore.

Flash floods have cut off all rail routes to North Bengal in Andal-Sainthia, Bandel-Katwa-Azimganj and Khana-Solarpur and Rampurhat-Malda sections, an ER official said.

The finance minister said Army helicopters would continue to airdrop food and medicines till further notice. Thirty-two Army and 40 state government boats are being used for round-the-clock rescue operation. Six launches carrying food packets and medicines have been sent to the districts.

Asim blames weather office: The weather office had not alerted the state government, Mr Dasgupta said. "They didn't tell us there could be heavy rain in Murshidabad, Birbhum and Burdwan. We would be better prepared if we had been alerted." He said the state government had released Rs 35 crore to buy relief material. Another Rs 15 crore has been sanctioned for tube-wells.

Floods wreak havoc in Purulia: Incessant rain claimed three lives in Raghunathpur, Purulia, yesterday. Unofficial sources put the toll at five. A truck driver and his helper were swept away by a current in Daraekeswar river on Purulia-Kashipur road.

Over 10,000 mud houses have collapsed and at least 14 bridges and culverts destroyed.

Train services between Tatanagar and Patna, Danapur and Chapra via Adra and Asansol divisions remained disrupted for the third consecutive day.

Air Force copters drop food material: The IAF has airdropped 61.6 tons of food material in flood-affected districts, a press release issued by the Fort William said today.

SUCI for all-party committee: The SUCI wants an all-party committee to supervise flood relief.

THE STATESMAN

25 SEP 2000

Worry clouds on day of respite

● Victims clash with police, Army ● Relief chopper crash-lands ● Toll climbs

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, September 24

THE RAIN has stopped but the scar on the population remains gory. The administration has got a day to act till the Bhagirathi and Ajoy go on high tide from Monday night. The rest is a story of inability and inefficiency marked by food riots, police firing and victims being washed away by menacing currents. The official toll stands at 208, but flash floods continue to flush out hundreds of bodies in Murshidabad.

Hungry, homeless victims clashed with police at Debagram in Murshidabad for food today. Some scuffled with the Army and administration at Ranaghat in Nadia demanding more rescue boats. Police fired in the air at Debagram to disperse the hungry mob, the Deputy Chief Minister said. "I have asked police to show restraint till the victims get adequate relief," he declared.

What the State Government has done till today is hardly worth mentioning.

It continues to bank on the Army to carry relief to the heart of inundated areas. The Indian Air Force, though trying its best, has been able to airdrop a mere 61.6 tonnes of food to more than a crore of people in Murshidabad, Burdwan, Hooghly and Nadia. An Mi-17 chopper was pulled out of the job after it crash-landed near Panagarh air base today.

A major part of the Rs 35-crore State allocation for relief has remained on paper. Most of the speedboats, vessels and trucks are stranded on their way.

Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has asked the Army and district officials to concentrate on Nadia for the next two days. The district lies in the pincer grip of the Bhagirathi and the Churni—both flowing above the extreme danger level at Hanskali. Fresh areas of Chapra and Tehatta were flooded today. A Government vessel reached relief to Krishnagore, Bhattacharjee claimed.

Krishnagore Jail is under water. Female prisoners in Ranaghat Jail have been shifted upstairs to share space with the men. The jailor has a tough job here. He has been told to look after the women's safety.



Women and children clamour for food packets being dropped by Army choppers at Ranaghat, Aishtala, on Sunday. Photo: Subhendu Ghosh

besides ensuring no one escapes. Prisoners have been shifted to the second floor at Katwa. The jails—and their inmates—at Kandi and Jangipur have been left to their fate. The Government has not been able to establish a link with them yet.

As the Ganga overflowed banks of several canals, parts of six municipalities in Barrackpore, North 24-Parganas, went under. At least 15,000 were hit in Kanchrapara, Hatisahar, Bhatpara, Naihati, Garulia and Noa-para. Discharge from the Maitthon Dam and Tilpara Barrage went

down to 20,000 cusecs today. But the discharge from Damodar Valley Corporation kept the Mundeswari in spate at Harinkhola.

The Bhagirathi has fallen below the danger level. So have all local rivers like the Brahmani, Dwaraka and Baslui. But they are all expected to swell from Tuesday as the Bhagirathi witnesses a high tide up to Katwa, irrigation officials said. The tide might tell upon affected areas of Udaynarayanpur and Amta in Howrah and Arambag and Khanakul in Hooghly, with a possible impact on the city. The National Highway 34 remains

under shoulder-deep water. With relief trucks stranded at Plassey, the State has chosen to send relief by water. It has commissioned six vessels—two each for Kalna and Berhampore, Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta said. But the tremendous current in the Bhagirathi is making it difficult for the sarengs to steer upstream.

"When it's taking an hour to cross from Babughat to Howrah Station, you can well imagine how long it would take to reach Berhampore," said one.

More reports, photographs on Page 4

Mamata to 'wait and watch'

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, SEPT. 25. The Trinamool Congress president, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, said here today that the demand for invoking Article 356 in West Bengal was a people's demand and she would prefer to wait and watch the developments.

Responding to a question whether she was satisfied with the NDA Government's action on her plea for imposing President's rule in West Bengal, she said there was no last word in politics. The Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, had already written to the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, and she would take things step by step.

Ms. Banerjee was addressing a press conference in the presence of the TDP president, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, who earlier hosted a breakfast at his residence. An air of cordiality marked the meeting with both leaders waxing eloquent about the commonality of interests between regional parties and highlighting their 'similar approach' within Parliament and outside.

Asked whether she was satisfied with the TDP's response to her demand, Ms. Banerjee pointed out that the Deputy Leader of the Telugu Desam Parliamentary Party, Mr. S. Venugopalachari, had been part of the NDA team which felt that there was a Constitutional breakdown in West Bengal and that law and order had failed. The team had recommended declaration of certain districts as "disturbed".

She said it was the duty of every Government to protect the fundamental rights of the people and not to turn as aggressor as the Left Front was doing in her State. Accusing Marxist Governments of indulging in political violence, she said West Bengal was 'number one' in this respect and Kerala second. The State police was not doing justice to the people.

Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, who spoke to the media later, said "we definitely support her demand for restoration of law and order in West Bengal". In fact, everyone ought to support the cause Ms. Banerjee was fighting for, that is protecting the people's rights and put-

ting an end to political violence.

He, however, felt that imposition of President's rule was not the central issue since Ms. Banerjee was primarily anxious to protect the lives and properties of people in her State. Moreover, people, who were the ultimate judges, would give their verdict during elections. Evading a direct reply to a question whether the TDP wanted certain areas in West Bengal declared 'disturbed', he said his party was examining the NDA team's recommendation. But, it was better to wait and see the outcome of the Centre's efforts to restore law and order, he added.

BJP holding 'informal talks' with Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, SEPT. 25. The BJP today indicated that it was engaging in "informal talks" with the Congress(I) to arrive at an understanding for imposing President's rule in West Bengal.

The party vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, told reporters that the NDA Govern-

ment was holding its hand in West Bengal only because it lacked the numbers in Parliament. The support of the Congress(I) was necessary to put West Bengal under Central rule, he pointed out. "We do not want to repeat the Bihar experiment (when President's rule had to be revoked in the absence of support in the Rajya Sabha)", he added. The local Congress unit had apprised its high command of the situation.

Describing the law and order situation in West Bengal as serious, Mr. Krishnamurthy said the CPI(M) Government had "totally failed" in taking steps to end the violence. "The entire country is exercised over this," he said. Criticising the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, for his "intemperate letter" to the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, he said in a federal set-up the State Government had certain obligations. The Basu Government had not taken any pre-emptive steps, he said.

The CPI(M)'s handling of the situation was reflective of its desperation and frustration. The party was staring in the face of defeat in the Assembly election, he said.

Don't count on us: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 25. The Congress(I) today urged the BJP not to look to it in tackling the situation in West Bengal. Referring to the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman's assertion that his party was looking to the Congress chief, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, the party spokesman, Mr. Anil Shastri, said, "Mr. Laxman would be well advised to look to his Government and his NDA partners as far as the situation in West Bengal is concerned."

The spokesman also said too much should not be read into Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi accompanying the Trinamool leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, to meet the President. Mr. Das-

munshi had clarified that his visit was purely in his capacity as a Member of Parliament. "He went there to discuss the flood situation in the State, there were no political undertones to it," said Mr Shastri.

PTI reports:

Mr. Shastri dismissed reports that Mr. Munshi continued to be the working president of the West Bengal PCC saying the post was abolished after the appointment of Mr. Pranab Mukherjee as State unit chief.

Whenever a new PCC chief was appointed, the state executive stood dissolved, and this was applicable to West Bengal also.

THE HINDU

25 SEP 2000

FLOOD:

(Continued from page 1)

still inaccessible. Kalna, Purbasthali and Katwa in Burdwan and Bhagawanpur, Kandi remain cut off.

Dropping food packets from IAF helicopters is the only way to feed people in inaccessible areas, but this has its pitfalls. A man died yesterday in Khanakul, Hooghly crushed by a bag of food that fell on him.

Floating corpses: Cremating the dead is a problem in Birbhum, Hooghly and Murshidabad, where water has started receding but large areas are still submerged.

Ananda Marga sadhus, who cremated thousands of corpses after the supercyclone in Orissa, today said this was a hard task now with so little dry land available.

CPM appeal: Mr Anil Biswas, has appealed to party members to give up a day's salary for October for flood victims.

THE STATESMAN

20 SEP 70

Murshidabad gets respite, Nadia suffers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Sept. 25. — Flood waters have risen alarmingly in Nadia, which is receiving the water flowing away from Murshidabad and other districts to its north. The situation has improved marginally in Murshidabad while the Ganga is rapidly receding in Malda where fresh flooding seems unlikely.

Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya and Mr Asim Dasgupta, during an aerial survey of the flooded districts today, could not differentiate between the course of the Bhagirathi and the stretch of land from Krishnagar to Kalyani. All roads, highways and fields in Nadia are flooded.

Most roads are still submerged in other flood-hit districts too, and efforts are under way to clear the highway linking Behrampore and Burdwan in 24 hours. Official estimates put the toll at 418; 260 are missing and nearly 14.8 million are affected. Only 3.1 million have been rescued and put in relief camps.

In Hooghly, fresh areas have been inundated in Guptipara Paschim, Sripur in Balagarh Block, Rajbonshipara, Tribeni Sibpur, Banberia, Baneswarpur, Mirzakancha, and Nomerpur. Vehicles can now hardly move along Assam Link Road, which is 3-5 ft deep in water. Launches cannot ply between Chinsurah and Naihati because of the strong downward current.

Guptipara is reportedly the

Hooghly water invades city

CALCUTTA, Sept. 25.— The Hooghly's waters rushed into parts of eastern Calcutta after a lockgate on Circular Canal gave way late tonight, the mayor said. A general warning was sounded and thousands of people in Narkeldanga, Entally, Ultadanga and other areas near the canal have been asked to move to safer places.

Sandbags were being used to protect the lockgate as the Hooghly waters kept rising following high tide. The water, however, was still below danger level.

Earlier in the day, the mayor said that parts of Kali-ghat, Behala and Ahiritola may be flooded tomorrow by a high tide in the Hooghly. It may raise the water level at Bandel power plant, necessitating a shutdown and blacking out Calcutta (details on page 4).

The weather office held out a crumb of hope, saying there is little possibility of rain in the city tomorrow. — SNS

hardest hit, with the water level rising to 10-15 ft. People are huddled together on roof tops and upper floors and using

country boats to fetch food and drinking water. Relief has not reached many. The Mundeswari is flowing 2 feet above danger level at Harinkhola. Fresh areas in Goghat, Khanakul, Arambagh and parts of Pursurah block continue to be inundated.

Flash floods in North 24-Parganas have inundated large areas of Bongaon and Barrackpore sub-divisions, affecting about 6,00,000 people, the DM, Mr HK Dwivedi, said. A breach was detected in the embankment at Garulia this evening. In Bagda block, the Icchamati rose suddenly, flooding all nine gram panchayat areas.

Mr Bhattacharya and Mr Dasgupta said at Writers' Buildings after their return that they had noticed a mild improvement in Murshidabad and Birbhum, the worst-hit districts so far. No water was released from Masanjore Dam today, and DVC released only 65,000 cusec of water.

Mr Jyoti Basu rejected the Railways' complaint that it hadn't been informed before water was released from dams. There was no time for that, he said. He confirmed incidents of looting and said "political parties" were to blame.

Relief teams have not reached the marooned in several areas of Nadia, Murshidabad and Burdwan, the state home minister said. Nabadwip, Santipur, Nakashipara and Kaliganj are

■ See FLOOD: page 3

THE STATESMAN

25.09.58

India, US to fight terrorism together

INDIA AND the United States today agreed on steps for greater cooperation to fight terrorism. They condemned all forms of terrorism including ones sought to be justified on religious, racial, ethnic, ideological or political grounds.

Expressing concern over the threat posed by international terrorism and the rise in drug trafficking as a means for funding such acts, the two sides called for an international consensus on adoption of a proposed UN convention on terrorism.

Discussing international terrorism with special focus on Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Indo-US Joint Working Group (JWG) on counter-terrorism exchanged views here on measures relating to plane hijacking and bomb detection. The Group's inaugural meeting was held in Washington on February 7 and 8 this year. The US team also called on Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh and Home Secretary Kamal Pande. The JWG assessed the striking capabilities of various terrorist groups operating in this region. The activities of Osama Bin Laden and his Taliban hosts were discussed in detail.

HTC, New Delhi

Left parties warn Centre

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 26

THE FOUR Left parties today vowed to fight the BJP-Trinamool's "game plan" of toppling the duly-elected Left Front Government in West Bengal and warned the Centre against imposing President's Rule or declaring certain areas as disturbed through an ordinance.

The CPI-M, CPI, RSP and Forward Bloc—who have to thank Ms Bannerjee and Home Minister L K Advani for bringing them on a single platform after a long interregnum—in fact, said that the attack on West Bengal smacked of a conspiracy to weaken the Left forces which have been spearheading the campaign against the ruling combine's ideologies and policies of dividing the country.

The central issue, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, A B Bardhan, Abani Roy, Debabrata Biswas, D Raja and Prakash Karat, pointed out at the convention was one of Centre-state relations, the use of constitutional provisions

and the contrast between the policies being pursued by the Centre and the state government. "There is no need for us to fear because the greater the harassment and tyranny on us, the stronger we become," Mr Surjeet told his cheering supporters.

He pointed out that since invoking Articles 356 or 355 were not possible because of lack of numbers and the need for the state government's consent respectively, there was now talk about amending Article 355 and an ordinance.

"We are ready to face any eventuality", thundered Mr Bardhan, recalling that Article 356 was first attempted on Communist Kerala.

He also came down heavily on the DMK and the TDP, the Left's erstwhile allies in the United Front, for maintaining a stoic silence on the BJP-Trinamool's demand for invoking Article 356 or 355.

Mr S K Mishra, West Bengal's Minister of Land, Land Reforms and Panchayats, also spoke at the convention.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2277 2006 2 2000

Calcutta caught

Rampaging river roars in on crest of high tide

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Sept. 26: The first of a forecast wave of high tides from a swollen Hooghly crashed into Garden Reach after midnight and surged towards Kidderpore.

The tide swept in before the city could recover from another midnight ambush. Water had crept up on a sleeping Calcutta on late Monday night, too, leaving areas near the two canals, Tolly's Nullah and Bagjola, in knee-deep water by noon.

Water flowing from the Hooghly into the canals broke through the sandbag barriers put up yesterday, as two lockgates, having fallen into disuse, failed to stem the tide.

The high tide, which rose to five metres tonight, submerged the circular railway tracks at Bagbazar. The river started to overflow at Babughat and inched towards Strand Road.

Water began entering Chetla, Kalighat, Behala, parts of Maidan, Tolly Road, Watgunge, Kashipur Road, Nimtalla Ghat Road and Tala Park.

The tide started losing its punch by 2 am, prompting civic officials to say that the situation may not be as severe as feared. But they conceded that the respite could be shortlived as the weather office has predicted the tides will reach a maximum height of 6.4 metres on Thursday and Friday.

Whipped into action by fears of widespread flooding over the next 72 hours, the government launched one of the largest disaster management and evacuation programmes in the city since 1978.

Behind the fear was the possi-

bility of sporadic but heavy rain combining with the high tides over the next three days. "We in Calcutta will be in real trouble if the combination becomes real," said deputy chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya.

R.N. Goldar, director of the Alipore Met office, said *bhara kotal*, or high tide, a regular phenomenon at this time of the year, will have a greater impact since the Hooghly is already in spate.

"The downward movement of water from flood-stricken Nadia and other districts is going to

Weather

The monsoon has weakened over Gangetic West Bengal, scaling down fears of uniform heavy rains immediately, the Met office said.

The sky is expected to remain less clouded in the next few days. Alipore Met office director R.N. Goldar forecast isolated, heavy-to-scattered rains in Calcutta and its neighbourhood.

The low pressure which had caused the floods in the districts has moved towards Uttar Pradesh.

power the river's backward assault on the city," Goldar said.

Riverside police stations were asked to draw up area-specific contingency plans for flooding and evacuation.

At 11.55 am today, breaching a bulwark of sandbags that had been put in place to repair the lockgate at Chitpur, river water started to engulf one neighbourhood after another across north Calcutta. Chitpur, Cossipore, Baranagore, Nimtolla, Sovabazar, Ahiritolla, Bagbazar and Posta

were awash in its inexorable march.

Down south, Behala, New Alipore, Tollygunge, Kalighat, Chetla, Rashbehari, Garia, Bansdroni and Tiljala were flooded when Tolly's Nullah overflowed. Water flowed in through the race course lockgate, too.

Heavy rain in the afternoon fed the accumulation of water in areas where underground sewers were already full with water from the Hooghly.

By afternoon, the administration was grappling with the daunting task of shifting nearly 25,000 men, women and children, all settlers along Chitpur, Kesh-topur and Bagjola canals and Tolly's Nullah, to safer places.

Local municipal officials, people's representatives, policemen and political activists went around the vulnerable areas, appealing to settlers over public address systems to move out.

By evening, a large section of settlers had been evacuated. But many decided to stay put, lulled into a false sense of safety as the water level began to recede.

Even after the onset of the high tide in the night, around 3,000 encroachers near Chetla refused to shift to safer places.

The Salt Lake administration has been alerted to the threat of inundation from Keshtopur canal. Similar warnings have been given to residents of Dum Dum, Baguiati, Lake Town and Nagerbazar, for whom danger lurks in the overflowing of Bagjola canal.

The government also cautioned those planning to perform tarpan in the Hooghly on Mahalaya on Wednesday.

■ See Page 8

9/2/83

Central rule not possible, concedes BJP

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 27. Even as the West Bengal political drama continues to unfold and the Bharatiya Janata Party has joined the Trinamool Congress full throatedly in decrying political violence in the State and demand for some Central action, privately senior party leaders concede that not much can be done. Imposing President's rule is out of the question, and using the Disturbed Areas Act is also virtually out, they feel.

"The Centre cannot even order a CBI inquiry into any incident without the consent of the State Government. And it would be wrong to change the law (regarding the Disturbed Areas Act) simply to deal with one particular situation," said a senior BJP leader. He viewed the whole exercise as an attempt to mobilise public opinion and in this the party has been successful. In a democracy what works is not action but pub-

lic opinion and the BJP is confident that months ahead of the Assembly elections, enough awareness has been created of the alleged excesses of the ruling Left Front, the BJP leader said.

Party leaders, however, do not agree that the campaign against the CPI(M)-led Government may prove to be counter-productive as it could help to give a wake-up call to the Left Front leaders, galvanise them to deal with the complacency that is bound to have set in after 20 years of uninterrupted rule and get them to put their house in order.

Neither there is any answer to the question how the BJP and the Trinamool hope to keep the tempo going, with elections still a good six months away. Will the Centre do nothing and yet keep shouting daily that the CPI(M) is murdering democracy in West Bengal? And will this slogan sell when their alliance partner is demanding the dismissal of an

electd Government months before elections?

When pointed out that the BJP-Samata Party combine had adopted similar tactics ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections last year and this had not helped it form a Government, BJP leaders say Bihar is different because caste loyalties of voters take precedence over all other matters. In Bengal, they are hoping for electoral dividends from the daily threat of "action" by the Centre against the Jyoti Basu Government.

PTI reports

"A tremendous public opinion is building up against the CPI(M) Government in the State and even though the situation is bad and the party president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, has described it as horrible, we can only mobilise the people against this misrule," the BJP vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, told presspersons here.

THE HINDU

28 SEP 2000

Centre's relief package after minister's report ■ Zoo, mor

Nitish on flood visit to silence Left complaint

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 28. — The Union agriculture minister will reach Calcutta on Saturday to assess the flood situation in the state.

Though earlier the Centre had decided to send only a joint secretary-level team on Friday, the Prime Minister later reportedly told Mr Nitish Kumar, now in Bihar, to change his programme and go to West Bengal. The agriculture ministry has confirmed Mr Kumar's visit.

Mr Kumar was asked to visit the state to counter the Left Front government's attempts to accuse the Centre of not paying enough attention to the floods, officials said.

The minister and the agriculture secretary, Mr Bhaskar Barua, will reach Calcutta at 1 p.m. and undertake an aerial survey of the flood-hit districts. Mr Kumar will then be briefed by the joint secretaries' team, which will hold a meeting with state officials after reaching Calcutta tomorrow.

Mr Kumar is likely to call on Mr Jyoti Basu and leave for Patna on Saturday night.

The minister's team will comprise agriculture, finance, surface transport, water resources and Planning Commission departments' officials. The Cabinet secretary, Mr Prabhat Kumar, discussed the flood-situation at a secretary-level meeting tonight.

The Centre today said 42 Army-boats, 50 speed boats and about 850 boats are helping relief operations. Rs 860 crore has been released in advance from West Bengal's entitlement of Central assistance in various sectors. Two calamity relief fund instalments — Rs 44 crore — will be released in addition to Rs 75.83 crore already sent to the state.

In October, the Centre will send about 70,000 tonnes of foodgrains at below poverty line rates for the 3.4 million affected families. Also, 10,000



Flood victims being served food at Panji Pukur in Hooghly on Thursday. — The Statesman (Another photograph on page 3)

tonnes of kerosene that the state had sought will be sent along with halogen tablets and bleaching powder. Adequate supply of drinking water too will be provided.

Mr Kumar had visited Hyderabad on a fact-finding mission after the recent flash floods had devastated Andhra Pradesh. Senior leaders reportedly felt that if the Central team had only joint secretaries, the Left Front would have got another chance to allege Central apathy.

The Centre will announce the flood relief package after Mr Kumar's visit.

Left offensive: The Left Front plans counter to Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for President's rule in the state by reportedly alleging Central apathy towards the flood vic-

tims.

A four-man parliamentary delegation — Mr Biplab Dasgupta (CPI-M), Mr Ajoy Chakraborty (CPI), Mr Abani Roy (RSP) and Mr Debabrata Biswas (Forward Bloc) — today called on the President and the Prime Minister. They demanded adequate Central assistance to tide over the flood situation.

They asked Mr KR Narayanan and Mr Vajpayee to declare the floods a national calamity and demanded that the Centre release Rs 962 crore as flood relief.

BJP demand: The BJP today demanded that Mr Basu convene an all-party meeting to apprise opposition parties of the flood relief operations. Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, party spokesman, said the Centre wouldn't discriminate in giving

assistance.

The Centre has promised to give the state foodgrains it needs as flood relief, he said.

Mr Naidu and the party vice-president in-charge of West Bengal, Mr Kailashpati Mishra, had earlier asked Mr Vajpayee to send a Central team to the state. A BJP team too will visit the flood-hit areas after the water recedes. Mr Naidu appealed to all political parties to begin massive relief and rehabilitation operations.

Mr Naidu suggested that the state set up all-party committees in the flood-hit districts for better and prompt relief operations.

The Congress and Trinamul have alleged discrimination in the state's relief to flood victims. Mr Mishra said the state was trying to divert the people's attention from the floods by attacking Miss Banerjee and Mr LK Advani.

■ Editorial: The real disaster, page 8
■ More reports on pages 3 & 4

Oil prices will be hiked within two days: Naik

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

NEW DELHI: Petroleum minister Ram Naik said on Thursday that the finance ministry had agreed to reduce import and excise duties and issue oil bonds in an effort to take care of a major chunk of the oil burden amounting to Rs 23,600 crore.

He also disclosed that the prices of oil were likely to be hiked within the next two days.

"The finance ministry has agreed to cut customs and excise duty on crude and petro products to provide relief to consumers from the impending hike in prices necessitated by the tripling of prices of international crude oil over the last 18 months," Mr Naik said.

The finance ministry has also agreed to part with the petroleum ministry's deposits with the exchequer amounting to Rs 4429 crore and issue oil bonds to cover for one-third of the oil pool deficit, which is estimated to touch Rs 23,600 crore during the financial year without any price correction, he said.

Mr Naik, however, reiterated that the government will take the "hard" decision of hiking prices of five controlled products — petrol, diesel, kerosene, LPG and Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) — by September 30.

"Prices of petro products will be hiked to the extent of one-third of the oil pool deficit... We have ensured that only the least burden is passed on to the common man," he said and added that his ministry has also initiated a move to cut the consumption of petroleum products by the government, by up to 10 per cent, in an effort to reduce the non-plan expenditure on the product.

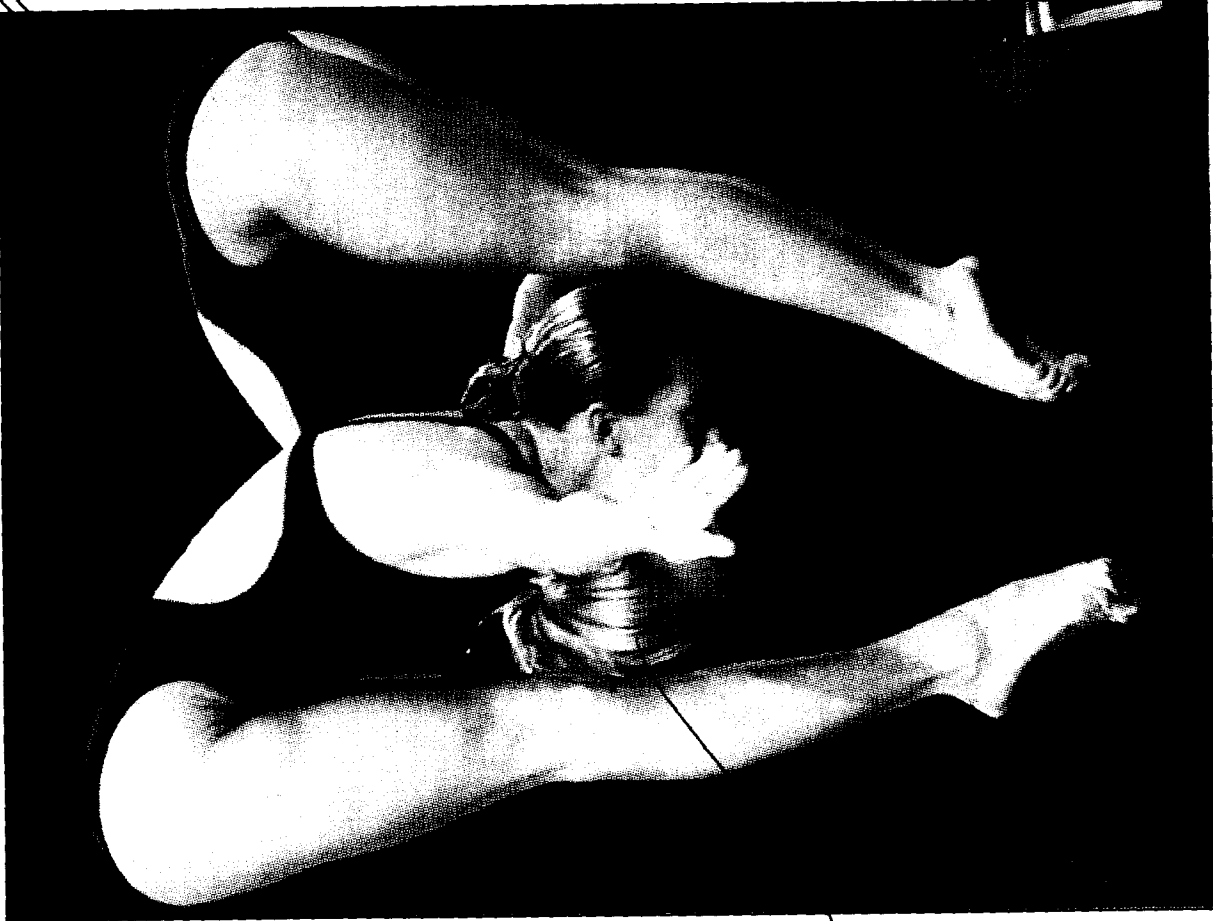
Mr Naik made it clear that the quantum of reduction in customs and excise duties and the amount that would be returned from the petroleum and natural gas ministry's oil sector funds was not known.

Responding to a specific question on whether there was a plan to ration petroleum products in the country in order to reduce its consumption, Mr Naik said he would never dream of doing this as that would have an adverse impact on industrial growth.

Meanwhile, the union petroleum ministry has relaxed the recent curbs on inter-state sale of petro products, subject to certain safeguards.

The curbs were imposed after the detection of some misuse racks, involving petroleum firms, too. It triggered a series of rule changes and verification procedures. As a result, it is felt the curbs may now be largely removed.

Reuters



HEAD-ON COLLISION: Jenny Keim and Laura Wilkinson of the U.S. take a dive in the synchronised 10-metre platform final at the Sydney Olympics on Thursday. The pair finished fifth in the competition.

Rajan wheeled into court, refuses to identify attackers

BANGKOK: Thirteen days after escaping an attempt on his life, an injured and pale-looking underworld don, Chhota Rajan, refused to identify his alleged attackers in a court on Thursday even as he was formally charged and granted bail in a case relating to violation of immigration laws.

Rajan was brought to the southern Bangkok criminal court on a stretcher hooked on to a glucose bottle with heavily-armed security men forming a ring around him. During his two-hour testimony and interrogation in the court, where his alleged attackers were also present, Rajan said everything had happened so fast that he was unable to see any of his attackers.

Rajan was injured when assailants of a rival gang barged into an apartment of Indian jeweller Michael D'Souza on September 15 and opened fire. D'Souza was killed while his wife Sangeeta Sharma was injured. Four persons — three Pakistanis and a Thai national — were arrested in this connection. Sangeeta, who also testified, identified one of the attackers.

The victims told the court what happened that night. But they refused to say why they were attacked, the lawyer said. One of the arrested attackers has said that the Karachi-based underworld don, Dawood Ibrahim, had sent them to kill Rajan.

After testifying as a witness in the shootout case, Rajan was taken in an ambulance to another court where he was chargesheeted for violating immigration laws and entering Thailand as Vijay Daman.

The court granted him bail after he furnished a bond of 20,000 baht (about \$ 500) which he paid in cash. The court set October 4 for the next hearing.

"India jaania hai. Main yahan se jaoonga sab khatam hone ke baad aur surrender karoonga (I will go to India after everything is over here and surrender there)," Rajan said in a feeble voice, while leaving the court.

The authorities have found that Rajan, who had entered the country under the name Vijay Daman, filed a false statement while requesting to change his visa from a tourist to a business one. The offence carries a maximum term of six months in prison or a fine.

As the court proceedings began, a top Thai police official, Gen Chakthib, said that the authorities were still awaiting a formal request from India on Rajan's extradition. (PTI)