

Act II: Mamata fails to create a ripple, PM rejects resignation

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 4 DECEMBER

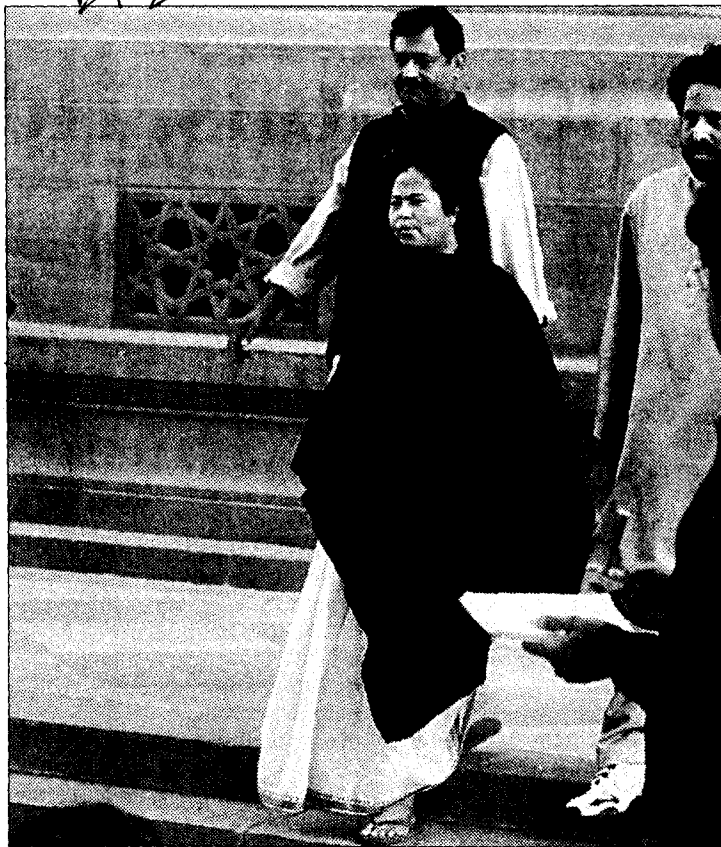
RAILWAY MINISTER Mamata Banerjee was out there yet again with her favourite one liner — "I Quit" — but the overworked resignation drama this time attracted less than marginal attention. Predictably, the Prime Minister refused to accept her resignation, not considering it worthy of despatching George Fernandes — only a PMO official made it to her house this morning.

The general consensus today seemed to be that she should stay back to face the music. Even her own party did not give her resignation the time of day with party leaders in Calcutta going to the extent of saying that she really should not resign. The last word from the east was reserved for Jyoti Basu, who was his normal acerbic self. "She has done this earlier too. She submitted a piece of paper to the Prime Minister saying she had resigned over the rise in petro-prices... she should have discharged her responsibilities instead of running away."

Apart from the CPI(M) in Parliament, led by Basudeb Acharya, no other Opposition party bothered to demand that she resign. This indicates that Ms Banerjee will certainly be called up to account.

For Ms Banerjee, carrying through the resignation would have been politically counter-productive because then she would have had to face the electorate as someone who had "failed to discharge her responsibilities."

Unlike the petro-prices crisis, where she could legitimately take a populist stance, in this case, she could hardly project herself as an eligible chief minister after having



Mamata's labour lost: The railway minister leaving Parliament House on Monday. — PTI

"failed to take care of a ministry."

Mr Vajpayee probably felt like Lyndon Johnson when he refused her resignation, because that piece of presidential wisdom holds good for her — its better to have her creating havoc from within than turn her loose and target the government.

Increasingly, however, Ms Banerjee's style of functioning will come under serious scrutiny. It has not escaped notice that she's running her campaign for the West Bengal chief minister's post from the Rail Bhavan in Delhi and that it took her 20 hours to get from Midnapore to Ambala on Sunday.

Ms Banerjee explained to the press on Monday that since she had "no work" over the weekends she went to Calcutta. The railway

minister of the second largest railway network in the world works a five-day week and she's on record. Railway accidents are equally disobliging — they always happen on weekends.

The key issue in this accident, as in the others in the past, was that of railway safety and maintenance or the lack of it. But the railway minister is waiting, endlessly as it turns out, for the G.N. Roy report on the Gaisal disaster, the report on the Khanna accident as well as the Rakesh Mohan report on reform and restructuring of the railways. Until then, Ms Banerjee will claim a legitimate reason not to jump the gun, but point to the suspension of seven senior Northern Railway officials as the first knee-jerk reaction to absolve herself.

A taste of Lady Bountiful from Bengal

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 4 DECEMBER

HAVING READ out her *suo motu* statement on the floor of the House and assured by the PM that her resignation will not be accepted, it was a chastened Ms Banerjee who wended her way to her office in Parliament, filled with dreams of munificence to Punjab villagers and self-flagellation for her moral responsibility, which she, in her colourful turn of phrase termed a "guilty conscience."

On admission of guilt: "Railways no doubt has been neglected. Whatever the cause its a failure... Even if one person dies (in a rail mishap), I feel guilty. Ours is the world's second largest rail network and there is need for more care and safety."

On accusations that she is seldom around: "I have spent more time here than any other minister. Unlike others I have not gone overseas, not even to Sri Lanka... Everybody has state obligations. Mine are a little more. But I am not doing it at the cost of the ministry. I go there only during the weekend if necessary... I don't see the operational side of the railways but only the administrative aspects. But as a human being, the accident has touched my heart."

On conspiracies: "I don't want to comment. But railway accidents seem to happen on the weekends only."

On railway reform: "This is a crisis year for the railways and the system has to be revamped. In my letter to Mr Vajpayee, I have written that I tried my best to transform the affairs.... I have left it to him to decide."

Atal trashes Mamata quit letter

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 4

RAILWAY MINISTER Mamata Banerjee's second attempt at quitting the Ministry—this time owning moral responsibility for the train crash near Ludhiana—was aborted faster than the earlier effort over the hike in oil prices two months ago.

By saying a firm no to her request, and telling Mamata to stay right where she is, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has buried any scope the Opposition might have had of showing his coalition as unstable.

And Mamata herself appeared relieved that she got an opportunity to demonstrate that she was not the kind to stick to the chair if the Opposition, particularly the CPI(M), bayed for her blood.

The Railway Minister had sought to be relieved "in order to adequately respond to my conscience", even though she believed that as a Minister she did not actually run the trains. She told Lok Sabha today that seven senior officials had been asked to go on leave following Saturday's dawn disaster.

Curtains on the resignation drama was preceded by a brief confusion among reporters at Parliament, some of whom appeared to have heard the Prime Minister say "sweekar" (accepted) when he had actually said "asweekaar" (not accepted).

A news agency even put out a story, saying Mamata was out of the Ministry. Vajpayee appeared before the cameras a second time to clarify.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 DEC 2000

Mamata's resignation rejected

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 4. The Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, today sent in her resignation from the Union Cabinet, owning moral responsibility for last Saturday's train accident in Punjab, in which as many as 43 passengers were killed.

But the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, promptly rejected the resignation. Talking to reporters at the Navy Day function, he said, "I have declined to accept the resignation of Ms. Mamata Banerjee."

In her letter, the Minister said, "as head of the 16-lakh railway family I can neither escape nor wish to avoid moral responsibility for this great human misery." Ms. Banerjee referred to the "soul searching" she had undertaken since the accident and that the resignation was "an adequate response" to that soul searching.

So clear, apparently, was the Prime Minister about how to respond to the letter that he did not feel the need to call the Minister in for a chat, and had, instead, conveyed it to her that she was to continue in the Council of Ministers. On her part, Ms. Banerjee was careful not even to hint in her statement in the Lok Sabha that she was owning up "moral responsibility" for the accident.

Talking to mediapersons in the Parliament House complex, Ms. Banerjee did not offer any excuses. "It was a failure. A failure is a failure. Though I do not run the Railways but look after only the administration and policy issues, I feel hurt even if one person is killed in an accident. My conscience is heavy because of this accident and I take moral responsibility."

The Minister also acknowledged that she had been petition-

ing the Union Finance Minister for more funds for safety works. "I have been fighting for more money for safety. But I do not blame the Finance Minister as he is facing similar demands from other sectors. I have tried my best and even got the allocation for track renewal enhanced substantially. Now the government will have to pay extra attention to the safety factor on the railways."

Nonetheless, Ms. Banerjee maintained she was grateful to "all political parties except CPI

(M)" for sympathising with her.

The Minister also assertively rejected any suggestion that her frequent trips of West Bengal (mostly for political purposes) had interfered with her ministerial assignment. "Tell me which Minister has given more time than me. I have not gone abroad, even to Sri Lanka, unlike several other Ministers. My party has suffered because I have devoted so much time to the railways. I have tried my best."

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THE HINDU

5 DEC 2000

PM rejects Mamata's resignation offer

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 4. — The Prime Minister today rejected the resignation of Miss Mamata Banerjee which she submitted owning moral responsibility for the Howrah-Amritsar Mail accident.

Putting in her papers, the railway minister said it was for Mr Vajpayee to decide on her resignation, but at the same time pointed out that the accident underlined her much-repeated demand for better safety standards and more funds for that. In an unprecedented move, she also sent seven top railway officials on leave till the inquiry is completed.

Earlier in the morning, Miss Banerjee called on Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and submitted the resignation. She is also learnt to have submitted to him a detailed statement about the urgent safety measures required in the Railways. According to sources, she wanted the immediate implementation of the Khanna Committee report which has demanded an investment of Rs 1,500 crore over the next five years on safety standards.

After a couple of hours, the Prime Minister's personal aide, Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni, called on Miss Banerjee and reportedly conveyed Mr Vajpayee's rejection of her resignation. Later, Mr Vajpayee himself told newsmen that he had turned down the resignation.

Miss Banerjee told reporters that she was genuinely hurt by the loss of lives in the accident

NEW DELHI, Dec. 4. — An 'a' made a world of difference, generating much confusion here this evening over whether Miss Mamata Banerjee remained a minister.

News agencies and some electronic media services flashed reports that her offer to resign had been accepted. It all started when the Prime Minister spoke to reporters at the Navy Day reception. He was asked about the resignation, and all those within earshot were convinced that he had used the word "sweekar".

Just to make sure, a video tape was re-run. Again, "sweekar" was about all that could be heard. And, the mobiles went abuzz.

Aghast officials of the PMO, who had only 90 minutes earlier consulted Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and announced that the resignation had been rejected, rushed to the Prime Minister who told them he had said "asweekar" — not accepted.

Then it was time to rush for the mobiles again, to issue clarification. But by then, the capital's politics buffs had already gone into a tailspin. — SNS

and felt morally responsible for it. "When I saw the dead bodies and blood at the accident site, I was really hurt. I may not be personally responsible for running the Railways and there could be technical errors which led to the accident. Still, a mistake is a mistake."

On whether resignations of railway ministers whenever serious accidents occur are really necessary, she said: "Well, the minister is not personally responsible for the running of the Railways. Yet, I felt morally responsible for the accident. That's all."

A senior Samata Party leader said one of the major reasons why she did not press the resignation was the support extended to her by most Opposition parties, including the Congress. "Today's support from the Congress to Mamataji will be a turning point in the events to come," a senior

Trinamul leader said.

Miss Banerjee angrily rejected the suggestion that her resignations "have become a political drama".

"What do you mean by drama? That may be your individual opinion. In fact I am grateful to all sections of the Lok Sabha except one (clearly hinting at the CPI-M) which expressed anguish over the accident, sympathised with me and persuaded me to continue in office," she said.

Responding to the charge that she reached the accident spot late, Miss Banerjee said when she received the news she was deep in the interiors of Midnapore and catching a flight from there was an uphill task. She rejected the CPI-M's allegation that her focus on West Bengal politics was adversely affecting the functioning of the railway ministry. "How can any one say so? I am the only

minister who has not been on a foreign tour."

Miss Banerjee's resignation, say observers, had a lot to do with the obvious political fallout to the accident. The Mamata camp was clearly aware of the CPI-M's plan to go big on the issue in Parliament and demand her resignation.

That way, her resignation this morning before the matter could even be discussed in the House, took the wind out of the CPI-M's sails. Besides, the Trinamul leader has been under pressure to regain some of the standing that she lost in the wake of her resignation to protest against the oil price hike.

CPI-M fury: Making a statement in the Lok Sabha, Miss Banerjee admitted to 'some failures' that caused the accident. She announced that she had ordered seven senior officials of the Northern Railway to proceed on leave in order to ensure an impartial inquiry.

CPI-M members, aware that she had already stepped down, were on their feet when she rose to make the statement. They demanded to know whether she was present in the House in the capacity of a minister or a member.

The officers who have been asked to proceed on leave are the chief engineer, the chief track engineer, chief motive power engineer, divisional railway manager (Ambala), senior divisional safety officer (Ambala), senior divisional mechanical engineer and senior divisional engineer.

■ More reports on page 4

THE STATESMAN

5 DEC 2000

PM eats humble pie, does a turnabout on Ayodhya issue

Houses adjourned for third day over resignation demands

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee stunned listeners on Wednesday morning by confidently asserting that the Ayodhya agenda was still incomplete and that the Ramjanmabhoomi movement was an "expression of nationalist sentiment".

By evening, as NDA partners, interpreting this as an approval for the demolition of Babri masjid, began to speak out, Mr Vajpayee was forced to eat humble pie and "clarify" to another set of reporters at Rashtrapati Bhavan that he had not supported the demolition. "Mandir ka nirman rashtriya bhavan ka praktikaran hai. Mandir kis tarah banaya jaye yeh mahatvapoorna hai. Masjid girney ka mainey samarathan nahin kiya" (The construction of the Ram temple is an expression of nationalist sentiment. What is of significance is how the temple should be constructed. I have not supported the demolition of the mosque), Mr Vajpayee said.

Earlier in the day, Mr Vajpayee, while rejecting the opposition demand for the resignation of the ministers chargesheeted in the Babri masjid demolition case, said in parliament, "Ayodhya mein Ram Mandir ka nirman rashtriya bhavana ke praktikaran ka karan tha, jo abhi tak poora nahin hua" (The construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya is an expression of nationalist sentiment which is still to be realised).

The PM's statement came as a morale booster for party cadres at the forefront of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement.

Interestingly, the statement, which is seen as a political manoeuvre with an eye on next year's assembly elections in Uttar

Pradesh, came two days after BJP president Bangaru Laxman had told this newspaper that the dispute should be left to the judiciary.

Two BJP MPs, Chinmayananda and Aditya Nath, both prominent VHP members, taking their cue from the PM, revived an old suggestion that opinion must be mobilised in parliament to enact a law for Ayodhya similar to that for the Somnath temple since the case in the supreme court would continue for another 40 years.

When reminded that the Ayodhya issue was not a part of the NDA agenda, Mr Chinmayananda said, "It is the opposition which has raised it to destroy the harmony that the PM is trying to create with his ceasefire offer during Ramzan. So, let us end the conflict (Ayodhya issue) through a law and hand over the disputed site to Hindus."

Wednesday's sabre-rattling clearly did not go down well with the BJP's allies in the National Democratic Alliance. The Telugu Desam Party's spokesperson C. Ramchandraiah, describing the PM's statement as being "uncalled for", said it would "further complicate the problem and create unnecessary tension".

The TDP, recalling that the party had all along said that "the contentious issue (Ayodhya) is sub judice as it is pending in the supreme court", said, "The supreme court verdict should bind all parties together and the PM has himself committed to this both on the floor of parliament and outside."

The Samata Party was also quick to distance itself from the PM's statement. While emphasising that his party did not favour the resignation of the ministers, party spokesperson Shambhu Srivastava said, "Everyone must

accept the verdict of the court. We support and will continue to support the government as long as it is committed only to the national agenda for governance. We have differences with the BJP on the Ramjanmabhoomi controversy and joined the NDA only after it was set aside."

The PM, who went all out to defend the chargesheeted ministers (L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti), said, "They were in Ayodhya to protect it (the mosque) and not to demolish it." Mr Vajpayee accused the Congress of raking up an old issue for lack of issues. He said that the case against minister of state for defence Harin Pathak, chargesheeted in a murder case, was very different from that against the three ministers.

"The Gujarat minister resigned because propriety demanded it. But the Ayodhya issue is no reason for resignation," the Prime Minister said.

Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the third day running without transacting any business on Wednesday as a determined opposition persisted with its demand for the resignations of Mr Advani and his two ministerial colleagues.

Soon after both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha met, hell broke loose as opposition members stormed the well in the lower house and strongly protested in the upper house over the continuance of L.K. Advani, HRD minister M.M. Joshi and sports minister Uma Bharti in the government.

Congress and Samajwadi Party members had forced adjournment of the Lok Sabha for the past two days on the same issue after question hour. Rajya Sabha was adjourned on Wednesday on the issue.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 JAN 2000

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2000

THE MASK SLIPS

THE VERY LEAST one expects of a Prime Minister is that he weighs his words very carefully before uttering them. And Mr. Vajpayee is guilty of making an ill-considered remark and then trying to redress this by issuing an unconvincing clarification. His recent take on Ayodhya is deplorable and merits criticism on a variety of counts. It is highly inappropriate for someone who heads the National Democratic Alliance Government — which has expressly eschewed endorsing the BJP's programme on Ayodhya — to claim that the agitation for the construction of a Ram temple in the town is an expression of unrealised or unfulfilled nationalist feeling. Such statements only reinforce the suspicion that the common NDA agenda is only a sanitised cover for the BJP to pursue its divisive agenda and it is no surprise that some of Mr. Vajpayee's allies such as the Telugu Desam are extremely uncomfortable about what he said. The BJP swears it is committed to the NDA agenda, but every now and then the mask slips. The face it reveals is not pretty.

But Mr. Vajpayee is guilty of more than just displeasing his allies or making statements which are not in consonance with the NDA programme. More shocking is the sheer insensitivity of endorsing the Ayodhya agitation on the anniversary of the destruction of the Babri Masjid — an act of political vandalism which inflicted a deep and still festering emotional wound on the nation. Mr. Vajpayee may have since clarified that he did not support the Babri Masjid demolition, but both the timing and the content of the remarks have lent the unfortunate impression that, in the Prime Minister's view, the question of how a Ram temple in Ayodhya should be constructed sweeps the business of the Babri mosque's demolition into near insignificance.

The Prime Minister's remarks were made against the background of demands that three BJP Union Ministers who have been chargesheeted in connection with the demolition — Mr. L. K. Advani, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti — resign forthwith. It is no surprise that Mr. Vajpayee rejected this demand, but what is really astonishing was his explanation that his Ministers were trying to protect the mosque (by trying to "control the crowd and persuade it against pulling down the structure") and not to demolish it. To project someone such as Mr. Advani — whose infamous Rath Yatra gathered support for the Ayodhya agitation and promoted the very forces that pulled down the Masjid — as a (albeit failed) protector of the mosque is preposterous. And of course, Ms. Uma Bharti is not exactly an ideal candidate to project as the mosque's attempted saviour.

Early last year, the Prime Minister called for a national debate on conversion at a time when there were communal attacks against the Christian community in Gujarat's Dangs district. The timing of that call seemed to lend tacit support to the theory — peddled actively by sections of the Sangh Parivar — that the fundamentalist violence was a direct result of unchecked and irregular conversions. Similarly, the timing of Mr. Vajpayee's remarks on Ayodhya leaves much to be desired. To make such references to the construction of a Ram temple on the anniversary of the mosque's demolition sends out disturbing signals. It strengthens the impression that the Prime Minister is uncaring about the sentiments of those appalled by the vandalism of December 6, 1992. Mr. Vajpayee should have thought carefully before endorsing a dubious politically-backed agitation on what is after all a day of national shame.

THE HINDU

8 DEC 2000

TRINAMOOOL CONGRESS DEMANDS NDA MEET

Vajpayee 'communalising atmosphere', say allies

By Neena Vyas

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NEW DELHI, DEC. 8. Several allies and supporting parties of the Vajpayee government — the Telugu Desam, the Trinamool Congress and the Indian National Lok Dal — today virtually charged the Prime Minister with "communalising the atmosphere" by his statements on the Ram temple issue over the last two days. This, they said, had sent a "wrong message" through the country, and something needed to be done "to correct this".

Simultaneously, the Trinamool Congress asked the convener of the National Democratic Alliance, Mr. George Fernandes, to call an urgent meeting of the NDA to discuss the Babri Masjid-Ram temple issue.

Party leaders made it clear that they were participating directly or indirectly in the NDA government and "if something inappropriate is said or done we will speak out." The allies hoped that the Prime Minister would somehow retrieve the situation although they stopped short of demanding that he withdraw his statements.

The Trinamool leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, said something must be done to "stop this immediately" and the most important concern today was "to save the country (from this growing communalisation)." They wanted their strong views on the matter to be conveyed to the Prime Minister, and this the Par-

liamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, promised to do.

The issue was discussed threadbare at a meeting of party leaders called by the Speaker this afternoon to try and find a way out of the deadlock that prevented Parliament from functioning whole of this week. Party leaders spoke their minds freely, and the allies were almost one with the opposition in expressing their anguish and even anger at the manner in which the Ayodhya issue had been raised.

BJP lifts self-imposed ban on own agenda; Cong. wants PM to clarify stand in Parliament; BJP must stick to common programme, says TDP: Page 13

The Government also expected fireworks, and before the Speaker's meeting, the big five of the BJP in the Government — Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. L. K. Advani, Mr. Jaswant Singh, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Mr. Pramod Mahajan — met in the Prime Minister's office and discussed how to proceed with the damage control exercise.

Later, Ms. Banerjee and Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, TDP parliamentary party leader, told reporters that in Rae Bareilly yesterday, a small madrasa-mosque was pulled down and in retaliation some Hindu structure was damaged.

"Now the Prime Minister must clarify. Communal tension is spreading at the grass roots level. At this critical juncture the Prime Minister must clarify what he meant by his statements," Mr. Naidu said.

Ms. Banerjee said a "wrong message" had gone throughout the country, "communal tension has increased" and "correct information must come from the Prime Minister so that this is stopped." "*Pehle desh ko bachana hai* (the country must be saved first)," she added and made it clear that her party considered the three contentious issues of the BJP part of the "communal agenda."

There is no doubt that if the Speaker decides in favour of a debate under Rule 184, which ends with a vote, the allies will speak out their minds, although they are not likely to upset the apple-cart at the Centre.

Mr. Naidu and Ms. Banerjee were especially peeved that although they had met the Prime Minister yesterday and raised the issue of his statement, what happened in the evening was not a clarification or a dilution of his earlier statement, but an elaboration. "We had both told him that there can be no deviation from the NDA agenda," Ms. Banerjee said. But what happened in the evening yesterday was not what they expected. As a hurt Mr. Naidu kept repeating, "it was totally unwarranted, what was the need?"

THE HINDU

9 DEC 2000

All-party meet fails to break deadlock

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 8. After a nearly two-hour heated discussion among party leaders at a meeting called by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr G.M.C.Balayogi, this afternoon, there was no resolution in sight of the deadlock that has paralysed Parliament for five days. Party leaders will meet again in his chamber on Monday an hour before Parliament convenes.

The earlier issue of a discussion demanding resignations of the three Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri demolition case was partly overtaken by the fresh controversy over the Prime Minister's remarks on the Ram temple.

The new twist helped to virtually isolate the Bharatiya Janata Party, with even its allies and supporting parties strongly disapproving the Prime Minister's remarks. The plan, earlier, was for the Prime Minister also to attend the meeting to find a way out, but this morning the Speaker reportedly advised him not to attend, sensing that the attack would be on his statements. Since the Prime Minister did not attend, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, Congress president, who was to have come, also stayed away.

At the meeting, the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, offered the opposition a discussion on any subject — including the demand for the resignations of the three Minis-



The Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, at the all-party meeting in his office in Parliament House in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

ters or the Prime Minister's statements on Ayodhya — under any rule provided that it was under a proper and appropriate rule of procedure.

The Government's position was that the Opposition should give proper notice and convince the Speaker whose decision all should accept. Mr. Mahajan wanted the Opposition to agree before hand to accept the Speaker's decision.

He wanted to know why the Opposition, which raised the issue of the resignations because the Prime Minister recently ac-

cepted the resignation of Mr. Harin Pathak, chargesheeted in a case, did so only on December 4 and not on the opening day of Parliament since Mr. Pathak's resignation had been accepted before the start of the winter session. The Opposition was not being logical as the Ministers had been functioning in their positions since 1998, he felt.

The Congress, the Left parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, and even the NDA allies seemed to be in favour of a discussion under a substantive mo-

tion like Rule 184, and are expected to press for this.

Although the allies were not with the Opposition on the resignation issue earlier, it was clear that the Prime Minister's statement that the temple could be built on the disputed site agitated them considerably. The allies charged that the Prime Minister's statement had communalised the atmosphere and amends must be made to "correct this" and they are looking for an opportunity to make clear their views on the sensitive Ayodhya subject in Parliament.

THE HINDU

9 DEC 2000

Stick to NDA agenda, TDP tells Vajpayee

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD, Dec. 9. — The TDP today asked the Prime Minister to stick to the NDA's common minimum agenda and warned that any deviation would be viewed seriously.

"His statement (on Ram mandir) was uncalled for, unwarranted and unnecessary. He, as the head of the NDA, should confine himself to the common minimum agenda," TDP parliamentary party leader, Mr K Yerran Naidu, said. The TDP MPs had a meeting with Mr Chandrababu Naidu today.

Mr Yerran Naidu said the TDP supported the NDA from outside since its agenda was without controversial issues like the Ram Mandir or the common civil code. "When they said they will stand by it (the agenda), we extended support."

Mr Yerran Naidu said Mr Vajpayee had assured him and Miss Mamata Banerjee that he would stick to the common agenda. The Prime Minister will clarify on his statement on Monday, he said.

(The NDA will meet tomorrow to discuss the Ayodhya issue. Mr Vajpayee is expected to assure the allies that the government is committed to the common agenda, NDA sources said in Delhi, adds PTI.)

Another TDP MP, Dr C Ramachandriah, claimed Mr Vajpayee had clarified that the temple could be built but on a consensus among

Hindus and Muslims.

At the TDP parliamentary party meeting, Mr Chandrababu Naidu reportedly said his party was not connected with the BJP's secret agenda.

When MPs asked him what needed to be done if the issue came up for voting under Rule 184, Mr Naidu reportedly said the BJP would be told that the TDP won't sail with them.

The TDP MPs yesterday expressed the need for the party to join the government.

The chief minister reportedly told the MPs not to hold such meetings. Such meetings will send wrong signals, especially when the TDP has been fighting with the Centre on rice procurement, he said.

When a reporter asked the MPs whether they would join the government, Mr A Rajkumar said: "Ask the chief minister." Did they manage to convince the TDP chief about joining the government? Mr Y Naidu said the party had decided against it.

NOT A SLIP: PM

NEW DELHI, Dec. 9. — The Prime Minister today indicated that his statement on Ayodhya should not be interpreted as a slip. "I have said what I had to say. And if there's need to say more, I will say in Parliament," Mr Vajpayee told reporters at a lunch hosted by Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra. — SNS

■ Details on page 10

Fernandes reticent

Mr George Fernandes was quite guarded and avoided being drawn into a controversy over Mr Vajpayee's statement. The Samata leader said in Bhubaneswar: "One has to see what exactly the Prime Minister had said on the Ayodhya issue." He said there could be misinterpretation by the media.

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THE STATESMAN

10 DEC 2000

Fernandes, Vajpayee snub Mamata over temple row

CL MANDU J
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

DELHI, Dec. 9. — Twenty-four hours after the Trinamul Congress asked Mr George Fernandes to convene an emergency meeting of the NDA, the defence minister today remained mostly outside Delhi. He is a gain flying out of Delhi tomorrow to attend a function.

A day after Miss Mamata Banerjee sought the Prime Minister's clarification on his Ayodhya remarks, Mr Vajpayee said there was nothing more to say.

Asked about Mr Vajpayee's response, Miss Banerjee said: "...We have made our feelings clear; now we hope he will make things clear in Parliament." She said the NDA government has to function on the common agenda.

With Mr Vajpayee deciding to play the aggressive Hindu card to regain the BJP's support base, especially in Uttar Pra-

adesh, Miss Banerjee is under pressure to review her party's continuance in the NDA. This is because West Bengal, where Assembly elections are scheduled for next year, has more than 20 per cent Muslim votes.

After her resignation and then withdrawal on oil price hike, Miss Banerjee will have to be careful in making the right choice to regain her lost image.

Miss Banerjee's concern was evident when she said: "I really do not know why the Prime Minister said such a thing. He has a good image and after all he is in a responsible position.

Such remarks could hurt some people...We are not interested in toppling the government. But if the government deviates from the common agenda, we will have to take our own decision."

And that decision is not going to be easy. If the Prime Minister continues to be unapologetic, to the delight of the Sangh parivar, the continuance

CPM RIPS APART PM REMARK

CALCUTTA/HOWRAH, Dec. 9. — The chief minister and the state secretary of his party today strongly objected to the Prime Minister's statements on Ayodhya. Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said Mr AB Vajpayee's remarks could lead to a dangerous situation while Mr Anil Biswas said they amounted to "treason". Mr Bhattacharya said at a public meeting at Howrah: "We had said during the last Lok Sabha polls that if the BJP came to power at the Centre it would endanger the country's secular fabric. The Prime Minister's remarks on the Ram temple has caused fresh tension."

In Calcutta, Mr Biswas demanded an apology from Mr Vajpayee because his remarks had "given encouragement" to communal forces. The CPI-M secretary's caustic tongue did not spare the Trinamul Congress either. "Some parties", he said, were threatening to pull out of the NDA if the Prime Minister went beyond the agenda of the coalition. "But they chose to turn a deaf ear when the Left warned them of the BJP's hidden agenda, when the alliance was being formed," he said. The allusion, quite obviously was to Miss Mamata Banerjee. — **PTI**

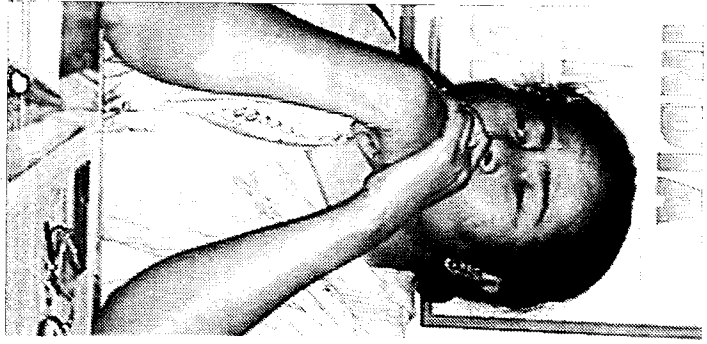
of the Trinamul in the NDA Central assistance. The Trinamul will alienate the Muslims. But mul is being forced to adopt a before walking out of the government. Miss Banerjee will have Mr Jyoti Basu's resignation. With Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya at the helm, the Com-

munists are trying to project a "fresh and clean" government.

Miss Banerjee's plan for a "Trinamul-TDP-INLD watchdog in the NDA" will not be easy to realise. Though she and Mr Chandrababu Naidu had a telephonic conversation today, the TDP and INLD, with Assembly elections not in near future, may not share the urgency of the Trinamul to "remain clean." Mr Naidu and Mr Om Prakash Chautala could settle for some hard bargaining.

If Miss Banerjee opts for her Muslim vote-bank, she will have to snap ties with the BJP and fight the Communists. But she might find the Congress acting pricey, more so when Mr Pranab Mukherjee is leading it.

If Miss Banerjee wants to continue in the government, she could make noises in Parliament and then settle for the theory — "let the court verdict decide the fate of the charge-sheeted ministers."



Miss Mamata Banerjee

PM stands his ground on Ayodhya, but sends out peace signals

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is fighting to retain his pre-eminent position in the BJP as well as to ensure that his carefully cultivated image as a moderate is not damaged by his statements on Ayodhya.

On Saturday, he indicated that he had no intention of going back even an inch from the stance he has taken, but he also sent a conciliatory message to Muslims—and his coalition partners—through junior minister Syed Shahnawaz, the only Muslim leader in the PM's council of ministers.

At a lunch hosted by BJP spokesperson Vijay Kumar

Malhotra, Mr Vajpayee said, "I have said whatever I had to. If there is anything to add, I will do it in parliament." And, in his characteristic mocking style, he added, "I only intended to answer a question on the opposition demand for the ministers' resignations, but you are so skilled that you made me say many other things."

Later, Mr Hussain read out a carefully drafted statement. Mr Hussain said, "As a Muslim BJP MP, I thought it was my duty to convey the sentiments of my community to the PM."

The PM, on his part, told Mr Hussain on Saturday morning that his (Mr Vajpayee's) statement had been twisted out of shape. "He (the

PM) said that the case is in court and the government is committed not to interfere in it. It is bound by the NDA agenda," Mr Hussain added. Asked why the PM had suggested an agreement between the two communities to build a temple at the disputed site and a mosque elsewhere, Mr Hussain said, "The PM told me that there was no question of imposing a solution."

On the other hand, the secular allies of the BJP, including the DMK, on Saturday toughened their

stand on Mr Vajpayee's remarks on the Ayodhya issue, making it clear that any "deviation" from the NDA agenda was "unaccept-

able" to them.

The TDP said in Hyderabad on Saturday that it would "not tolerate any deviation" from the common minimum agenda of the NDA.

The TDP said that the party had asked Mr Vajpayee to clarify his remarks fully by Monday.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Maulana Syed Ahmed Bukhari, on Saturday "appealed" to Muslims to boycott the *iftaar* parties hosted by Mr Vajpayee or any of his ministers.

The Imam said, "If any Muslim happens to attend such parties, we will interpret that the particular person is in favour of the temple and opposed to the construction of a masjid at Ayodhya."

VOICES OF RESENTMENT

- Secular allies of BJP toughen stand on PM's Ayodhya remarks
- TDP sets Monday as deadline for PM to clarify his stand
- Boycott PM, BJP's *iftaar* parties, says Imam Bukhari

THE TIMES OF INDIA

10 DEC 2000

Partners force commitment to rule of law

Allies stand by Vajpayee

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ST-11

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 10. — The coordination committee of the NDA today resolved to follow the common agenda without any deviation and decided to accept the Supreme Court verdict on the Ayodhya issue.

Despite Mr George Fernandes' best efforts to play down the Prime Minister's remarks on Ram temple, the allies reportedly insisted on burying the controversy over the statements by reiterating the government's commitment to the rule of law and promotion of secularism and social harmony.

Today's two-hour meeting of NDA supported Mr Vajpayee's rejection of the Opposition demand for resignation of the three chargesheeted ministers, making clear the allies' resolve to stand united.

The allies expressed full support to Mr Vajpayee's leadership and said his almost three-year rule has been successful in maintaining harmony.

NAIDU ALERTS MPs

HYDERABAD, Dec. 10. — Mr N Chandrababu Naidu has asked all his party MPs to be present in Parliament tomorrow when Mr Vajpayee clarifies his statements on Ayodhya. He has asked them to be careful while reacting to the clarifications. "If there seems to be any deviation from the common agenda, you must raise your voice," he reportedly told the MPs today. — SNS

To give a face-saver to Mr Vajpayee on the demand for a clarification over his remarks, Mr Fernandes told reporters that the Prime Minister would respond to all charges in Parliament "if the House is allowed to function."

Notwithstanding Mr Fernandes' public posture, the tension that Mr Vajpayee's remarks created was evident when the resolution, adopted at the meeting, said: "The NDA government is committed to

maintain the rule of law, which is its constitutional duty. In the litigation over the title of the disputed land in Ayodhya, which is at the centre of the long-standing controversy, the NDA government is duty-bound to accept and implement the decision of the Supreme Court." It wants the parties to the dispute and other political parties committed to the Constitution must accept the verdict and the status quo must be maintained till then.

While reiterating the NDA's resolve to "protect and promote secularism," the resolution vowed to implement the common agenda without deviation. It reminded one and all that the contentious issues had been left consciously to create an atmosphere for dialogue and consensus, and promote harmony between communities. Mr Fernandes tried to project the resolution as a usual one done "whenever the Opposition tries to create confusion and controversy."

■ See ALLIES: page 8

ALLIES:

(Continued from page 1)

The NDA convener tried to underplay the significance of the timing of the resolution. He said the purpose of the meeting was only to discuss the deadlock in Parliament. When reminded about the Trinamul's letter to him demanding the meeting, Mr Fernandes said: "The meeting is not called on the demand of the Trinamul. The meeting was called to discuss the impasse in Parliament."

Mr Fernandes also refused to acknowledge the fact that Mr Vajpayee made some controversial remarks.

But sources say when Mr Fernandes tried to make the Parliament issue the main agenda, Miss Mamata Banerjee reminded him of the controversy Mr Vajpayee's remarks had created underlined the need to send a signal to clear all doubts. The allies shared her sentiments.

THE STATESMAN

1 DEC 200

LS impasse ends, RS
standoff drags on

Govt takes Babri vote plunge

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

P-1
12/12

9-22-9-24

New Delhi, Dec.12: The week-long logjam in the Lok Sabha was unravelled today with the government and the Opposition agreeing to a discussion tomorrow and voting on a censure motion against Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statements on Ayodhya and on the demand for resignation of three chargesheeted ministers.

Both the government and the Opposition claimed victory for having their way. The BJP's secular allies are trying to brush under the carpet their embarrassment in voting for the government on the motion under rule 184. During the discussion on the motion, what will be debated is the propriety of continuance of the three ministers in office.

The debate will begin tomorrow and the Prime Minister will reply on Thursday.

The deadlock in the Rajya Sabha, where the ruling coalition is in a minority, continued with the government rejecting the demand for a discussion with vote. The Opposition is meeting tomorrow to discuss a strategy to force a government rethink.

At an all-party meeting after both Houses were adjourned for the seventh day, it was decided to have the Lok Sabha discussion under rule 184. The Lok Sabha secretariat will draft the language of the motion. Yesterday, the Speaker had rejected the Con-

gress notice on grounds that the matter was sub judice. The notices were later reworded.

After high-decibel noises over Vajpayee's statements on Ayodhya, the allies, especially the Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam Party, face the unenviable task of defending chargesheeted ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti.

Telugu Desam parliamentary party leader Yerran Naidu sought refuge behind "national interests" while declaring that his party would have to support the government to avoid frequent elections.

Sources said the Desam is finalising a strategy under which it will criticise the incidents leading to the demolition of the Babri masjid, but will not step into the "danger zone" of demanding the resignation of the three.

Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee said the coalition had already adopted a resolution reaffirming its secular commitments. "There is no threat to the government, we are not supporting the motion," she said.

Congress leader P.R. Das Munshi hoped the allies, having questioned the propriety of the three ministers continuing, would stick to their stand.

Temple stones land

The stones to be used in the *garbhagriha* of the Ram temple were unloaded in Ayodhya today, adds UNI. The stones were sent from Rajasthan on December 6.

■ More reports on Page 6

THE TELEGRAPH

13 DEC 2000

Cracks within

THERE IS nothing surprising about the NDA's resolution reiterating the standard formulation about abiding by the judicial verdict on the disputed site in Ayodhya. But any presumption that the furor caused by the Prime Minister's comment on the Ram temple will now subside would be naive. What was significant was the nature of the discussions which preceded the adoption of the resolution. By all accounts, it was not a cordial get-together, suggesting that perhaps for the first time, the allies had to cope with serious disagreement in their ranks. Ever since Jayalalitha's departure ensured greater harmony within the BJP-led coalition, there had probably been no other meeting of the NDA which had to amend a resolution three times to accommodate the various dissenting views.

That the differences would be voiced over the Prime Minister's observation on the most sensitive of the three major points associated with the BJP's own agenda was expected. The construction of the Ayodhya temple is evidently even more contentious than the other two items — Article 370 and the uniform civil code — which have been put on the back burner. But what was interesting was the differences among the allies on the matter. Mamata Banerjee and Farooq Abdullah were the most vociferous of those objecting to the Prime Minister's statement, with the Trinamool Congress leader arguing that not only had it heightened communal tension but Uma Bharati's remarks in Mr Vajpayee's support had added fuel to fire. It is obvious that the fear of alienating the minorities in West Bengal, who constitute a substantial percentage of the electorate there, persuaded Ms Banerjee to go on the offensive.

In contrast, George Fernandes played a role which might have been expected of the Shiv Sena. He sponsored the first resolution which had no reference at all to the Prime Minister's statement and later asserted that the controversy relating to it was a result of distortions in the media. Clearly, while some of the allies have distanced themselves from the BJP, others have moved closer to it. It goes without saying that political and personal reasons are responsible for such varying attitudes. But what is clear is that signs of strain have appeared within the NDA which may not be all that easy to repair since the BJP has again brought a highly emotive issue to the fore.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 DEC 2001

Atal between Ayodhya and allies

FROM DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR

New Delhi, Dec. 13: When Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee responds to the debate on the Ayodhya controversy in the Lok Sabha tomorrow, he will abide by the resolution of the National Democratic Alliance adopted at the meeting last Sunday.

Vajpayee will have to do some tightrope walking because he will not retract his first statement that the Ayodhya movement was a "manifestation of nationalist feelings" and that the task had not been completed yet.

Government sources said this balancing act was the decision the Prime Minister had arrived at after discussions with senior leaders like home minister L.K. Advani and his key aides. He will iterate

19/12
the NDA resolution and defend to the hilt his three colleagues — Advani, human resources development minister M.M. Joshi and sports minister Uma Bharti — whose resignations are being demanded by the Opposition.

Even the allies, who were critical of Vajpayee's statement, which they believed would lead to communal tension, have agreed to stand behind the three ministers.

With none of the critical allies — the Telugu Desam and the Trinamul Congress — having spoken today in the Lok Sabha — Vajpayee has few options. (See Page 6)

He will try to explain that when he clarified his previous statement by saying at the *istar* party of junior minister Shahnawaz Hussain that a resolution of the dispute was possible only

through the Supreme Court's verdict or by agreement between Hindus and Muslims that a Ram mandir should be built there, all he had in mind was to find a way out of a dangerous stalemate.

The sources explained that with the allies still fidgety and apprehensive, Vajpayee will adhere to the principal aspects of the NDA resolution. He will say that his government remains committed to upholding the rule of law, which is its constitutional duty.

He will have to assure the Opposition that status quo will be maintained until the Supreme Court verdict. The resolution, at the insistence of railway minister Mamata Banerjee, had even included a paragraph which said: "The NDA iterates its unambiguous commitment to the protection

and promotion of secularism. It remains unreservedly committed to implement its national agenda without any deviation."

The resolution also said the NDA "had consciously left out all issues of contentious nature in order to create an atmosphere for dialogue and consensus on such issues and promote harmony between all communities".

Vajpayee can get away by suggesting that he was earlier trying to create this atmosphere which could lead to a dialogue between the two parties.

The Opposition will be unhappy with his explanation because he will not backtrack from his previous statements that triggered the controversy. It remains to be seen whether the Prime Minister is able to please his allies.

THE TELEGRAPH

14 DEC 2000

Mamata bargains for secular agenda

5/11 19/12 9-20/12

C. L. MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 13. — Two of the BJP's allies, the Trinamul and TDP, have made it clear to the government that their support in defeating the Opposition motion in the Lok Sabha would be linked to an assurance from the Prime Minister that there would be no deviation from the Common Agenda for Governance.

The Lower House today began a debate under rule 184 on whether the three ministers chargesheeted in the Ayodhya demolition case should be allowed to continue. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee replies to the debate tomorrow.

Representatives of the government's allies, all except the Shiv Sena, met in Miss Mamata Banerjee's office in Parliament today to chalk out a strategy. The meeting was held at the initiative of the TDP and Trinamul. Miss Banerjee was present, and so were Mr Yerran Naidu (TDP), Mr Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U), Mr Prabh Nath Singh (Samata Party), Mr TA Baalu (DMK), Dr Sushil Kumar Indora (INLD) and Mr Vaiko (MDMK). Representatives from the NC and BJD were also there.

The TDP and Trinamul in particular among the BJP's allies don't want to be identified with the Ayodhya agenda. These two parties have their Muslim constituencies to nurse and both have made it

clear to the government that their representatives, Mr Yerran Naidu and Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, will speak in the House only tomorrow, that too after all the BJP speakers have taken the floor.

But not all allies appear quite as anxious to retain their secular image. At least some of them, notably Mr George Fernandes and Mr Vaiko, chose to speak up for the Prime Minister in the Lok Sabha.

But the TDP and Trinamul were uncomfortable as Opposition speakers called the allies "power-seekers who compromised their principles" to support the Sangh parivar.

Miss Banerjee spent most of the day either in the back bench or outside the House, leaving Mr Bandopadhyay to duck the Opposition bouncers. The only intervention she made was when Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav said the Trinamul will lose out to the CPI-M only because of its alliance with the BJP. An embarrassed Miss Banerjee shot back: "*Hum CPM ko harega, harega, harega (sic) (we will defeat CPM).*"

Mr Yerran Naidu kept a studied silence and affected a calculated indifference as the Opposition tried to provoke him to a debate.

The TDP and Trinamul would like their posturing to be taken as a determined bargain for an unambiguous commitment to secularism, but they seem to be searching for grounds to justify their support to the government.

THE STATESMAN

1 11 DEC 2000

Trinamul reels under PM's 'slap'

CL MANU
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 14. — Soon after the Opposition motion was defeated, the Trinamul Congress made it clear that it was unhappy about the Prime Minister's reply in the Lok Sabha and could have abstained from voting but for Mr Vajpayee's "clarification".

But it was evident that the party is almost isolated, with the other allies, though unhappy, not ready to sing along. The Prime Minister, by choosing not to appear apologetic, left it to the allies, especially Miss Mamata Banerjee, to decide their future course of action.

"We were not happy about Mr Vajpayee's speech and had walked out. We conveyed our feelings to the Prime Minister through some BJP ministers. We returned only when we were assured of the Prime Minister's clarification, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay said, desperately trying to focus on the clarification Mr Vajpayee gave.

"We will meet and decide," he said when asked about the future plans. His talk about a "secular front within the NDA" did not carry any conviction.

Soon after Mr Vajpayee's speech, an unhappy Railway minister and her party MPs were seen going out of the House. They held parleys with Mr Pramod Mahajan, Mr Jaswant Singh and the BJP MP, Mr Kirti Somayya, in the lobby. One of the ministers, on being told about the "unsatisfactory reply" of the Prime Minister, reportedly told a Trinamul leader that nothing could be done



Miss Mamata Banerjee

about it. It was after much pleading that the clarification came, providing the Trinamul with sort of a face-saver.

Miss Banerjee described the demolition of the Babari Masjid as a "heinous crime" while repeatedly telling the Prime Minister to clarify his remarks.

Mr Vajpayee's refusal to either withdraw or dilute his remarks came as a rude jolt. During his speech, a glum Miss Banerjee — who was hoping for a positive message for her Muslim vote-bank in West Bengal — was sitting in the back bench resting her head on the hand-rest.

Mr Vajpayee's iteration of NDA's common agenda, as expected as his ruling out the resignation of the three ministers, hardly provided her any relief. With a few months left for the Assembly election in West Bengal, the Trinamul have to assess the pros and

RS DEADLOCK

NEW DELHI, Dec. 14. — Efforts to break the procedural deadlock in the Rajya Sabha failed again today, forcing adjournment of the House without any business.

The Chairman has called a meeting of the floor leaders tomorrow to discuss a fresh Opposition notice. The Opposition wants a discussion and voting on a motion demanding the resignation of the Babari trio, saying rules for both the Houses should be the same. The Treasury benches are against the motion questioning its validity, on the grounds that the issue is sub judice. — SNS

cons of either continuing with the BJP or going it alone to fight the Leftists.

The TDP, JD-U and DMK are also unhappy. Asked for his assessment of Mr Vajpayee's speech, all that Mr Yerranaidu would say was: "Mr Vajpayee clarified on the common agenda and that the Supreme Court decision on Ayodhya will be abided by". Like Miss Banerjee, Mr Naidu had also sought a clarification from Mr Vajpayee during his speech.

But the TDP, with four years left for the Assembly poll in Andhra Pradesh, is not as desperate as the Trinamul. The other allies preferred to remain silent. The JD-U, weakened by a split, doesn't seem to have much of an option, and the DMK, though worried about the Muslim vote-bank, could be risking its front's unity against Miss Jayalitha if it opts out of the NDA.

Vajpayee lobs the ball in Opp court

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 14. — Oratorical skill apart, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee demonstrated the art of lobbing the ball in the Opposition court during the acrimonious debate on the Ayodhya issue in Lok Sabha today.

The Prime Minister harped on the fact that expression of national sentiment was not confined to Ayodhya but also extended to other places of worship like the St Francis Cathedral of Goa, the Golden Temple of Amritsar and the Dargah of Ajmer Sharif. The Opposition members were quick to respond by saying they were not against construction of Ram temple but they wanted to know where it would be built. They also asked the Prime Minister to tell them about the construction of the Babari Masjid.

There was theatrics in plenty and there was no dearth of members. Mr Vajpayee included, making light of a matter which has attracted the attention of the entire

BISHOP LEAVES GUJARAT

GANDHINAGAR, Dec. 14. — Bishop M Ezra Sargunam, chairman of the Tamil Nadu Minorities Commission, left Gandhinagar for Chennai today. He was dismissed at not been given a chance to explain the "vandalism" at the Evangelical Church of India hall to the Gujarat chief minister. — SNS

"I can't speak the language of Mr Reddy," Mr Vajpayee said while regretting the remark about the *mukhauta* (mask).

Mr Vajpayee took a dig at Mr Reddy when he said one changes body and soul when one changes parties. "I haven't changed my party and I don't wear any mask," he said.

"*Tsi live aap Atal hairi*" said a Congress member. "*Lehin iske baad Behari bhi laga hai*," Mr Vajpayee quipped, sending the entire House into peals of laughter.

VHP RAISES PITCH FOR SHRINE CONTROL

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, Dec. 14. — A VHP-backed outfit of religious leaders today threatened to launch a nationwide agitation if Hindus were not allowed to conduct regular puja in Qutub-wal-Islam mosque near Qutub Minar, which it claimed was built after razing 27 Jain and Hindu temples.

Claiming that the mosque was built in AD 1100 after destroying the ancient Vishnu Dhvega Mandir, Mahant Naval Kishore Das, Delhi Sant Maha Mandal general secretary and head of the Margdarshak Mandal's Delhi unit, gave an ultimatum on the Archaeological Survey of India till January-end to allow puja or "face consequences".

"While the ASI has allowed regular prayers in the mosque, it has not granted permission for the appointment of a Hindu priest to carry out daily worship of the Ganesha idol there," said Rama

krishna Gaur, VHP city unit secretary and head of the newly-floated Dewsathan Raksha Samiti.

The Statesman had carried a report on 2 December, saying Mehrauli residents have been worshipping Ganesha in the mosque since 1980 when the Ganesha image was found. They wanted the VHP to lay off. The ASI, they said, had never stopped them from offering prayers till the VHP's abortive attempt to perform a *yajna* in the mosque. About 80 VHP activists were detained.

Mahant Das said religious leaders met ASI director-general Komal Anand and sought permission to conduct the puja. "She has sought a month from us to study the issue and if puja is not allowed after that, we will perform a *devmukti mahayajna* during Ganesha Chaturthi in February to liberate the temple."

After the Ram Janamhoomi in Ayodhya, Krishna Janamhoomi in Mathura and Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, this is the fourth major shrine whose possession is being sought by the VHP.

ALLIES FORCE PM TO AGREE TO HONOUR COURT VERDICT

Resignation demand rejected, censure motion defeated

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, DEC. 14. The Vajpayee Government survived its first parliamentary crisis when the Lok Sabha this evening rejected a Congress motion, demanding dismissal of three Ayodhya chargesheeted ministers. However, at the end of a two-day robust debate, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, did not retract his formulation that the Ram Mandir movement was a "manifestation of national sentiment".

The coalition survived by a comfortable margin, 291 to 179 votes, but not before the ruling alliance partners extracted — pointedly and demonstratively — their pound of flesh by way of an unambiguous commitment from Mr. Vajpayee that the Government would not deviate from the National Democratic Alliance agenda.

Since the crisis was triggered by the Prime Minister's statements which suggested that he was reviving "contentious issues" (of a Ram temple at the "disputed site"

in Ayodhya) outside the NDA agenda, the crisis ended when Mr. Vajpayee acknowledged that he was bound by the National Agenda for Governance. But it was an unedifying sight of the Prime Minister finding himself giving in to the allies' demand that he say once again — that too after a nearly hour-long intervention — that the Government "would abide by the court verdict" (in the Ayodhya/Babri Masjid dispute); and "it would be implemented".

Commitment after debate

The Prime Minister found himself forced, by the Telugu Desam Party and the Trinamool Congress, to give the commitment after the debate was over; the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, had already called for a division. The ungainly drama prompted the veteran parliamentarian, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, to note that this was "unprecedented". Later, Mr. Sharad Pawar (Nationalist Congress Party), observed, tongue in cheek, that what was witnessed in the Lok Sabha was

"a national manifestation of the regional parties' power".

The Prime Minister was forced to give the categorical assurance because in his long intervention he did not retract from his controversial December 6 formulation (which queered the pitch for the Opposition and the allies) that the Ram Mandir movement (that culminated in the desecration of the Babri Masjid in 1992) was a manifestation of a "national sentiment".

Mr. Vajpayee made a belaboured attempt to draw a parallel between the reconstruction of the Somnath temple in the mid-1950s and the Mandir movement of the early 1990s. He cited the cases of the national celebration of the 400th year of the Khalsa faith, as also the decision to observe as national celebration 2600th year of Lord Mahavira; and, then, rather unconvincingly, he tried to say that it was in the same vein that he had termed the mandir movement a "manifestation of national sentiment".

Rejecting the demand for the

resignation of three Ministers was easy, and the Prime Minister did this at the very outset. "The question of the resignations does not arise; even if these are offered, I will not accept them," he declared to the satisfaction of the BJP benches. But the very first speaker of the day, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Trinamool Congress leader, dictated the script. "Mr. Prime Minister, clarify your recent utterances." The TDP leader, Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, provided the footnotes to that script.

Consequently, Mr. Vajpayee chose to fashion his reply on two levels. First, he did not say anything that would have annoyed the BJP's traditional 'mandir constituency'. The Prime Minister repeated that only two solutions to the Ayodhya-Babri dispute were feasible; either the court should give a verdict in favour of those who wanted to build a temple at the disputed site or the Hindus and Muslims should arrive at some mutually acceptable way out.

'NDA is united'

At another level, he reiterated the commitment to the NDA agenda. If the Opposition's obvious strategy was to drive a wedge between the BJP and its allies, the Prime Minister asserted that "the NDA is united".

Addressing himself as much to his allies as to the Opposition, he made fun of the "competition" between the Congress and the Samajwadi Party to be more "secular" than the other. The Prime Minister's intervention was a masterly exercise in obfuscation. In his reply, the mover of the motion, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, termed Mr. Vajpayee's reply "confusion worse confounded".

Predictably enough, the allies were not taken in by his verbal callisthenics; and, insisted, later, on yet another commitment.

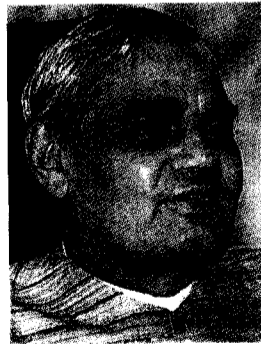
More reports on Page 13

'I am Atal, and a Bihari too'

NEW DELHI, DEC. 14. "Atal hoon... Bihari bhi hoon" (I am firm and a Bihari too), quipped the Prime Minister in the Lok Sabha today. Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's wit surfaced at times during his 50-minute speech on the Ayodhya issue, punctuating the serious atmosphere with laughter.

To a Congress MP's remark "Aap to atal hain" (You are firm), Mr. Vajpayee said, "Main bihari bhi hoon" (I am a Bihari too). The member was suggesting that he should be firm on his statements.

To the comment of the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, that the BJP was trying to shake hands with the Congress, Mr. Vajpayee



said "Hum haath kya, gale bhi milana chahte hain. Yeh to Ramzan ka mahina hai. Hum gala kaatna nahi chahte hain." (Why just hands, we want to embrace. This is the month of Ramzan. We do not want to cut throats).

Amidst peals of laughter, Mr. Vajpayee added if all the people in the country embrace each other, then the country would prosper. While referring to the reconstruction of Gujarat's Somnath temple, he had a dig at the CPI(M) chief whip: "I am not talking of Mr. Somnath Chatterjee." — PTI

Mamata gives a scare

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 14. A dissatisfied Trinamool Congress made it clear today that though it had voted with the Government on the motion in the Lok Sabha, it was disappointed as the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, failed to retract his controversial statements of

last week. So incensed was the Trinamool president, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, having termed the demolition of the Babri Masjid a "heinous crime", that minutes before the votes were to be cast she led her MPs out, intending to abstain.



A worried BJP got the senior Ministers, Mr. Pramod Mahajan and

Mr. Jaswant Singh, to plead with Ms. Banerjee. She relented only after extracting a promise that her party would be allowed once more to query Mr. Vajpayee.

The Trinamool chief whip, Mr. Sudip Bandhopadhyaya, demanded to know whether Mr. Vajpayee would stand by the court verdict and what his stand was. The Prime Minister asserted his commitment to accept the court verdict, but did not clarify his stand on the controversy. He got the Trinamool votes though. Even after the motion was defeated, Trinamool leaders said they were "upset" because Mr. Vajpayee had failed to withdraw his statements.

PM's remark skews equations for allies on home turf

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: All eyes are now on Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, who said on Saturday that her party would not "tolerate it" if the BJP deviated from the NDA agenda and pushed the mandir issue too hard. She had left for Calcutta on Friday evening to gauge the impact of the Prime Minister's statements on the Ayodhya issue.

NDA sources said she was "very concerned" because the feedback received back home has not been positive. If she was concerned about her Muslim votebank after tying up with the BJP, the latest Ayodhya controversy, which has surfaced just a few months before assembly elections in West Bengal, has exacerbated her problems.

Of the BJP's allies—barring the Shiv Sena, which is more or less ideologically in tune with the BJP—the two NDA partners for whom the Ram Janmabhoomi controversy is of immediate concern are the TC and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). Elections in Tamil Nadu are round the corner, just as in West Bengal. Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi had even warned the BJP-led government twice in a week not to deviate from the NDA agenda.

In West Bengal, the Congress is waiting in the wings, ready to forge an alliance with the TC if it breaks up with the BJP. While the TC can still change its electoral partner for

the assembly elections, in Tamil Nadu the situation is different. DMK sources admitted that since the possibility of a re-alignment is virtually out of the question, breaking up with the BJP at this stage would be suicidal. For the DMK, at least till the elections are over, the bottomline is that the Ram temple issue has to be put on the backburner.

But even as the TC and the DMK are agonising over next year's assembly elections, an informal understanding has been reached among the BJP's allies to meet regularly to assess the situation, and try and work jointly to ensure that the BJP does not deviate from the NDA agenda in word or deed. And it is Ms Banerjee who has taken the initiative in this matter along with her Telegu Desam counterpart N. Chandrababu Naidu. (On Friday, before her departure for Calcutta, Ms Banerjee met TDP leader M. Yerran Naidu).

And talks of a new front being forged are not wholly unfounded. A recent issue of *Swastik*, an RSS weekly in Bengali, said that a new alliance, headed by Mr Naidu and backed by Ms Banerjee, is in the making, which could create serious problems for the BJP.

The TDP—which was the most active NDA partner last week in seeking a clarification from the Prime Minister on his controversial statements—remains a key party with its 29 MPs.

Hurriyat lauds Vajpayee's Ramzan ceasefire offer

Srinagar
17 DECEMBER

THE HURRIYAT Conference, a conglomerate of 23 separatist outfits, on Sunday, formally welcomed the Ramzan ceasefire announced by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and offered talks with the Centre at a stormy meeting of its executive followed by violent factional feuds.

A Hurriyat spokesman said after the meeting that the seven-member executive council, the highest decision-making forum of the organisation, had discussed "the situation arising out of the unilateral ceasefire and unambiguously reiterated its stand that Hurriyat would take part in any meaningful and result-oriented political process aimed at resolving the Kashmir issue permanently."

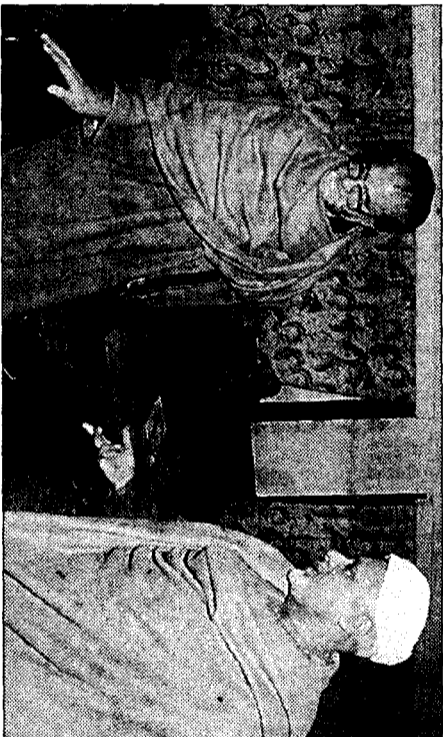
A statement issued by Hurriyat said: "It considers the announcement of Prime Minister

Atal Behari Vajpayee's unilateral Ramzan ceasefire as a positive change in the policy of the Government of India."

"The Hurriyat leadership is of the opinion that they can be given a chance to initiate talks with militant leaderships, besides the Governments of India and Pakistan so that a process of meaningful and result-oriented dialogue for resolution of the Kashmir issue and restoration of peace in Kashmir is started," the statement said.

Stating that "Hurriyat resolves to work unitedly and with discipline to reach its goal," the statement warned the forces "who want to create confusion and division in the ranks" that their efforts "would fail."

However, violent factional feuds broke out shortly after the meeting, when rival constituents of the organisation clashed, leaving 12 injured.



Hurriyat leaders Abdul Ghani Lone (left) and Maulvi Abbas Ansari talk at a meeting in Srinagar on Sunday. — AP

The trouble started when supporters of pro-Pakistan outfits — Muslim Conference, Muslim League, Islamic Students League and People's League raised slogans to shout down pro-independence Jammu & Kashmir

Liberation Front (JKLF) supporters outside the Hurriyat headquarters where the meeting was on. As Hurriyat leaders came out of the executive meeting, supporters of their respective parties raised slogans while escorting

their leaders outside the headquarters.

When JKLF chairman Mohammad Yaseen Malik came out, his supporters raised pro-freedom slogans. Angered by this, supporters of pro-Pakistani constituents of hurriyat raised counter slogans demanding that Kashmir "be included" in Pakistan.

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, considered a hardliner, made a vain bid to pacify the clashing groups but was persuaded by his supporters to leave the place. When Mr Malik tried to pacify his supporters, rival groups raised some slogans that prompted him to slap a Muslim League activist.

Top Hurriyat leaders, including Abdul Ghani Lone, Geelani and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq claimed there was no division in their organisation. "Leaders of all the con-

stituents are united. Supporters do not represent the leadership," Mr Lone told reporters.

Mr Geelani said there were no differences within the Hurriyat leadership. "We... have discussed the developments taking place in the sub-continent."

Before the clash took place, Hurriyat spokesman Sheikh Abdul Rashid read out a statement to waiting media persons saying Hurriyat "considered the announcement of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's unilateral Ramzan ceasefire as a positive change in the policy of the Government of India."

"If the step is based on sincerity, is above political gimmicks, aims at resolving the Kashmir issue, restores peace and prosperity and resumption of good neighbourly relations, then it is a positive change in the approach of the Indian leaders," the statement said. — PTI

Govt. plans radical measures to spur economic growth

By Jayanta Ghosh
Business Times Bureau

NEW DELHI: The finance ministry is charting out tough policy measures, including the elimination of certain subsidies, the privatisation of pension and provident funds, privatisation of major banks, decontrol of sugar and drugs, making higher education more expensive and bringing about drastic reforms in the public distribution system and in the Food Corporation of India.

The exercise is being carried out at the behest of the Prime Minister, according to sources. Finance secretary Ajit Kumar has prepared a reforms blueprint to correct the fiscal imbalance and achieve a nine per cent growth.

Among the most daring measures contemplated is the complete privatisation of the public sector over the next decade, with an achievement target of 60-70 per cent in the first five years.

The removal of reservations for the small-scale sector, allowing contract labour to be used for raising productivity, bringing UTI under the purview of the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the removal of FDI caps in the financial and services sectors and allowing FDI in real estate and printing and publishing are also part of the blueprint.

Besides doing away with subsi-

dies on certain goods and services, the blueprint envisages increasing user charges for power, irrigation, urban water supply, health, higher education and government housing.

It points to the need for a fully-funded, private sector managed pension fund for new government employees and provident fund with flexible regulations to allow investments in stocks.



A.B. Vajpayee

According to sources, the privatisation of a couple of major public sector banks is proposed. The objective is to create a competitive environment by changing banking laws and labour management practices. The blueprint also plans handing over all weak banks to private banks.

Mr Kumar has also recommended the repeal of SICA, the dissolution of BIFR and the inclusion of modern bankruptcy procedures in the Companies

Act. He has mooted a new bankruptcy law, encouraging voluntary winding up as it promotes a fast and market-determined sale of assets.

The blueprint includes the removal of all controls on movement, stock holding, forward trading, exports and the processing of agricultural goods.

It also calls for gradually raising fees for higher education to cover all operational costs and offering means-cum-merit scholarships.

MINISTRY OF GROWTH

- Daring 'reforms blueprint' moots privatisation of pension and provident funds
- Total disinvestment of PSU banks over the next decade
- Removal of all controls on stock holding, forward trading and exports
- Subsidies to be done away with; sugar to be decontrolled

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 DEC 2000

Vajpayee censured in Rajya Sabha

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 19. — The Rajya Sabha today censured the Prime Minister for defending Mr LK Advani, Mr Murli Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati for their alleged role in the Babari Masjid demolition.

The motion expressing strong disagreement with the Prime Minister's decision to defend the Babari trio was supported by 121 members while 86 opposed it.

"You may get the motion passed but the logic and morality is with us," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee told the House.

This is the second time in 22 years that an Opposition motion has been carried in the Upper House. In 1978, it passed a motion seeking a House Committee for two separate commissions of inquiry into corruption charges against the then Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, and the then home minister, Charan Singh.

Mr Vajpayee, while replying to the motion, argued that it was his prerogative to keep someone as his minister or ask

him or her to resign. The House or the Opposition could not direct him on that, he said.

The cases over which some of his ministers had resigned earlier were of a different nature, he said, repeatedly describing the Ayodhya issue as a 'movement'. He appealed to Opposition leaders not to play politics with Ayodhya and rake up issues that divide the nation as it would be counter-productive.

Though the Prime Minister was softer in his reply than the one he gave in the Lok Sabha, he dwelt on the same parameters he set there. Even while suggesting an out-of-court settlement between Hindus and Muslims over the issue, he stressed more on adherence to a court verdict.

Mr Vajpayee said there was no condition for talks and "I never said the Ram temple should be built at the same site".

On who should represent the two communities, he said this too should be mutually decided.

On the demand for resignation of the three chargesheeted ministers, he said he had never

termed anyone guilty or innocent. "It is for the court to decide, but you should wait for the court verdict."

Despite being censured, Mr Vajpayee's speech elaborating his secular credentials and his 40 years of parliamentary career evidently moved even the main Opposition party. Mr Pranab Mukherjee, who moved the motion, complimented the Prime Minister on the Kashmir ceasefire and assured him of all cooperation.

Call for restraint

The uneasy relation between the BJP and its allies was evident today when Mr Vajpayee appealed to NDA constituents to exercise restraint despite political "compulsions".

Speaking at a meeting of the BJP Parliamentary Party, he said there was a general feeling in the party that the allies had not been fair to the government over the Ayodhya issue.

He said though the allies had "regional interests" to cater to, they should bear in mind the "national interests" which were of utmost importance, the party

spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said after the meeting.

The TDP, Trinamul and DMK have repeatedly criticised the Prime Minister's statement that the Ram temple stir mirrors national sentiment.

Mr Vajpayee, however, thanked allies for supporting the government on the Opposition motion in the Lok Sabha and congratulated them for not falling into the "Opposition trap".

Reacting to Mr Vajpayee's call for restraint, the TDP leader, Mr Yerran Naidu, said at the Prime Minister's iftar party today that the allies were very much within their limits and that they raised their voice only when they detected a deviation from the NDA agenda.

The appeal for restraint is considered significant by BJP leaders as it comes amid constant attack by allies over Ayodhya despite repeated clarifications by Mr Vajpayee.

- Editorial: No! Not acceptable! page 6
- Don't take us for granted, says Naidu: page 8
- More reports on page 8

THE STATESMAN

2 3 11 2 00

Stay within limits: PM

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today virtually issued a warning to his Government's allied and supporting parties that when raising issues of concern to them they should keep "within limits" (*seema ke andar*) and within the parameters of "decorum" (*maryada*). Strangely, he chose to send this message to his allies while addressing the parliamentary party meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party this morning.

It was not clear what provoked the Prime Minister. Was it the protesting noises made by parties such as the Telugu Desam, the DMK and the Trinamool on his controversial Ayodhya statements, or was it the demands made on the Centre in relation to paddy and wheat procurement, or the not so hidden support for the LTTE by parties such as the MDMK, or perhaps the Shiv Sena chief's statement suggesting disenfranchisement of Muslims?

It was officially confirmed by the party spokesperson, Mr. V. K. Malhotra, that the Prime Minister did make this "suggestion." He is reported to have told BJP MPs that while allies and supporting parties were free to raise issues of concern to them, they should keep in mind the "national interest" when raising region-specific issues and they should "keep within limits and decorum."

The allies' reaction was that it was the BJP which had gone beyond the "limits" of the National Democratic Alliance agenda and created a crisis, and it was the BJP which had tried to play by different rules while considering "regional" demands on procurement made by Punjab,

Andhra Pradesh or Haryana.

The crisis in Delhi related to the Supreme Court order on closure of polluting industries was the other major issue discussed. Apparently, Mr. Madan Lal Khurana spoke at length on this, and the view that emerged was that the Centre should support the Delhi Government's decision to ask the apex court for more time to implement the verdict in an orderly fashion without creating a crisis by rendering over one lakh persons jobless.

By and large it was agreed that the decisions taken at a meeting called by the Prime Minister on this subject a few days ago were correct. When taking any decision what had to be kept in mind was the Supreme Court verdict, which must be implemented, that most polluting units which had to move out of the city, and that planned implementation must take place to cause the least dislocation.

THE HINDU

20 DEC 2000

Central government extends Ramzan ceasefire by a month

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Union government has, on observing the largely encouraging response it has generated, decided to extend its unilateral stoppage of search-and-destroy operations against Kashmiri insurgents for another month, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told both Houses of Parliament on Wednesday.

Mr Vajpayee had made the gesture late last month, at the onset of the holy month of Ramzan, to cover the entire latter period. Ramzan ends in another week. The extension, said Mr Vajpayee, would be till Republic Day (January 26), after which the government will review the position.

In identical statements read out by him in both Houses, Mr Vajpayee said the government was "greatly heartened" by the citizens' response to truce in the strife-torn state. "Our peace initiative has been widely welcomed

there. A distinctly different and more optimistic mood now prevails in that state. The constituency for peace has expanded significantly," he said.

This, he went on, had been accompanied by a decline in insurgent violence, barring the activities of some groups, notably the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Harkatul-Mujahideen. The government, he promised, remained firm in its resolve to combat these, and related challenges.

In addition, said Mr Vajpayee, there has been a "recognisable decline" in attempts (by insurgents) to cross the Line of Control (LoC) between India and Pakistan. "These (cross-overs) must cease entirely. The government is committed to this." That apart, there had also been a "marked improvement" in the regular exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani military forces since the partial ceasefire announcement last month.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 DEC 2000

POPULISM PAYS

It is difficult to explain Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Santa Claus-like largesse, even though it might have been his birthday and there is no logical reason why popular or populist schemes should be launched only on the prime minister's birthday. Present populism is clearly directed towards Uttar Pradesh elections sometime next year. Depending on how the Bharatiya Janata Party fares there and depending on how the National Democratic Alliance reactions to Ayodhya pan out, there could be a fresh round of general elections. Two schemes have been proposed. The first, the Antyodaya scheme, proposes that one crore families will be given 25 kilograms of subsidized rice and wheat at Rs 3 and Rs 2 per kg respectively. With an average of five persons per household, this is a vote bank of 50 million, even if it means an additional expenditure of Rs 2,300 crore, which the finance minister will find difficult to find at a time when the fiscal deficit is under pressure and a Fiscal Responsibility Act is being mooted. This is not to deny that 40 million tonnes of foodgrain stocks are excessive or that carrying costs, given the Food Corporation of India's inefficiency, are high. It is better to distribute surplus food to the poor than to feed it to rats or export it at a loss. However, if this is the logic, such an exercise should have been attempted months earlier and the transitory problem of a food mountain should not be confused with the long run problem of mishandling the food subsidy burden.

Procurement prices and the public distribution system are both part of the problem. There was no rationale for hiking procurement prices other than a desire to satisfy NDA allies. Nor do such hikes benefit small farmers. In the recent instance, hikes have also benefited mill owners in Punjab, rather than large farmers. This is also true of the PDS. Any number of studies have demonstrated that the PDS has a pro-urban bias and that the truly poor do not obtain more than 20 per cent of their foodgrains through the system. Nor have attempts to re-target the PDS succeeded and the Antyodaya scheme will be no exception. Clearly, the answer is to introduce a system of food stamps.

The second scheme that the prime minister's strategic management group has cooked up is a Rs 60,000 crore fund that will connect all villages with all-weather roads over the next seven years. This is no doubt a laudatory objective and surely the question to ask is why this objective has not been attained over the last fifty years. Inevitably, the answer will hinge around the inefficacy of Centrally sponsored schemes. Rather paradoxically, the present government has itself argued against Centrally sponsored schemes and there have been recommendations that these should be terminated. Instead of rural roads being built by local bodies and state governments, the Centre now expects the finance minister to find Rs 8,500 crore annually for projects that have not yet been identified. Land acquisition itself is likely to take more than seven years. So what is the prime minister up to, other than talking through his mask? Prior to 1991, the Congress legacy was one of doing something in the name of the poor, irrespective of whether such schemes actually benefited the poor. The BJP has now appropriated this legacy, as it had temporarily appropriated the mantle of reforms. The consensus across the political spectrum is that populism pays. If not through gross domestic product growth, certainly through votes. Political parties will not change unless voters prove otherwise.

THE TELEGRAPH

28 DEC 2000

Centre clears trips of six Hurriyat leaders to Pak as goodwill gesture

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: In a gesture of goodwill, the Union government has cleared the passports of at least six of the seven executive members of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC).

The decision follows the APHC's announcement to send a delegation to Pakistan for talks with militant groups there. The Prime Minister's principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, had last week assured APHC chairman Abdul Ghani Bhat that the "Prime Minister has referred their cases to the nodal ministries (home and external affairs)".

According to reliable sources, the government has decided to restore to Mr Bhat his impounded passport and issue a fresh one to Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) leader Yaseen Malik. Barring Muslim League hardliner Syed Ali Shah Gilani, all other members of the Hurriyat executive will get their travel documents.

The Hurriyat leaders had sought their travel documents through unofficial intermediaries. They said they wanted to travel to Pakistan and hold talks with militant groups there. While Mr Malik, who applied in September, will get a new passport, Shia leader Maulana Abbas Ansari, whose passport was impounded recently after his visit to Doha, and Abdul Ghani Lone, who had been issued a "country-specific and temporary passport", will have their travel documents restored.

Former Hurriyat chairman Geelani, who got involved in the separatist movement, had not applied for a passport, the sources said. But former Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umer Farooq already had his passport. About the proposed visit to Pakistan and its possible outcome, Mr Bhat said in somewhat dramatic and florid vein, "The Hurriyat Conference has fairly and sufficiently expressed its willingness to travel to Pakistan to engage

the leaders of the boys with guns. We will gleefully hear their throbbing heart and trust that they too will appreciate our anxiety to resolve the dispute through negotiations across the table, and thus make sure that the peace initiative is not aborted."

Meanwhile, home minister L.K. Advani has said that the Centre will review the situation in Jammu and Kashmir after the extended ceasefire expires on January 26 and then decide its future course of action.

Speaking at the 61st raising day of the Central Reserved Police Force (CRPF) on Thursday, Mr Advani said he hoped Pakistan would not squander the chance offered by India's second peace initiative. "One month of ceasefire has expired and we decided to extend it to give peace another chance. I hope the militant organisations and the Pakistani government will give a correct response to the offer," Mr Advani said.

Describing the Red Fort strike as an attempt to create terror, the home minister said the militant organisations, especially the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), wanted to convey that they could even strike at the Red Fort. He said the Prime Minister had repeatedly said that he would do his best to restore peace and normalcy in J&K and had even carried the message to Lahore. However, at the time the PM was in Lahore, Pakistan was sending its troops to Kargil, he said.

Rejecting Pakistan's claim that it had no control over *tanzeems* like LeT, Mr Advani said the whole world knew that such organisations got their training and support from Pakistan and the ISI. If Pakistan wanted, it could stop their operations.

He said the truce offer was made when the Indian government demonstrated it could come down heavily on the militants in the Valley. From June to September, more militants had been killed than during the past few years in anti-militancy operations, he pointed out.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 DEC 2000

Mamata patience may pay

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 15. — Ground realities had forced the government to reject Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for a petroleum price roll-back, but the Trinamul leader may soon be allowed a face-saver by the Prime Minister — a reward for her patience rather than a concession to her pressure tactics. Miss Banerjee has been waiting for over a month for Mr Vajpayee to keep his word that he would take a fresh look at the price line.



Miss Mamata Banerjee

Though it's known that the Prime Minister is inclined to give her some relief, the package was held back till the OPEC meet in the misplaced belief that international oil prices would be cut back. With the government keen to avoid any embarrassment during the winter session of Parliament, the relief package is widely expected to be announced any time before 20 November, the opening day of the session. Since the international price line remains in the top bracket, a cut in excise duty is being seen as the most likely way to bring down the retail prices

of petroleum products.

The Union Cabinet is meeting tomorrow, but government sources said the decision on a roll-back had been left entirely to the Prime Minister. While Miss Banerjee, away on an official meet in Hyderabad, will reach Delhi only on Friday, the petroleum minister, Mr Ram Naik, is leaving for Saudi Arabia to attend the meeting of the International Energy Forum where the issue of rising international oil prices will be discussed.

Though the finance ministry remains opposed to cutting excise duty, citing a further crunch on the deficit front, it is the politics of economics that seems to be dominating thinking on the roll-back issue. The Prime Minister, despite opposition from his core group, that includes Mr LK Advani and Mr George Fernandes, reportedly feels 'duty-bound' to keep his word to Miss Banerjee. Even the BJP and some of NDA allies, long opposed to Miss Banerjee's 'pressure-tactics', now feel if the government agrees to a roll-back more than a month after she threatened to resign, it won't look like buckling under pressure.

THE STATESMAN

11-15-2000

Rolling Back Mamata

The tiger may be a threatened species, but the 'Bengal Tigress' is obviously of the threatening variety. Union railway minister Mamata Banerjee, who was lying low for a few weeks, has reclaimed attention, with the NDA government seriously considering a rollback of the hike in prices of petroleum products. The ostensible reason for the review, at least in the case of LPG and kerosene, is the overwhelming need to repair the dented image of the Trinamul Congress chief who had threatened to quit the NDA government on this issue. There are situations when exigencies of political management may warrant bad economic decisions. This appears to be a case of bad economics and worse politics chasing each other in a vicious cycle from which the BJP seems most unwilling to extricate itself. On the contrary, the party is ensnaring itself deeper in a political variation of the Veerappan web which Ms Banerjee seems to be so adept at weaving. When the issue first came up, Mr Vajpayee was going in for his knee operation and global oil prices were at an unprecedented high. These, combined with assurances that her sentiments would be respected and the demand considered at an appropriate time, somewhat mollified Ms Banerjee. Later the Centre let it be known that until international oil prices stabilised it would be unwise to take any decision. Since then, Ms Banerjee has not revived the demand, perhaps because it promised diminishing returns in the context of political developments in her home state.

Therefore, it is surprising that the NDA should, without any provocation, reopen the chapter against its own political interests as well as the petroleum ministry's case for the price increase. From the economic standpoint any rollback of LPG and kerosene prices would mean an additional burden of over Rs 2,000 crore when the government has already absorbed Rs 4,000 crore of the oil pool deficit totalling Rs 24,000 crore. Politically, any concession on the plea that otherwise Ms Banerjee's image would be compromised is fraught with the risk of inviting more threats and demands from her, and perhaps other allies too in a game of competitive populism. The perceived compulsion for appeasing Ms Banerjee is that without the Trinamul Congress, the BJP would be hard put to challenge the dominance of the CPM-led Left Front in the Bengal assembly elections due next year. Jyoti Basu may have bowed out and large sections of voters may be disenchanted with the CPM. This does not necessarily translate into a Mamata-sized power vacuum which the lady alone can fill. The Trinamul Congress is yet to be tested in an assembly election, and if Ms Banerjee finds that being tied to the BJP is a handicap she would part ways in any case. Her latest ultimatum — to quit the NDA government if steps are not taken to protect the minorities — shows that her essential preoccupation is with securing maximum leverage for the assembly elections. Earlier she had threatened to quit the Union cabinet if the LF ministry was not dismissed. It is time the BJP-led NDA called her bluff rather than let policies of governance remain perpetual hostage to such demands.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 NOV 2000

IT IS NOT DENATIONALISATION, SAYS MAHAJAN

Govt. to cut holding in banks to 33 p.c.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 16. The Union Cabinet today cleared the proposal to reduce the Government's equity holding in nationalised banks from 51 per cent to 33 per cent, disregarding the one-day strike on Wednesday by bank employees against the "privatisation" of public sector banks. But the Union Minister and Cabinet spokesman, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, who announced the decision, maintained this move did not signal de-nationalisation of the banks and that their public sector character would continue.

The safeguards he listed include the stipulation that, apart from the Government, no one would be allowed to hold more than one per cent of the bank's equity; that the appointment of the Chairman and other Directors would continue to be made by the Government and that the process of Parliamentary supervision over the banks would continue. "It is not like Air India or Indian Airlines disinvestment where the Government is seeking a strategic partner and handing over the management," he said.

Responding to apprehensions about "ganging up" by the one per cent shareholders or of foreigners buying the equity, Mr. Mahajan said the Bill for amending the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act, 1970 and 1980 would be placed before a Parliamentary Standing Committee where members would be free to make further suggestions and put in more safeguards.

The setting up of bank-specific financial restructuring authority for weak banks and some changes in the number of directors on bank boards were also approved.

Terming the amendments as an enabling measure for the 19 nationalised banks (the State Bank is excluded from this Bill as it is governed by a separate Act) to raise resources from the market, Mr. Mahajan said that apart from re-

the existing provision of nominating a Central Government official to one nationalised bank board would be modified to allow nomination on the board of not more than two banks.

The amendment would delete the present mandatory requirement of nominating representatives of the Reserve Bank, financial institutions and Chartered Accountants on the boards of nationalised banks. Similarly, the existing condition, imposing a restriction that the paid-up capital of nationalised banks should not fall below 25 per cent, would be removed.

It would enable shareholders to discuss, adapt and approve the annual accounts and the balance sheet at the bank's annual general meeting. Banks would be able to transfer unclaimed dividends of over seven years to the Investor Education and Protection Fund.

For the weak banks, the amendment will enable the supercession of the board of directors of weak and potentially weak banks by the Central Government, based on the recommendation of the RBI. It will also enable the constitution of bank-specific Finance Restructuring Authority.

There are 19 banks in which the Government holds the entire or majority of the equity. Up to 1994, the entire paid-up capital in nationalised banks was held by the Central Government after which the Act was amended, enabling banks to access the market to meet additional capital requirements. Subsequently, six of the 19 nationalised banks have so far gone in for public issues.

Divorce Act to be amended

NEW DELHI, NOV. 16. The Union Cabinet today decided to amend the Indian Divorce Act of 1869 to end outdated and discriminatory provisions against Christian women.

As per Section 10 of the prevailing law, a Christian woman who seeks dissolution of her marriage is required to prove adultery and some other marital offences against her husband, whereas the man has to prove adultery only.

— PTI

'Bill will help Christian women: Page 10

ducing the prescribed minimum shareholding of the Central Government, the restriction on the free transferability of shares held by the Government would be removed. Also, the number of whole-time Directors would be increased from two to four and

THE HINDU

17 NOV 2000

No foreign equity in print media

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 17

INFORMATION AND
Broadcasting Minister ^{18/11} Pushma
Swaraj today announced that the
government had decided against
allowing foreign direct investment
(FDI) in the print media.

Mrs Swaraj, who had a meeting
with Prime Minister Atal Behari
Vajpayee on this issue recently,
told reporters that the government
believed that the media could not
be opened blindly to FDI in view
of the crucial effect it has on the
country's political process.

Mrs Swaraj had initiated a
national debate on this issue soon
after taking charge as the I&B
Minister by stating that the govern-
ment had an open mind on this
issue.

However, she admitted last week
that 80 per cent of the reactions
received by the government were

against the entry of FDI in print
media.

"We believe that the concerns
which were expressed in 1955,
which led to the then Cabinet ban-
ning FDI in this sector, are still
valid.

"We believe that print media is a
sensitive sector and doors of fore-
ign investment can't be opened
blindly. So we have reached a con-
clusion that there is no need for
the entry of foreign media," she
stated.

Mrs Swaraj, however, said the
government was still considering
the issue of allowing foreign equity
in the field of technical journals -
like those on computers, geogra-
phy, medicine, and research and
development.

On this issue, she said, there
were two suggestions — to set up a
committee of concerned secre-
taries to grant case-by-case permis-
sion, and to allow franchise. "But

no categorical decision has been
taken on how to allow foreign
equity in the case of journals," Mrs
Swaraj added.

Asked about the CBI raids on
several Doordarshan officials, the
Minister said she was awaiting a
report by the CBI on whether any-
thing incriminating was found in
the raids and what action the CBI
expected the Ministry to take on
the issue.

Regarding the much-awaited
Convergence Bill, Mrs Swaraj said
the government would endeavour
to introduce this Bill in the forth-
coming winter session of
Parliament, which begins on
November 20.

"But this could be done at the fag
end of the session since the group
of ministers which is looking into
this issue may have to hold another
couple of meetings before giving
a final clearance to the Bill," she
added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 NOV 2000

Foreign entry lock on print, for 45 years and some more

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Delhi, Nov. 17: After dising economic shackles of 'intage, the BJP-led government chose to persist with prohibition on foreign entry to print medium existing for

rs. "national debate" information and broadcasting minister Shama Swaraj had promised month, reopening the issue apparent reason, appears to be without the nation know-

ing too much about it. At the end of it, Swaraj announced that the "concerns of 1995 (when the Cabinet passed a resolution against foreign investment) were still valid".

These concerns are that foreign-owned publications could influence the political process. It has not been made clear, though, how the print medium with far less reach than the electronic medium — where all manner of fully foreign-owned broadcasters are beaming into people's homes around the clock — can exert that

influence.

Swaraj told reporters that there was "no need" to permit foreign investment as "media are not just another sector of trade which you can open blindly".

Other forms of media have been opened up, though, the ban now relevant only for print.

She said the decision to continue with it crystallised after a recent meeting with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. The decision will be "valid for years", she added. This is the third time the Union government is

"national debate" meant talking to various associations representing the print medium. She said the discussions had thrown up the majority view that foreign investment "is not desirable".

The government is, however, considering allowing some foreign magazines and journals relating to research and development, computers, medical sciences and educational publications like *National Geographic*. However, it is still being debated if publication should be allowed through the investment route or

under a franchisee agreement.

At a meeting on October 23, the executive committee of the Indian Newspaper Society adopted a resolution where it iterated its decision of September 1994 and December 1999 that foreign entry should be opposed.

But the print medium's reaction to today's announcement is divided. Aroon Purie, editor-in-chief of *India Today*, said: "Once again the lobbies of Indian newspapers have successfully blocked entry of FDI".

Purie considers the so-called

national debate "a wrong approach". He wondered if the government had been as assiduous in seeking opinion in other sectors of the economy before opening them up.

"If you ask a chicken if it can be had for dinner, naturally its answer will be a no," he said.

N. Murali, joint managing director of *The Hindu*, said: "The minister's announcement shows a lot of sense. The print medium has had a long tradition and history of independence. It is a limb of democracy."

OPEN DOOR

- TV networks
- Direct-to-home TV
- Internet
- Entertainment
- Insurance
- Banks
- Mining

SHUT

- Print

shooting down the proposal. According to the minister, a

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Cabinet gives green signal to Maruti sell-off

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The cabinet committee on disinvestment (CCD) on Saturday decided to sell the government stake in auto major Maruti Udyog Limited (MUL), a 50:50 joint venture with Suzuki of Japan. However, the decision on how the sale is to be made has been deferred until its December 23 meeting.

As required by the joint venture agreement, the government will now have to secure the Japanese company's consent. Cabinet secretary T.R. Prasad will constitute a panel of secretaries to recommend the "optimal ways of disinvestment in Maruti" within 15 days.

In another significant move, the CCD altered an earlier cabinet decision to sell shares of the petrochemicals company IPCL and decided to hive off IPCL's Baroda plant and sell it to IOC. In the rest of IPCL, comprising its Nagothane and Gandhar complexes, the government will divest 25 per cent to a strategic partner and transfer management control. After the transfer of the Baroda plant to IOC, there will be fresh international competitive bidding to sell the stake in IPCL. IOC will also be free to bid. The price for the Baroda plant will be decided by the ministries of petrochemicals and petroleum.

Disinvestment minister Arun Shourie said he had held consultations with law minister Arun Jaitley on the proposed disinvestment plan. "Several options are open to the government on the sale of its

stake in Maruti. The options range from selling the entire stake to Suzuki to buying out Suzuki, from selling to a third company to disinvesting to the public," he said. Mr Shourie quoted from the joint venture agreement to emphasise that each partner was required to obtain the prior written consent of the other before transferring its shareholdings in Maruti. However, he made it clear that Suzuki had "no first right of refusal".

The government, which has been dragging its feet on the sale of shares in Maruti, now appears keen on quitting the fiercely competitive automobile business. It

would like to cash in while the going is good for Maruti, whose market share in cars has declined to 50

per cent from 70 per cent with the advent of other international car makers in the market.

Replying to queries on the IPCL, he said the Centre had informed Reliance group managing director Anil Ambani about its decision to seek fresh bids. "Though it is not mandatory on the part of the government to get consent from anyone, Anil Ambani was informed about it," he remarked.

Mr Shourie said the IPCL's Baroda plant was Naptha-based and located on the IOC's land and the main feedstock was supplied by the IOC's Gujarat refinery. He added that IOC's CMD was in favour of taking it over. The CCD has also decided to divest 74 per cent of the government's holding in Paradeep Phosphates Ltd and simultaneously restructure the company, for which the fertiliser and chemicals minister will move a proposal to the cabinet committee on economic affairs.



Arun Shourie

SAFE DRIVING

- Final decision after meeting on December 23
- Suzuki's consent will be sought
- Suzuki has 'no first right of refusal', says minister

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 NOV 2000

MOVE TO MAKE LIFE EASY DURING RAMZAN: FERNANDES

Vajpayee announces unilateral ceasefire in J&K

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, today announced a unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir during the holy month of 'Ramzan' which begins towards the month-end.

"I hope that our gesture will be fully appreciated and all violence in the State and infiltration across the Line of Control and the International Border will cease and peace will prevail," he said in a statement.

The Cabinet Committee on Security Affairs was understood to have considered the initiative at its meeting on Saturday. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, arrived here at short notice and met the Prime Minister earlier today before the ceasefire offer was made public.

Mr. Vajpayee noted India had always stood for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue and the events of the past two years had underscored the country's credentials for peace. Recent events also proved the country's resolve and capability to defeat any attempt to undermine its security.

At the same time, the Government had continued with efforts to normalise the situation in the border State and to hold talks with all those who were prepared for dialogue. The direction to the security forces to cease anti-insurgency operations was part of the attempt to resolve the problem through dialogue.

The Prime Minister recalled that during his visit to Srinagar in August, he had underscored the need for resolving all issues in the spirit of humanism. "Mine was a sincere appeal for cooperation to bring to an end the long trail of violence, which has claimed so many precious

lives and inflicted untold misery on all sections of the State's population — Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs alike," he said.

On the possibility of reopening the dialogue with militants, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, said, "dialogue is always two-sided. We do not know what the other side wants. Last time we entered into a dialogue, it got scuttled."

He said the decision was the Government's initiative as it wanted to make life of people easy in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in the holy month. The move came after suggestions were received from several quarters on

**Ball in Pak.'s court: Page 13
A wedding and a vow: Page 14**

this count but he refused to identify the organisations which had suggested this initiative.

Significantly, the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid here, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, had recently phoned the Hizbul Mujahideen chief, Syed Salahuddin, and informed him of his intention of appealing to India and Pakistan to stop violence in the Valley. Reacting to the Imam's observations, a Hizbul spokesperson had said that the ball was in India's court to make a ceasefire offer. However, he said talks would have to be tripartite involving Pakistan besides India and militant organisations.

Pak. awaits details

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, NOV. 19. Pakistan tonight declined to comment on the announcement of cease-

fire in Kashmir against militant groups made by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, saying it would like to wait for exact details.

Spokespersons of the Pakistan-based militant organisations were equally reticent. Their stock reply, when contacted by *The Hindu* was, "we do not know the details and would like to wait for a direction from our leaders on the announcement".

The Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mr. Riaz Mohammad Khan, said "I would not like to comment unless we know the exact details of the announcement".

However, the chief of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief, Mr. Amanullah Khan, said "If the offer is sincere and there is no element of mischief, it is a welcome development. The other side should follow suit. It could prove to be a step forward in improvement of relations between India and Pakistan and resolution of the Kashmir conflict".

The Hurriyat Conference senior leader, Mr. Abdul Gani Lone, currently on a visit to Pakistan, was not available for comment. An aide of Mr. Lone said he would not give any reaction until he knew the full details.

The office of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen here, dominant militant group in Kashmir which had announced a ceasefire for a fortnight in July-August, was trying to contact its chief, Syed Salahuddin, "to apprise him of the development". The same was the case with the Lashkar-e-Taiba and other outfits. Ever since it called off the ceasefire on August 8, the theme song of the Hizb has been that it is now the turn of India to make a gesture for peace in Kashmir.

THE HINDU

20 NOV 1999

Kerosene, LPG to cost a little less

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 19. The Government today announced a partial rollback in the price of kerosene by one rupee a litre and LPG (cooking gas) by Rs. 10 a cylinder in deference to the demands by the allies led by the Trinamool Congress.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, announced the decision at the Coordination Committee meeting of the National Democratic Alliance on the eve of the winter session of Parliament starting tomorrow.

Briefing reporters on the meeting, the NDA convenor, Mr. George Fernandes, said the Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, would make a statement in Parliament on Tuesday and also on the day from which the price cut would be effective.

The Trinamool president, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, was the first to object to the price hike and demanded a rollback in the prices of kerosene and LPG. Other allies echoed a similar demand. Ms. Banerjee and Mr. Ajit Kumar Panja, also sent in their resignations from the Union Cabinet opposing the hike and withdrew it after Mr.



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, attending a meeting with NDA leaders on the eve of the winter session of Parliament at his residence in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

Vajpayee promised to look into it.

Mr. Fernandes said even now the price of international crude was high and had risen to \$35 a barrel against \$30 a barrel when the Government decided to raise the prices. He said following the rollback, the oil pool deficit was estimated to be bloat by Rs. 139 crores a month.

The NDA was informed that the Government would bring forward the Women's Reservation Bill in

the ensuing session and authorised the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, to interact with all parties in Parliament to ensure smooth conduct and passage of the Constitutional Amendment Bill. Earlier attempts to introduce the Bill met with stiff resistance.

Perhaps in an attempt to checkmate the Opposition, the NDA leaders suggested that Government discuss in Parliament the new agriculture policy, the inter-

national situation and the Kargil report.

The NDA leaders were also briefed about the Cabinet decision to reduce equity in 19 public sector banks. Mr. Fernandes said the clarification was necessary in the wake of the bank strike and reports that the move was aimed at privatisation. The NDA also endorsed the campaign against polio eradication as it was in its final phase.

THE HINDU

20 NOV 2000

A bold initiative

AT A superficial level, the boldness of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's offer of a unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir for the duration of the Muslim holy month of *Ramzan* may be partly underestimated because of the excessive — and perhaps unnecessary — hype over the wedding in a political family in Rawalpindi. But its import runs much deeper. The Prime Minister's initiative should help to put the options before the militant groups operating in the state in a clearer perspective. Ever since the Hizbul Mujahideen's offer of a ceasefire as a first step paving the way for talks with New Delhi came a cropper earlier this year, there has been considerable confusion over what the insurgents have in mind. For a start, the Hizbul itself appeared to be in two minds over how far it was prepared to go so far as the negotiations were concerned.

Several of Hizbul's Valley-based leaders — who naturally are in closer touch with the situation on the ground — had seemed quite willing to initiate a dialogue with the Centre. On the other hand, its Pakistan-based leaders, including Hizbul chief Syed Salahuddin, appeared to be engaged in a ventriloquist's act in following the script prescribed by Islamabad, which has been its principal source of weapons and training for more than a decade. The Prime Minister's offer has a better chance of being appreciated by the Valley-based elements than those who operate from bases in Pakistan. The latter, in any case, may seek to attach conditions to their acceptance or find other ways of saying no. But the fact that the offer, to begin with, is linked with the Muslim holy month must make it difficult for them to reject it out of hand.

In the circumstances, it is quite likely that some of the groups may go along with the ceasefire offer while others will turn it down on some pretext or the other. That might be one way for the militants to keep their options open. But the fact remains that there is a growing constituency of people in the Valley who, whatever their expectations during the onset of the militancy a decade ago, are sick today of the continuing violence and fervently wish for peace. It is this constituency which will discern a ray of light in the Prime Minister's offer. Although this initiative represents no more than a small step on the long road to peace in Kashmir, it is nevertheless a step that carries the possibility of gradually overcoming the many hurdles that lie ahead.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 NOV 2000

'Rollback a bid to please allies'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 20. The decision of the Vajpayee Government to partially reduce the prices of Kerosene and Liquefied Petroleum Gas was criticised by the Opposition, which termed it as an attempt to please its allies and unsound on economics.

The Congress, the Left parties, the Samajwadi Party and a MP of the Samata Party joined the chorus saying it was a decision of political expediency.

The BJP, however, described the move as a reflection of the Prime Minister's sensitivity to people's problems and that Mr.

Atal Behari Vajpayee had kept his word. The party vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurty, said the Prime Minister reviewed the decision in the light of a decrease in international prices of crude oil.

The senior Congress leader, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, said the decision was one of political management to satisfy the ruling coalition's partners while Mr. Jairam Ramesh, secretary of the Congress economic affairs department, described it as "politically expedient but economically disastrous".

The CPI(M) and the CPI reiterated their demand for a total rollback of the hike and said the

measure would not bring relief to the people due to across the board hike in prices of petroleum products.

The CPI(M) politburo said that not a single paise had been reduced on the prices of diesel and petrol and of the Rs. 8,000 crores imposed, the current reduction would amount to just Rs. 139 crores per month.

The CPI national secretary, Mr. D Raja, said: "the so-called reduction in the price is a gimmick to hoodwink the people and NDA allies". The Samajwadi Party general secretary, Mr. Amar Singh, said the move was to buy peace from allies.

THE HINDU

21 NOV 2000

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Sonia slams Govt.'s farm policy 23/11

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 22. The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, in her opening remarks while moving the adjournment motion on farmers' plight, catalogued the farmers' plight saying they were being crushed by the rising cost of production and "the falling prices of his output". She accused the Government of "neither curbing costs nor intervening to ensure higher prices," points which were later refuted by the BJP and by the Minister for Agriculture, Mr. Nitish Kumar, who gave a hard-hitting reply to the Congress.

She came down hard on the Centre accusing it of lacking "a policy, foresight, and plan of ac-

tion". The Plan outlay had been cut by Rs. 500 crores and public investment in the sector was drying up. She demanded implementation of a nationwide crop insurance scheme and said the disaster relief plan needed to be enhanced.

The Congress deputy leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, criticised the cuts in subsidies by the Vajpayee Government pointing out that this had nothing to do with the WTO, as in the United States there were higher subsidies, totaling \$ 26 billions for 6 million farmers. In India, the subsidies were a fraction of that amount.

The Congress' indictment was picked up by partners of the ruling NDA. Though some allies, such as the TDP, the Shiv Sena,

and the BJP, eventually voted with the Government, their speeches were critical of Government policies. Mr. Venkatasarlu (TDP), Mr. Prassana Acharya (BJD) and Mr. Ananth Geethe (Shiv Sena) left little doubt about where their sympathies lay. However, the BJP members were vociferous in their defence.

Contrary to what Mrs. Gandhi had said, Mr. Anandi Sahu and Mr. Sahib Singh Verrna claimed that allocation on the agriculture sector was the highest ever and it was the Congress which had signed the WTO agreement leading to the current woes caused by agricultural imports. They also charged the Congress with being members of the elite who had no idea about farmers or farming.

THE HINDU

23 NOV 2000

PM RULES OUT FURTHER EXPANSION OF CABINET

Sushma gets back I&B, Venkaiah, four others in

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 30. Ms. Sushma Swaraj and Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu made their way into the Atal Behari Vajpayee Cabinet today. Besides the two new Cabinet rank Ministers, there are four new Ministers of State — Mr. Shripad Naik of Goa, Mr. Pon Radhakrishnan (from Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu), Mr. Satyabrata Mukherjee of West Bengal, and Mr. U. V. Krishnamaraju of Andhra Pradesh; with these additions (all belonging to the BJP), the strength of the Vajpayee Council of Ministers has gone up to 75.

The new Ministers were administered oath of office and secrecy by the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, at Rashtrapati Bhavan this evening. The ceremony was attended by the Prime Minister, and his senior colleagues.

According to a Rashtrapati Bhavan press communique later in the evening, Ms. Swaraj gets back her old job as Minister of Information and Broadcasting, while Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu gets to become the Minister of Rural Development, a responsibility so far shouldered by Mr. Sunderlal Patwa. In the process, Mr. Patwa becomes the new Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers while the much sought after Ministry of Power has been bagged by Mr. Suresh Prabhu of the Shiv Sena.

In addition, there is a minor reshuffle of portfolios among the Ministers of State, involving six old faces (besides the four new entrants at that level). The reshuffle of portfolios of these half-a-dozen Minister of State level does not indicate any administrative coherence or political pattern, except that Mr. V. Dhananjaya Kumar (who has been shifted out of finance to textiles) seems to have paid a price for having annoyed the NDA's political brass in the matter of Income-Tax raids on cricketers.

Talking to reporters after the swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Prime Minister indicated that there would be no further addition to his Council of



The newly sworn-in Union Ministers with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi, on Saturday. — Photo: S. Arneja

Ministers. If there was any political message in this evening's reshuffle and expansion of the Vajpayee ministerial team, it was clearly overshadowed by Ms. Mamata Banerjee's dramatic announcement, in Calcutta, of her resignation (as, also, that of the Minister of State for External Af-

fairs, Mr. Ajit Panja, in protest against the increase in the prices of petroleum products). Suddenly, Ms. Banerjee has underlined the built-in fragility of the coalition Government, exposing the vulnerabilities of the ruling arrangement at the Centre.

The BJP leadership as well as

the Vajpayee establishment was clearly taken aback by the Minister for Railways' announcement; it was being angrily pointed out that Ms. Banerjee was very much present at the NDA meeting on (September 23) when the Union Cabinet was authorised to take a decision on the quantum of hike in the oil prices. Ms. Banerjee was also reportedly unhappy that she was not extended the courtesy of a consultation on the induction of a new face from West Bengal. Nonetheless there is a sense of confidence that the Prime Minister and Mr. George Fernandes, NDA convener, would be able to persuade Ms. Banerjee to withdraw her resignation. The Prime Minister has already rejected the resignations of the Trinamool Ministers.

Uma Bharti resignation not accepted

PTI reports:

Mr. Vajpayee said the BJP leader, Ms. Uma Bharti's resignation from the Lok Sabha has not been accepted. He added in a lighter vein that she was at present resting at the Kedarnath shrine.

Mamata, Panja resign

CALCUTTA, SEPT. 30. The Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, and the Union Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Ajit Kumar Panja, today resigned from the Vajpayee Government in protest against the hike in prices of petroleum products.

Ms. Banerjee faxed the resignation letters to the Prime Minister this evening though she had announced earlier that she would wait for three days for the Government to roll back the price hike.



The Trinamool Congress leader told newsmen at her residence, "Either they have to withdraw or we will withdraw. We cannot accept the price hike which will affect the common people. It is not possible for us to continue in this Government." Ms. Banerjee said she had requested the Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, not to take any decision which would hit

the common people. "The prices were hiked at midnight without consulting us. But we cannot remain spectators." — PTI

Details on Page 8

Mamata quits, PM says nothing doing

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Sept. 30. — Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja resigned from the Union ministry today in protest against the increase in prices of petroleum products. Another BJP ally, Mr Chandrababu Naidu, was also unhappy with the increase that he nonetheless conceded was inevitable, and said the prices of kerosene and LPG could be kept much lower.

The Trinamul leaders' resignations were faxed to the Prime Minister at 6:30 p.m., who refused to accept them. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee asked NDA convenor, Mr George Fernandes, to persuade Miss Banerjee to withdraw her resignation.

The Union petroleum minister, Mr Ram Naik, and sources in the PMO in Delhi ruled out

a rollback in prices, refuting Miss Banerjee's claim that she had not been consulted. Senior BJP vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, said the government had acted under compulsion that she should understand.

Miss Banerjee's resignation came a little after an announcement that she would wait for three days for the government to roll back petroleum product prices. The Trinamul leader, who did not clarify whether her party would still back the NDA, claimed to have requested Mr Naik not to take any decision that would hurt the public. "But the prices were increased at midnight without consulting us. We can't remain spectators. This is too much."

The Union agriculture minister, who is in Calcutta, said no one was happy about the hike



Miss Mamata Banerjee at her residence after resigning from the Union ministry. — The Statesman

but it was inevitable. Also, everyone was taken into confidence and the way Mr Naik placed his case, there "was no way out". The issue was discussed at length at the last

NDA meeting.

Miss Banerjee told reporters at her home: "We cannot accept the price hike which will affect the common people. It will not be possible for us to continue in the government."

The Union government has said the increase was necessary to meet the oil pool deficit. Miss Banerjee's response to that was: "The government has its compulsions. We also have our own compulsions."

Left front ministers refused to react to Miss Banerjee's resignation, which they said was "an internal matter of another alliance". But her arch rival and West Bengal chief minister said: "It will be good if the prices of petroleum products are reduced". Mr Jyoti Basu added that the Trinamul Congress had been "encouraging the anti-national, anti-people and

pro-multinational policies" of the BJP-led government.

His Andhra Pradesh counterpart plans to speak to the Prime Minister and leaders of other political parties to see what can be done. Mr Naidu feels that increase was necessary, but a burden on the common man. The TDP leader has discussed it with his Cabinet colleagues and his party's politburo.

Mr Naidu criticised the NDA for not preparing the public for the increase, sources said in Hyderabad. The Centre should have convinced the people that the increase was inevitable before announcing it, he reportedly said.

He compared the situation with the way his own government tries to make the public "more aware" every time a hike of any nature is effected.

Govt prepared for painful separation with Trinamul

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 1. — Having ruled out a roll-back in petro price hike, the Centre is now prepared for a painful separation with Miss Mamata Banerjee. According to a reliable source, there are enough grounds to suspect that the Trinamul Congress chief is consciously moving towards a working arrangement with the Congress with an eye on the Muslim votebank in West Bengal.

"There is a feeling that Miss Banerjee is turning out to be another Jayalalitha but fortunately, this time the government has the numbers to survive even without her," said a NDA leader.

The government, however, still "sincerely desires" to persuade Miss Banerjee to "return home".

Mr George Fernandes who returned to Delhi after speaking to Miss Banerjee in Calcutta has informed the government that there was no "break-through". The defence minister left for a scheduled programme in Chail soon after, and could not be contacted.

He is learnt to have briefed the Prime Minister on the outcome of his talks in Calcutta. Mr Vajpayee had spoken to Miss Banerjee over the phone late last night, before Mr Fernandes flew down.

"The feed-back that we got is that she, as of

9-10-90
now, remains adamant on resigning. Whether she will quit the NDA or not remains to be seen. As far as the government is concerned, it is prepared to repeat the come-back appeals to her or send more high-profiled negotiators for talks. The government genuinely does not want to lose any partner. It will be ready to provide a face-saver for her through well-publicised talks," the source said.

Sources said Miss Banerjee was rethinking her attitude towards the Congress after the panchayat and civic polls in the state. The civic poll results gave the Congress the casting vote with 15 crucial seats. The party had won in areas with substantial Muslim voters.

Further, the Trinamul could not match its urban growth in the rural areas. In the panchayat elections, the Congress pushed the Trinamul to third place, and its partner BJP ended up an "unimpressive" fourth.

The general feeling is that Miss Banerjee is "acting according to a prepared script with an eye on the Assembly poll", a source said. The Congress has "more utility" for her than the weak BJP as a tactical partner in her "now-or-never" electoral battle with the Communists next year, he said.

For the time being, the government is relieved that Mr Chandrababu Naidu, though unhappy with the price hike, has not joined Miss Banerjee.

THE STATESMAN

• 2 OCT 2000

FERNANDES MEETS MAMATA, RETURNS EMPTY-HANDED

Vajpayee hopes to retain Trinamool support

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, OCT. 1. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Bharatiya Janata Party are still hopeful of continued support to the National Democratic Alliance by the Trinamool Congress although the NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes' visit to Calcutta to meet the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, ended without any positive response.

"Talks are going on with Ms. Mamata Banerjee, we hope her support will continue," Mr. Vajpayee told reporters after the BJP national executive committee meeting here this evening. Asked whether she had been consulted on the increase in the prices of petroleum products, he said she had been present at the NDA meeting when the matter was discussed. He, however, conceded that "she had some reservations, she had a different opinion on some matter, but went along with the consensus."

Ms. Banerjee had cited the hike in prices of petroleum products, "which has hurt the poor" for her resignation. But there are fears in the BJP that there is more to it than meets the eye. After all, Ms. Banerjee had talked about the "mahajot" idea — a grand front

against the Left Front in West Bengal — quite a while ago, and the Congress(I) response is well known. The party would have nothing to do with her as long as she is with the BJP.

All accounts suggest that Mr. Fernandes, who along with a PMO official, Mr. Sudhendra Kularni, was sent by the Prime Minister last night to try and pacify Ms. Banerjee has returned without success. Reports from Calcutta suggest that Ms. Banerjee remains firm, pointing out that the interests of the poor were up-

permost in her mind when she decided to withdraw from the Government.

Mr. Fernandes, who met Ms. Banerjee, Mr. Panja as well as Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyaya, Trinamool whip in the Lok Sabha, refused to comment on what had transpired saying he would report to the Prime Minister.

The Trinamool chief's three-day ultimatum for withdrawal of the price hike is also not likely to be accepted by the Government in view of the huge Rs. 25,000-crore oil pool deficit. Mr. Ram

Naik, Petroleum Minister, had indicated this.

Other straws in the wind suggest that Ms. Banerjee may have decided to opt out of the NDA because of her electoral compulsions in West Bengal. One, she does not want to be associated with any unpopular decisions, and the price rise will surely be unpopular. Two, any alliance with the Congress(I), open or otherwise, could bring richer dividends. Three, she had recently submitted a memorandum on the flood situation to the Prime Minister along with Congress(I)'s Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, and that was perhaps an indication of her mood to move closer to that party. Reports from the Congress (I) suggest that acceptance of Ms. Banerjee's leadership in Bengal would not be a problem.

However, the BJP is still hoping that the Congress(I) may not like to take a stridently anti-CPI(M) posture as it may have to depend on the latter's support to form a government at the Centre in the future.

But the counter argument is that the Lok Sabha elections are still four years away while the West Bengal Assembly election is due to take place within six months.

Mamata remains firm

By Malabika Bhattacharya

CALCUTTA, OCT. 1. Even as some of the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee's men have been in and out of the city since last night to persuade the Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, to return to the National Democratic Alliance Government, the latter remained firm on quitting the BJP-led Government in protest against the hike in prices of petro products.

"If the Government hurts the average man, then we have no option but to protest against that Government. We have done just that," she said.

Last night, the NDA Government was jolted by Ms. Banerjee's announcement at a press conference that she and her colleague, Mr. Ajit Panja, Minister of State for External Affairs, would quit the Cabinet in protest against the "anti-people" hike in the prices of petroleum products.

Oil not the only reason: Page 13

THE HINDU

2000

MONDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2000

g.p. / 12
MR. VAJPAYEE'S WOES 10-12/2000

BY ANNOUNCING HER decision to quit the Union Cabinet (unless the Government agrees to roll back the prices of petroleum products), Ms. Mamata Banerjee has landed the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in some more trouble. Ms. Banerjee's show of protest, coming as it did about the same time when Mr. Vajpayee was making efforts to fill the gaps in the Cabinet caused by the death of Rangarajan Kumaramangalam and the angry exit of Mr. Ram Jethmalani, has only caused further trouble to the Prime Minister and the managers in the ruling coalition. The induction of Ms. Sushma Swaraj and Mr. Venkaiah Naidu into the Union Council of Ministers was guided by considerations relevant to the internal affairs of the BJP, while shifting Mr. Suresh Prabhu to a "more" important ministry had become necessary in order to placate the Shiv Sena's Mr. Bal Thackeray. Ever since her short stint as Delhi Chief Minister came to an end after the BJP's defeat in the elections to the State Assembly, Ms. Swaraj had been sulking and had insisted on speaking against the Government's policies on the party fora. And Mr. Naidu, a senior leader, too has been rewarded for his services to the party by being inducted into the Cabinet. Meanwhile, Mr. Vajpayee could not but have found a berth for at least one of the BJP members from Tamil Nadu — Mr. Pon Radhakrishnan.

The threat by Ms. Banerjee could not have come at a worse time. It remains to be seen whether the Trinamool Congress leader is serious about carrying out her threat. But there are reasons to assume that Ms. Banerjee will stick to her decision. The provocation for this, however, does not seem to be what Ms. Banerjee has publicly stated — her opposition to the hike in the prices of petroleum products — but seems to be rooted in the political alignments she is keen on working out in West Bengal. It is now clear that the Trinamool Congress chief's campaign within the ruling combine demanding "action"

against the Left Front Government in West Bengal did not yield her anything; apart from the missives sent from the Union Home Ministry and the exaggerated descriptions by Mr. George Fernandes about how bad things were in the State, Ms. Banerjee could not achieve anything substantive. This certainly must have hurt her ego enough and added to this was the induction into the Cabinet of yet another BJP MP from West Bengal, Mr. Sathyabrata Mukherjee, as Minister of State. The decision to effect an increase in the prices of petroleum products was discussed by the coordination committee of the ruling NDA when Ms. Banerjee was present almost a week ago; moreover, the logic behind the price hike — the rise in international prices and the dismantling of the Administered Prices Mechanism — has had the concurrence of not just the partners of the NDA but also of others across the political spectrum. For Ms. Banerjee to now make an issue of this and display her annoyance does not sound credible.

The real reasons guiding Ms. Banerjee's decision are to be found in West Bengal politics. The results of the elections to the local bodies held a couple of months ago clearly brought out that the Congress(I) continues to remain a force in at least most parts of rural West Bengal. The polls also revealed that the BJP is hardly a force in the State. The message that emerged clearly was that the Trinamool Congress along with the Congress(I) could emerge as a powerful platform against the Left parties in the Assembly elections; a mahajot without the BJP. And it is this calculation that seems to be guiding Ms. Banerjee at this stage. After all, she must have realised, at least now, that the Congress(I), particularly the high command, despite its eagerness to revive its fortunes in West Bengal would not approve any move by its State unit leaders to be part of a mahajot that had the BJP in it. Ms. Banerjee apparently feels that this is the right moment to leave the BJP-led combine.

THE HINDU

• 2 OCT 2000

POLITICS! POLITICS!

Aftermath of Mamata's resignation

IT has been clear for some time that Mamata Banerjee's sights have been focused on Writers' Buildings and that she wants to throw the Marxists into the Hooghly. It follows therefore that she would choose her time to make the *move dramatic*, to stay out in Calcutta and focus on the task in hand. It is too early to say whether she has chosen her time, it seems a trifle early except that she is earthy and clear headed enough to know that fine tuning such an important issue may not be easy and she must take her chances as they arise. If elections in West Bengal are held with those due elsewhere then they will be in February/March, in which case this is perfect timing. The issue purely from the political perspective could not be better. Prices are bound to rise all round, as transport costs go up; she expects to reap the political rewards and also deny the Left Front a monopoly in resistance. They also know that if both jump on the same bandwagon, she has the clout to push them off the wagon with the greatest of ease. There will be the usual flurry of activity to persuade her; the Prime Minister has already asked George Fernandes to talk her out of it, something to which he must be getting accustomed by now. After the three days she has allowed, there will be appeals not to precipitate matters in view of Vajpayee's knee operation in which case she could relent without losing the momentum she seeks and the focus will remain on her sacrifice.

On the substance of her complaint that she was not consulted she has no case. The increase has been on the cards for a while, although it is arguable whether the government could have done any more to prepare the nation for the inevitable. This is not a country where informed debate on economic issues cuts any ice. Our unlamented politicians have seen to that. Nobody, not truckers, not unions, not anybody will have wanted to understand the crisis in the oil-pool account; the earlier effort to delink government from administered prices came a cropper precisely because of the refusal to understand and a sharper refusal not to let go. Further, Mamata cannot complain that the decision was taken in her absence, she chose to remain in West Bengal for the occasion and she knew what was in the wind. Nothing in the reaction of the Left Front suggests that they have understood even the politics of it. Instead of pointing out that Mamata knew all along what was in the offing and remained in West Bengal on purpose to facilitate her design, all they can say is that *it is an internal matter of the alliance*. Jyoti Basu's comment is inane nonsense — *it will be good if petroleum prices are reduced*. But how can one blame them. In July 1997, Anil Biswas, now the state secretary was agitating to prevent the price of the newspaper *Bartaman* from falling and a big thing he made of it too! But if the unreconstructed Marxists hold that rising prices of transport will lead to increasing misery and this is their staple diet for everyone but their own selves they will surprise themselves shortly.

It is not very clear what if anything the Union Government plan to do to consume less petroleum products in the national effort they are urging on everyone, Perhaps one less car in VIP motorcades!

If readers are looking for meaningful efforts from any government, Union or State, they are looking for a black cat in a dark room that isn't there!

PM emissary upbeat on midnight talks

Mamata refuses to budge on oil price rollback demand, ministerial berths

Arindam Sarkar
Calcutta, October 2

THE MAMATA crisis hung on the edge till late tonight as the Railway Minister huddled with Prime Minister's special emissary Sudheendra Kulkarni at her Kalighat home.

Kulkarni, back in the city in less than 24 hours of being stonewalled in his first mission late last night, was understood to be carrying a special message from Atal Behari Vajpayee for Mamata.

There was intense speculation on whether she would yield to Delhi's overtures and climb down on the oil price hike issue. The Trinamool chief herself would give nothing away, saying no more than that talks with the PM's emissary were on.

Kulkarni arrived here by a late night flight and drove straight to Harish Chatterjee Street, where Mamata herself received him. There was no out-

ward show of the tension that has been wracking the NDA since Mamata and party colleague Ajit Panja put in their papers on Saturday.

At the airport, Kulkarni had appeared hopeful of resolving the crisis. "Vajpayeeji has tremendous affection for Mamata. Everything will be settled. We want to see Mamata as Chief Minister of Bengal," he was reported to have told Mukul Roy, Trinamool general secretary.

Earlier in the day, Mamata's party colleague Pankaj Banerjee said the log-jam could be resolved tomorrow. But, he virtually ruled out the option of supporting the Government without being part of it. "We either stay in the NDA Government or we withdraw support to it."

Sources said Mamata has suggested to the Prime Minister that at least the prices of kerosene, LPG and diesel be rolled back. She also wants party col-

league Panja to be upgraded to Cabinet Minister and one more minister of state berth, apparently, for Nitish Sengupta.

In a related development, Trinamool MP Jayanta Bhattacharya, who held talks with State BJP leaders today, categorically told them if his party delinks itself from the Government at the Centre, the alliance at the State level too would be off.

"For us, the BJP in Bengal is a liability. They have a vote-bank of only four per cent. If we part ways, our Muslim vote-bank will immediately increase dramatically. Mamata is very popular with the Muslim community and we can easily get at least 18 out of its 25 per cent votes here," Bhattacharya said. "Moreover, don't forget there would be the CPI(M) dissidents and parties who would be eager to join hands with Mamata once we leave the BJP," he said.

On her part, the Trinamool Congress

chief today seemed prepared to part ways with the NDA. "By tomorrow everything will become clear. I think my presence in or absence from the Government will not make much of a difference to the NDA," Mamata told *The Hindustan Times*.

Party sources said the Trinamool chief today received three telephone calls from the Prime Minister's Office and Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and other NDA allies. Her personal office here has stopped moving files relating to the Railway ministry.

HTC adds from New Delhi: M Venkaiah Naidu, who relinquished his post as BJP general secretary today after becoming the Rural Development Minister, said the BJP National Executive did not discuss the oil price hike yesterday. The hike was a "painful decision, but a rollback cannot be effected".

Pranab moots pact with Mamata

Mamata may have the last laugh

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 3

‘Cabinet to reconsider kerosene, LPG, diesel price hike on Oct. 6’

MAMATA BANERJEE may, after all, have her way. Clearly upbeat, the Trinamool Congress chief announced here today that Prime Minister Vajpayee had assured her that the Centre would consider reducing the steepness of the recent hike in cooking gas, kerosene and diesel prices. (By implication, petrol and aviation fuel prices will stay as they are). She said the PM had told her that the rollback would be considered at a Cabinet meeting slated for Saturday, October 6.

“I will, however, not be attending the Cabinet meeting as I am busy coordinating flood relief work here,” Ms Banerjee said.

“The entire country is going to benefit if the prices of petroleum

Trinamool may get one more berth

IT IS not only on the price hike issue that Ms Banerjee will be scoring political points. BJP sources say she has managed to get the Prime Minister to agree to give her party colleague Ajit Panja independent charge of the steel and mines ministry. These sources also say if Mr Panja is indeed upgraded, Trinamool MP Krishna Bose will slip into his Minister of State shoes.

Ms Banerjee feels that if both the BJP Lok Sabha members from Bengal can be ministers, the Trinamool, with nine, ought to have more than just two ministers. The Shiv Sena, which has 15 members in the Lok Sabha, too has been demanding one more ministerial berth.

Kalyani Shanker, New Delhi

products are reduced. Now we will wait for the Cabinet's decision on Saturday before deciding on our next course of action,” she said.

“Vajpayeeji has told me,” she went on, “that some formalities are to be worked out before the decision (to rollback the price hike) is made public. The issue has to be discussed with all NDA con-

stituents and at the Cabinet meeting. Also, he is currently busy with the visit of President Putin. So the decision has to wait till Saturday. The people of India will be waiting anxiously for the PM to take action that is appropriate,” she added.

Ms Banerjee thanked “all those NDA allies who had protested against the price hike and brought it

to the government's attention”. She said she had protested against the hike “as an ordinary leader” and not as a Union minister. “In a democracy, a government cannot ignore the people. We in the government cannot let down the people who elected us,” she added.

The PM's emissary, Mr Sudhendra Kulkarni, arrived here for the second time in the last three days, from Delhi last night. He went straight to Ms Banerjee's residence. Their meeting ran from 11.30 pm to 2 am. They met again this afternoon.

Ms Banerjee also spoke to the PM today. “I am sure everything will fall into place on Saturday and we will all have a very happy Durga puja all over the country,” she said with a big smile.

The deadline for Ms Banerjee's rollback-or-we-quit threat expired today.

Sparks fly at flood relief meet

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, October 3

SPARKS FLEW at a Cabinet meeting on flood relief with Chief Minister Jyoti Basu quietly watching the unruly proceedings.

Minister of State for Mass Education Anju Kar minced no words in attacking grossly inadequate relief measures in Burdwan's Kalna block while Cooperatives Minister Bhakti Bhusan Mondal complained that ministers and Left Front leaders were forced to remain “mute spectators” as bureaucrats went about handling operations.

The unexpected criticism appeared to have had an effect already. The Cabinet meeting advised all ministers belonging to flood-hit districts to monitor relief activities. Twelve high-speed boats from the Civil Defence Department are to be pressed into service. **Detailed report on Page 4**

PM buys 'peace' with Mamata

110/110 By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, OCT. 3. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is reported to have bought peace with the Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, by promising an additional berth to her party in the Council of Ministers and agreeing to at least a partial rollback of the recently announced increase in the price of petroleum products. The partial rollback decision is expected to be taken after a Cabinet meeting on October 6.

The buckling comes just when the Government and the BJP were getting ready to celebrate the completion of one year in office by the Vajpayee Government; the projection was that the Government had grown from strength to strength with the United States' visit seen as the icing on the cake.

It seems the Prime Minister was keen on untangling the Trinamool imbroglio before going in for his knee surgery, although the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, and the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, had serious reservations. Government sources today confirmed that the package worked out in Calcutta today — where the Prime Minister's emissary, Mr. Sudhendra Kulkarni, has been camping since last night — included the elevation of Mr. Ajit Panja to a Minister with independent charge of Mines and Minerals, and the induction of a new Minister of State from the Trinamool, in all likelihood Ms. Krishna Basu, who could be given the

job Mr. Panja has been holding, Minister of State rank in the Ministry of External Affairs.

Ms. Banerjee announced her resignation as Minister of Railways, along with that of her colleague Mr. Panja as MoS, External Affairs, on September 30, the very day Mr. Vajpayee inducted some new faces into the Council of Ministers. What reportedly angered Ms. Banerjee was the induction of Mr. Satyabrata Mukherjee, a BJP MP from West Bengal, making the BJP score two Ministers out of two MPs from the State, the other being Mr. Tapan Sikdar. On the other hand, the Trinamool with a strength of nine MPs also had a quota of two — one Cabinet berth held by Ms. Banerjee and a MoS position held by Mr. Panja.

The Trinamool's public posture was that she would press the resignations unless the Vajpayee Government rolled back the increase in prices of petroleum products which had "hurt the poor and therefore hurt us too". Naturally, there was no mention of the demand for an additional portfolio, though it was known that this was also a grudge.

When exactly the ministerial inductions will take place has not been indicated. It seems Ms. Banerjee has let it be known that she will withdraw her resignation only after the Government announces the reduction in the recent increase in prices of petroleum products, especially kerosene, LPG and diesel. The ministerial inductions would probably follow, if other partners do not start protesting.

Mamata thanks PM: Page 13

THE HINDU

4 OCT 2000

Vajpayee knees Mamata's rollback plan

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 4. — There were indications today that the rollback in prices of petroleum goods, if any, would be unlikely before the Prime Minister's knee operation.

Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee and his senior Cabinet ministers today decided not to give in to Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for a petroleum price rollback. Friday's Cabinet meeting, therefore, was unlikely to take up the issue, a Union Minister told **The Statesman**.

In Calcutta, Miss Banerjee said she would not say a single thing about the issue before the Cabinet meeting.

Earlier, it was concluded in Delhi that the Prime Minister's special emissary, Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni's mission had failed, and the government should be ready for any step the Trinamul Congress might take. The package offered through Mr Kulkarni was a knee-jerk reaction from the Prime Minister's advisors who were unprepared for a sudden crisis, a source said.

Their projection is, Miss Banerjee would not withdraw from the NDA — not at least for some more time. Her first step would be withdrawal from the ministry, followed by withdrawal of support to the NDA, and eventually, snapping of

ties with the BJP if that seemed likely to pay her electoral dividends at a later stage, a Union minister said.

The PM's advisors had thought of reducing the oil prices to keep her in the ministry. On second thoughts, however, they took a strong line today that the Prime Minister should by no means end up sending the message that the government could be pressured so openly. This would invite more and similar pressure from other allies as well.

Apart from economic compulsions, what had annoyed the Prime Minister was Miss Banerjee's public announcement that the government had agreed to a rollback, a source said. Already, an impression was gaining ground that the government was buckling under pressure from the Trinamul leader.

The Prime Minister hardened his stand after an afternoon meeting with Mr LK Advani, Union home minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, external affairs minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, finance minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, IT and parliamentary affairs minister, and Mr Ram Naik, petroleum minister.

Mr Advani then drafted the Prime Minister's statement for the media. Mr Vajpayee approved it after which Mr Mahajan edited the long sentences to shorter ones to ensure clarity. It was read out to Mr Vajpayee

before being released to the media. The statement said, "the Prime Minister today spoke with the railway minister, Miss Mamata Banerjee. He conveyed to her that the government is closely watching oil prices at the international level.

"The government proposed to have a second look at the tariffs of petroleum products recently announced, after his return from Mumbai subsequent to his knee operation. The Prime Minister requested her to continue discharging her ministerial duties in the meanwhile and not to press her resignation."

Mr Mahajan and Mr Naik reportedly argued at the meeting that accepting a rollback demand would be an invitation to trouble during the Railway Budget in February.

She would force the Maharashtra ministers to resign if she increased the fare of suburban railways and did not raise passenger fares to cater to her electorate in West Bengal, one of them is believed to have argued. The mood was transparent when Mr Naik told reporters in the evening, "I don't see any scope for a rollback."

Mr Sinha put emphasis on financial discipline, and said a rollback would set a bad precedent for the general Budget if it proved harsh.

■ More reports on page 8

THE STATESMAN

5 OCT 2000

PM plans to buy rollback time

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 5. — The Prime Minister today appeared to be working on a way to ensure that Miss Mamata Banerjee did not withdraw from the government while waiting for some more time before rolling back the prices of petroleum products.

An emissary of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is reported to have spoken to Miss Banerjee over telephone. The BJP president, Mr Bangaru Laxman, met the Prime Minister late tonight to discuss the situation. Earlier, the plan was to send some one from the party to cajole her into not precipitating a crisis.

At one point, the human resources development minister, Mr Murlī Manohar Joshi, who is now in Allahabad, was

considered as a special emissary. A PMO source said the government was trying to give the impression that Miss Banerjee has not been jettisoned by the NDA alliance.

About a rollback, the source said that nothing was ruled out. These developments came even as the TDP joined Miss Banerjee in demanding a rollback, strengthening the possibility of some relief.

However, the TDP refused to state that it could go to the extent of issuing threats of withdrawal. In democracy, public opinion was important and the party was merely voicing public concerns, the TDP parliamentary party leader, Mr K Yerrannaidu, told **The Statesman**.

Some BJP leaders today said a partial rollback was neces-

sary but felt that it should not be after a public display of one's mischief-making potential as demonstrated in Miss Banerjee's announcement that the rollback was coming after Friday's Cabinet meeting.

The move to defer any decision on the rollback till his return from Mumbai was the Prime Minister's "masterstroke", a senior BJP leader said. The ball was now in her court. Relations could not be maintained if one partner kept on bowing to pressure. Will Miss Banerjee wait for Mr Vajpayee to return from Mumbai after his knee operation or will she withdraw from the cabinet? The answer to this question would show how sincere she was about the NDA coalition, he said.

Her withdrawal would prove

that the government's managers were right in assessing that she was not interested in the alliance at all, he said.

These party leaders say Miss Banerjee's demand would have been conceded had she not announced that the partial rollback was coming after Friday's Cabinet meeting. A rollback in these circumstances would have buttressed the impression that the government was bowing to pressure from its ally.

Murmurs of discontent were heard even within the BJP on the price front. The party's Uttar Pradesh unit president, Mr Kalraj Mishra, recently admitted that the price increase was too stiff. Today, the senior BJP leader, Mr JP Mathur, told **The Statesman**

■ See ROLLBACK: page 8

ROLLBACK

(Continued from page 1)

that some relief should be given in the context of public grievances after the price increases. "There should be some relief," he stressed.

Trinamul angry: The Trinamul Congress leadership said today that the sudden change of stand by the Centre had deepened the crisis created by the resignation of Miss Mamata Banerjee and her party colleague, Mr Ajit Panja from Vajpayee ministry.

Mr Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of the Trinamul Congress' policy making body said. "We have communicated to Delhi that we have not taken the sudden change kindly". The change has "deepened the crisis and created a difficult situation for all of us", he added. Negotiations were continuing with the Centre, he added.

Trinamul insiders said that the party leadership might maintain status quo till Mr Vajpayee returned from Mumbai after his treatment and took a decision on the rollback in the price of petroleum products. But there is hardly possibility of rejoining the ministry in the meantime, they added.

They said any package for West Bengal, including increase of ministerial berths for the party, would not be acceptable for Miss Banerjee unless it addressed the basic appeal for a rollback in the price of petroleum products which will protect the interests of the people.

THE STATESMAN

6 OCT 2000

Resignation rollback at PM's promise

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA/NEW DELHI, Oct. 6. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today announced the withdrawal of her resignation after the Prime Minister promised to review the decision on the petroleum price hike.

The railway minister and her party colleague, Mr Ajit Panja, resumed work today after receiving a fax message from Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee that said: "I assure you that the entire issue will be given a re-look and appropriate action taken after I return from Mumbai subsequent to my knee surgery.

"I fully share your concern and sentiments about the effect of the price hike on the common people. Even though the government has tried to minimise the burden of the price increase on consumers, it cannot be disputed that the hike does cause hardship to common citizens. We are closely watching the trends in the international oil prices."

Addressing a crowded press conference outside her south Calcutta residence, Miss Banerjee lauded the Prime Minister's "positive response" and called the assurance a "victory for the people."

"The Prime Minister has given us a written assurance and we have full trust in him," she said, adding "we will take our decision" if the assurance is not kept.

The shape of things to come was evident at the Union Cabinet meeting in the morning where Mr Vajpayee briefed ministers on his talks with Miss Banerjee. Before this, he had a word with her over phone from his Race Course Road residence in which he agreed to send over an assurance as a face-saver.

The ground for this was prepared by Mr George Fernandes who asked Miss Banerjee to talk to Mr Vajpayee. She told him that she would not do anything to precipitate the crisis but said a fax be sent to her, requesting her to resume duty.

■ Left pounces on Mamata's petro price 'charade', page 3

Reacting to the withdrawal of resignation, Mr Anil Biswas said this was hardly a surprise. He said the "fax gimmick" was an old trick of the BJP-Trinamul. "Before the corporation election, a similar fax was sent over the closure of six PSUs. We have seen what really happened after that."

Refuting the CPI-M's allegation that she was already aware of the price hike decision as it had been cleared by NDA constituents and that her rollback demand was mere political gimmick, she said she came to know of the decision only from newspapers.

The Prime Minister's Office and the BJP were jubilant at Miss Banerjee's climbdown. They described this as a personal victory for the Prime Minister. Nothing better could have happened before Mr Vajpayee's return from Mumbai, a PMO source said.

A Cabinet minister told **The Statesman** that the price hike was calculated on the basis of the international price of crude oil at \$30 per barrel. Yesterday, the price was \$29.61, he said, hinting that a token rollback was indeed possible.

Petroleum minister Mr Ram Naik, however, maintained his stand that a rollback would be difficult as the deficit should first be wiped out. A genuine reduction would be possible only with the international crude price coming down to \$22-23, he said.

Meanwhile, the case for a partial rollback was strengthened as TDP spokesman Mr C Ramachandraiah urged the government to at least spare those below the poverty line from the hike.

He said Andhra Pradesh had been the worst hit. The increase of LPG price was in particular a blow to the beneficiaries of the state government's ambitious 'Deepam' scheme under which it was to give about one million LPG connections to those below the poverty line.

THE STATESMAN

57 001 700

With friends like these... 9/10

The present crisis caused by Ms. Mamata Banerjee has exposed the kind of opportunistic politics being played out in the ruling coalition at the Centre, writes NEENA VYAS.

THE LADY from Bengal protests too much. She complained about the violence in some districts in her State and demanded the Government's dismissal; she protested about the floods and even said that they were "man-made"; she fumed about the increase in oil prices; and she fretted when the Prime Minister quietly gave one more ministerial berth to his own partyman.

And then came the last straw as it were, when she suddenly swerved around to train her gun at her own beloved Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, forgetting that just a while earlier the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, was her target. She penned off a letter to the Prime Minister offering her resignation, and that of her colleague, Mr. Ajit Panja, from the Council of Ministers unless the recently increased prices of petroleum products were brought down immediately. The unkindest cut was that this was done on the auspicious day carefully chosen by the Prime Minister for that rare occasion of expansion of the Council of Ministers. And then she quietly withdrew her resignation after a vague promise by Mr. Vajpayee to review the oil prices three weeks later.

After this latest antic, many political observers, including some of the BJP and its other alliance parties, are beginning to feel that the Lady from Bengal has already outdone the Lady from Poes Garden who brought down the 1998 Vajpayee Government.

The last five weeks have thoroughly exposed the kind of opportunistic politics being played out within the grand 24-party ruling coalition. Neither Ms. Banerjee nor Mr. Vajpayee can come out untouched by the scandalous manner the affairs of the state are ought to be run. Once earlier Mr. Vajpayee promised a ministerial berth to Mr. Sahib Singh Verma. It was as never fulfilled.

A quick look at what has happened. Ms. Banerjee was very much present at the meeting of



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee... unseemly squabbles.

the National Democratic Alliance on September 23 when the proposal to increase fuel prices was discussed. If she was honest she should have announced that day itself that she did not agree with the proposal. But no, she chose to wait till after the formal announcement of a price increase on September 29 night, lobbing the bombshell of her threatened resignation on September 30.

The Prime Minister buckled quickly. First he dispatched Mr. George Fernandes, NDA convenor and Defence Minister, to Calcutta in a bid to pacify her (a farcical replay of similar missions to Chennai in 1998 when the lady to be wooed was Ms. J. Jayalitha), then two days later he sent a PMO official, Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni, with a specific proposal that her demand for a cut in prices would be met after a Cabinet meeting on October 6. An additional berth for the Trinamool Congress was also negotiated. And it was announced that the crisis was over, only the "formality" of the announcement of a price reduction for kerosene, LPG and diesel remained. Ms. Banerjee, naturally, chose to publicise her political victory.

The aftershocks of these political tremors may not have been anticipated by the PMO although many others had no doubt that "other" allies would not let the Prime Minister get away with this

open appeasement of one coalition partner. After all, West Bengal was not the only State heading for Assembly elections.

Two days ahead of the scheduled date for a happy resolution of the NDA crisis, at the meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on October 4 all hell broke loose. How could the Prime Minister cave in to Ms. Banerjee when other allies had been persuaded to accept the cold logic of the necessity to increase oil prices? Were all economic decisions to be politicised, asked one Cabinet Minister. Some others said that if the Trinamool Congress wanted to get out of the NDA it should be allowed to go, but no concessions should be made. Reports suggest that no one stood up to defend the Prime Minister's offer of a cut in prices. The result was that the Government backtracked for the second time.

Some in the BJP have argued that it was a "masterstroke" by the Prime Minister, others saw in this a high-stake political game in which the Prime Minister had successfully trumped the Trinamool Congress ace. But, in fact, all that this game established was that the Government was amenable to political blackmail, that economic decisions were related to political expediency, and that the Prime Minister was ready to give in to Ms. Banerjee one day and to his other allies the next day mak-

ing a mockery of governance in the process. In this context, it hardly matters which NDA partner plays what stroke against the BJP or against each other, and what the final outcome is of this farcical drama. The end result necessarily will be that the people will be the losers.

To understand what Ms. Banerjee is up to in West Bengal, and how far the BJP is willing to go to appease its coalition partners, it is useful to take a quick look at Ms. Banerjee's handling of the Railway Ministry. One, for the first time in the Union Budget 2000 the Finance Ministry decided to partially forego its due dividend from the Railways. In a grand gesture, the first such by any Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, decided to defer payment of Rs. 1,500 crores of a total of over Rs. 2,100 crores due to it to save the Railways from going into the red.

Two, populist politics prevented Ms. Banerjee from raising passenger fares with the result that these were subsidised by revenue from freight to the tune of Rs. 2,000 crores. This means that the so-called common man in the village who did not travel on the Railways subsidised those who did by paying more for freight on almost every conceivable essential commodity, including oil, on which so much noise is being made by Ms. Banerjee.

Three, for the first time ever,

the non-government sector has been allowed by the Railways to build up an outstanding of Rs. 600 crores over just three months from April to June this year taking total money owed to the Railways to an all time high of Rs. 2,500 crores. This raises the question who are the private parties whose goods have been carried by the Railways on credit? How is this money going to be recovered? And four, the accident rate in the five months from April this year has been the highest ever at 204 incidents. Was this because Ms. Banerjee was too busy with her politics in West Bengal?

Over the last few months the Prime Minister and his NDA colleagues have approvingly heard Ms. Banerjee scream from the rooftops the demand for the dismissal of the Jyoti Basu Government for alleged non-performance of its constitutional duty in the context of violence incidents in West Bengal. But no one has wondered why the taxpayer is being made to give Ms. Banerjee her ministerial salary, bungalow and other perks for non-performance of her obligations as a Cabinet Minister.

No work, no pay is the acceptable norm for trade unions which choose to strike work. But it seems that no work and all political play is acceptable for politicians — and naturally, with no loss of pay and perks.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2000

NO:12
A TOUCH OF THE ABSURD 9/10

BY WITHDRAWING HER letter of resignation from the Union Cabinet, Ms. Mamata Banerjee (as also Mr. Ajit Panja) has brought to an end the week-long drama within the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA). However, one cannot but be sceptical of Ms. Banerjee's claim that the decision to stay on in the Union Council of Ministers was based only on the assurance by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, that he would consider her demand for rolling back the increase in the prices of petroleum products. For, the increase was effected not just because of the rise in crude oil prices in the global market; the logic behind the price hike was the consensus within the ruling alliance on the need to dismantle the Administered Prices Mechanism which was becoming unworkable. That Ms. Banerjee was only resorting to theatrics rather than raising any serious questions on the decision itself was clear even otherwise; after all, she was a party to the decision both at the political level (in her capacity as a member of the NDA's steering committee, at a meeting of which the decision was taken first) and as a member of the Cabinet on whose behalf the price hike was effected. And if she decided to make an issue of that and went about holding out her resignation as a demonstration of her concern for the poor, few within the NDA were impressed.

9:25 AM
It is this background to her action rather than the decision itself that lent a touch of absurdity to the sequence of events. And the political leadership of the NDA even while seeming to be accommodative quite clearly wanted to put her in place. That Ms. Banerjee's expression of anger had also to do with the Cabinet expansion cannot be discounted given the timing of her announcement; she took two full days to "realise" that the hike in petroleum prices would affect the people. It is in this context that one is

left wondering whether the climbdown on Ms. Banerjee's part was achieved by Mr. Vajpayee and his aides only on the basis of what had been stated. After all the fuss, the assurances by Mr. Vajpayee that crude oil prices in the global market would be monitored (as if this was not done hitherto) and that her demands could be considered (as if the issue of oil pool deficit could be ignored) once he returned from Mumbai, where he will be undergoing a surgery, were all that it took to get Ms. Banerjee to return to the Cabinet. At the same time, the Minister for Petroleum, Mr. Ram Naik, has been maintaining that a rollback is not possible. And this brings into focus, once again, the tendency among most leaders in the ruling combine to push through their "hidden" agenda (the business of self-preservation and promotion in most cases) rather than show any serious concern over matters relating to governance.

It is important for the political leadership of the ruling combine to realise the consequence of such a course not just for the parties but more so for the democratic structure itself. The drama involving Ms. Banerjee was certainly not one that could be described as merely a matter within the NDA. Instead, it involved members of the Cabinet making a mockery of the principle of collective responsibility. Such developments, taking place far too frequently in recent years, cannot but heighten the sense of distress among the people against the political class as a whole. And it is in this context that one would expect Mr. Vajpayee to stand up to such attempts at blackmail. Repeated bickerings in a coalition where there is no dearth of parties demanding as many Cabinet berths as they can manage (and there is every indication that this was among the other reasons behind Ms. Banerjee's theatrics) and resorting to other such means of self-preservation can do good neither to the culture of coalition nor the democratic structure.

THE HINDU

3 OCT 2000

Cabinet to be expanded today

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 29. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is to expand his Cabinet tomorrow, when he fills up the existing vacancies. A swearing-in ceremony is planned for 5 p.m. at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Authoritative sources suggest that the "expansion" is likely to be a mini affair, and the names of the new entrants would be finalised only tomorrow morning.

The Council of Ministers has two Cabinet-level vacancies — caused by the death of P. R. Kumararamangalam (Power) and by the resignation of Mr. Ram Jethmalani (Law) — and two Minister of State-level vacancies, that of Mr. Bangaru Laxman (who was Minister of State for Railways before he was appointed BJP president and who subsequently resigned his ministerial post) and that of Ms.

Uma Bharati (who resigned as Minister of State for Tourism because she wanted to lead an agitation against the Digvijay Singh Government in her home State, Madhya Pradesh.)

In another curious development, Mr. S. B. P. B. K. Satyanarayana Rao, Minister of State for Agriculture, was asked to resign. (The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, has already accepted the resignation, on the advice of the Prime Minister). His departure is supposed to pave the way for the induction of Mr. Venkaiah Naidu in the Cabinet. As it is, there is a surfeit of representation from Andhra Pradesh, with three Ministers of State — Mr. Bandaru Dattatreya, Mr. Laxman (since gone) and Mr. Vidya Sagar Rao.

Besides Mr. Naidu (who obviously feels he has to be compensated as he was made to lose out in the race for BJP president), the

most likely new Cabinet-level entry would be that of Ms. Sushma Swaraj, a member of the Rajya Sabha.

Like Mr. Naidu, Ms. Swaraj also feels she is entitled to a Cabinet post since she gladly went out to bat for the BJP against Ms. Sonia Gandhi in the Bellary Lok Sabha constituency in the summer of 1999; that in the process she went down only enhanced her sense of usefulness to the BJP and the Government.

However, authoritative sources are insistent that no names have been finalised. This is a definite indication that the Prime Minister would continue to be subject to claims and counter-claims by various aspirants and their godfathers in and outside the BJP. Indications are that after tomorrow's mini expansion, there would be a reshuffle of portfolios.

'Farooq kept us in the dark on autonomy vote'

Resolution will be considered within Constitution, says PM

K A Badarinath
On the PM's aircraft, June 30

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee today said that the Government was willing to consider autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir but within the framework of the Constitution. He was talking to newsmen on the way back home after a five-day tour of Europe.

Asked whether he was surprised at the passage of the autonomy resolution, he said: "We were not told about it." Some officials also expressed surprise that the resolution was piloted by the National Conference-led government at a time when the Prime Minister was abroad.

Mr Vajpayee said he himself would undertake the consultation process and it would be completed by the year-end.

As a first step, an analytical note on the J&K Assembly resolution with various options would be put before the Union Cabinet. Later, Mr Vajpayee will seek the views of constitutional experts, political parties, Kashmiri Pandits and those actively associated with the issue.

After these talks, the issue is likely to be taken up in Parliament for a debate in the monsoon session beginning third week of July.

The Prime Minister said before he left for Europe, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah met him in New Delhi and indicated that there would be a discussion on autonomy in the Assembly. But he said the Centre did not feel that the J&K Assembly would adopt a resolution.

On various aspects of the resolution, he said he had not yet studied the details of the debate and the decisions of the Assembly. The

Prime Minister maintained that consultation with the Hurriyat Conference would continue.

Asked to comment on Akali leader Gurcharan Singh Tohra's demand for autonomy for Punjab too, he said, "Indian democracy is resilient and strong enough to withstand any threat."

The Prime Minister ruled out any talks with Pakistan as long as cross-border terrorism was being encouraged, abetted and aided by the neighbour. When pointed out that the EU and the US were pressuring India to have talks with Pakistan, he shot back, "I don't agree with them."

The Prime Minister said India would step up its campaign for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council during the General Assembly millennium summit in September this year.

He said "Portugal has extended its unequivocal support" in this regard while Italy was non-committal.

The Prime Minister reiterated that efforts would be made in the coming months to arrive at a political consensus on signing of the CTBT.

With regard to multi-lateral trade issues, Vajpayee came down heavily on the developed countries for having linked non-trade issues like core labour standards and environment with providing market access.

He hoped that differences between developing and developed countries "would be ironed out".

The Prime Minister said that there were no differences within the various constituents of the National Democratic Alliance on economic reforms. He, however, conceded that the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) differed with his government's policies.



J&K autonomy issue will be tackled within constitution: PM

By Vinay Pandey
The Times of India News Service

ON BOARD PM'S SPECIAL FLIGHT: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee says the issue of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir will be considered in accordance with the Indian constitution.

In a first reaction to the autonomy resolution recently passed by the J&K assembly, Mr Vajpayee said, "Our views on the status of J&K as an integral part of India are the foundation of all other activities in and with regard to Jammu and Kashmir."

Talking to journalists on board the special Air-India flight that brought him back to New Delhi from Lisbon on Thursday night, the Prime Minister said the move initiated for talks with Hurriyat leaders would continue.

He said he was still to get the details of the debate and the resolution. He also pointed out that Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah had met him in New Delhi last week and indicated that there would be a discussion on the matter in the assembly. The Prime Minister, however, dismissed the suggestion that the adoption of the resolution while he was abroad was tantamount to a breach of trust by Farooq Abdullah and that it would vitiate the Centre's relations with the Farooq regime.

"Don't be under any illusion that Kashmir wants to secede from us," the Prime Minister said, adding that Indian democracy was powerful enough to take care of such demands if they came from

other states.

Asked for his response to suggestions from European Union leaders that India and Pakistan must review the process of dialogue, Mr Vajpayee said, "We are always open to talks. But how can there be a dialogue unless Pakistan stops cross-border terrorism?"

PMO sources maintained that the autonomy resolution was a manifestation of the competition

between Mr Abdullah's National Conference and the Hurriyat Conference for recognition as the true voice of the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. The National Conference did not want to go out of the reckoning, hence the resolution, they said.

On board the special flight, the Prime Minister spoke on a host of issues, including CTBT, India's claim to a permanent seat in the UN security council and

economic reforms. Excerpts from the press conference:

On CTBT: Mr Vajpayee said a debate had been going on in India with regard to the country's adherence to CTBT. "We are preparing a national consensus in this matter and efforts will be continued in the coming months in this direction." Asked if a consensus would be achieved by the end of the year, the Prime Minister said, "I hope so."

On the bid for a security council seat: The Prime Minister said there were indications that the issue would feature prominently in the coming Millennium Summit of the UN General Assembly in September, which he is going to attend.



A.B. Vajpayee



F. Abdullah

GROUND REALITIES

- Talks with Hurriyat will continue
- Centre-J&K ties remain cordial
- J&K demand unique, other states will not follow
- Work on to build CTBT consensus
- No tiff within cabinet over divestment
- Chances for security council seat brighten

Centre not for confrontation on autonomy issue

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30. With the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, back in the capital after a five-day foreign trip, the Centre will handle the hot potato — autonomy — handed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. Though there is a sense of disappointment over the fact that the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, was not content with a discussion on the "autonomy report" and that he allowed a resolution to be tabled and approved in the Assembly, there is no inclination to take a confrontationist approach.

To begin with, there will be an informal discussion with the constituents of the National Democratic Alliance, and then the Cabinet is expected to take a view of the next step. The idea is to carry along all allies and the Cabinet on a sensitive issue, rather than allow partisanship to take over.

The Prime Minister and the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, would, of course, have to contend with the harsh polemics that has emanated from the BJP itself. Not only the Jammu unit but others within the BJP have also reacted in a "scrap 370" mien. Even the latest issue of the party's official organ, *BJP Today*, strikes a strident posture on the question of autonomy. The talking point with the allies, including the National Conference, is to underline the marginal utility of "autonomy" in the changed national and international context. For example, it is to be pointed out that a post-autonomy Jammu and Kashmir would be deprived of many safeguards it enjoys today. In particular, the point to be emphasised is that "autonomy" would mean greater power for executive authorities in Srinagar but very little empowerment for the people. Or, without the corrective institutional mechanism of the Supreme Court and the Election Commission of India, the people of Jammu and Kashmir could lose quite a bit of political space.

The second major argument is that suggestions like "two Prime Ministers" would be exploited by Pakistan for propaganda purposes, without their bringing any countervailing advantage to India or, for that matter, Jammu and Kashmir.

At the same time, there would be no outright rejection of the "autonomy" report; instead, the argument is that the NDA stands for devolution of powers, as envisaged in the Sarkaria Commission report. Given the composition of the NDA, with a very large number of regional parties, the Prime Minister and his political advisors would want Dr. Abdullah and the National Conference to feel that the Centre is not averse to the idea of exploring the creative potential of the Indian federation.

THE HINDU

1 JUL 2003

PM DISCUSSES J&K AUTONOMY WITH NDA LEADERS

Thakre warns of instability

2/7 By Neena Vyas HD-1

NEW DELHI, JULY 1. The Bharatiya Janata Party president, Mr. Kushabhau Thakre, made it absolutely clear today to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, that the party was totally against the Kashmir autonomy demand which must be "rejected outright."

The working committee of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, currently meeting in Ahmedabad, is also expected to adopt a strong resolution tomorrow against any return to the pre-1953 status for Jammu and Kashmir.

Mr. Thakre, who was away in Ahmedabad returned this morning and will go back for the RSS session, is expected to have briefed the Prime Minister on this.

The big three in the BJP — Mr. Vajpayee, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and Mr. Thakre — met for nearly two hours today to discuss a number of important issues, especially the autonomy resolution adopted by the Kashmir assembly and the overall political situation in Uttar Pradesh.

Immediately afterwards, Mr. Vajpayee met a number of senior Ministers, presumably to discuss the Kashmir situation informally.

Among those present were Mr. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Mr. George Fernandes, who has just returned from Russia, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mr. P. R. Kumaramangalam.

Thus the process of discussing the issue with NDA partners has already begun. After meeting the Prime Minister, Mr. Thakre told reporters: "Return to the pre-1953 status for Kashmir would lead to disintegration of not only Jammu and Kashmir but would also create instability in the rest of the country with other States demanding autonomy."

He said he had made the party's position very clear to the Prime Minister, that it was in favour of "rejecting outright" the State Government's demand.

The Kashmir development has come for the

J&K resolution will lead to wise settlement, says Jethmalani: Page 11

BJP at a most inopportune moment, as it coincides with the birth centenary celebrations of its hero, Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerji. The party cannot and will not accept a return to the pre-1953 status demanded by the National Conference.

In fact, there are many voices in the party which would rather get the Abdullah Government dismissed than countenance even a discussion on autonomy.

With the monsoon session of Parliament due to begin a fortnight from now, the Government needs to come up with a concrete

plan and a specific view on what to do with the autonomy resolution.

U.P. situation discussed

Senior party leaders hinted that the situation in Uttar Pradesh, where a replacement of the Chief Minister is a possibility, would have been discussed but Mr. Thakre denied this, saying only the results of the recent panchayat elections in the State came up. Although the Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, asserted in Lucknow today that there was no threat to his Government, party sources here have been saying "a change cannot be ruled out". The party feels this could take place after the organisation elections in the State in the third week of July.

Several other issues, including the anti-government stance of the RSS affiliate, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, and the 'Tamil Eelam' issue raked up by the BJP's allies in Tamil Nadu, are also believed to have figured at the meeting.

What may worry the Government is that the SJM, backed by the RSS, has announced a series of public agitations against policies which it said were "against national interest," thus sending a signal that there was no consensus on reforms even within the Sangh Parivar.

And tomorrow Mr. Advani and Dr. Farooq Abdullah will be among the dignitaries attending the 'Tamil Awakening' rally of the MDMK in Erode, Tamil Nadu.

THE HINDU

- 2 JUL 2000

Sack Farooq if necessary, says RSS

Sangh autonomy caution to govt

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT AND AGENCIES

Koba (Gandhinagar), July 2: As a divided Kashmir grappled to come to terms with the demand for self-rule, the RSS today breathed fire at the charter, urging the Centre to tackle the issue with a firm hand and even throw out the Farooq Abdullah government, if necessary.

Coinciding with the Sangh's statement, the Prime Minister's Office issued a clarification, saying the autonomy question would be considered "in accordance with the Constitution".

A PMO note quoted Atal Behari Vajpayee as having told reporters on board his aircraft to Delhi from Lisbon that the matter would be discussed within the framework of the Constitution, not that "the autonomy demand was within the Constitution".

At its national executive meeting, the Sangh dubbed the autonomy demand "a step short of actual secession" and "a reflection of the divisive and communal mindset of the National Conference". It adopted a resolution urging the Centre to mothball the charter.

accepted. If necessary, the Centre should dismiss the Farooq Abdullah government," RSS joint general secretary Madan Das said after the two-day meeting ended here.

Terming the autonomy demand a great setback to the nation, Das said the government should first try to talk the Kashmir chief minister out of it before taking any extreme step. "Dismissal is one option, but we have not demanded it," he said.

Claiming "the resolution was a fallout of the driftless Kashmir policy pursued by various governments", Das said the Centre should not attach too much importance to it as it articulated the demands of only a section of the people. He pointed out that an issue "fraught with disastrous consequences as it seeks to take the state back to the pre-1953 status" should not be left to the whims of a select few.

As the RSS leader hailed the people of Ladakh and Leh for condemning the resolution, Hurriyat Conference leader Yasin Malik announced in Srinagar that autonomy was not what his organisation wanted. Dismissing the charter as of "no consequence", he said it was Abdullah's "diver-

creating a division of Jammu and Kashmir and they will never be allowed to succeed by the people of the state," Malik said.

An under-fire Abdullah, however, clarified in Coimbatore that the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India was "final and irrevocable". "We are not trying for any confrontation on the autonomy issue with the Centre... Either you convince us or we will convince you. The time has come to return powers to the people and the states, which were eroded in the last 50 years," he said.

Christian attacks

In another resolution, the Sangh condemned the Church for "painting the RSS and other Hindu organisations in the darkest colours by accusing them of atrocities on the Christian minorities in the country".

It regretted that a pattern was being read into stray incidents, and said "there seems to be a conspiracy to malign the Sangh parivar by Church leaders who tend to blow things out of proportion".

On the Prime Minister's meeting with the Pope, it said: "India has never persecuted the minorities. So the government need not

apologetic."
see Page 6

uld

Vajpayee shift on autonomy

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 2: Confronted by his own party and faced with an orchestrated clamour for more devolution of power to the provinces, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is altering his initial optimistic approach to the autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly.

After last evening's meeting with BJP president Kushabhau Thakre and informal parleys with several Cabinet ministers, including M.M. Joshi, both Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani decided against sending out any positive signal to the resolution.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) also issued a statement saying that Vajpayee had not yet decided whether the resolution was constitutional or not.

Yet, despite the row it has kicked up, constitutional experts say a degree of autonomy for Kashmir does not go against the grain of the Constitution. Law minister Ram Jethmalani even argued that it would dilute the ranks of secessionists in the state.

For the BJP, which has been fighting for the abrogation of Article 370, granting even a semblance of additional powers to the state would mean continuing with the special status it already enjoys.

Therefore, 7 Race Course Road's backtracking on the sensi-

tive subject is understandable.

Complicating matters, the Ladakhis have moved a resolution, demanding autonomy for their part of north Kashmir. The BJP's Jammu unit has also voiced reservations, saying it is ready to defy New Delhi if the Centre ignored Jammu's popular sentiments.

The government is also feeling the backlash from the Sangh parivar's fundamentalist fringes and even from Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, while three former Prime Ministers have warned of dire consequences.

Despite the Centre's best efforts, the autonomy debate has already sent the wrong signals to states clamouring for more power -- especially in financial matters. Their dissatisfaction stems from the meagre resources doled out by the Centre.

According to both Assam chief minister Prafulla Mahanta and Andhra Pradesh chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, a degree of autonomy should percolate to all states and not Jammu and Kashmir alone.

There is also the feedback that there might be a similar demand from the secession-prone provinces of the Northeast.

The Cabinet, which will meet in the next two days, will have to take all these negative vibes into consideration. It is clear that the government will now tread even more cautiously.

THE TELEGRAPH

3 JUL 2000

'TWIN THREATS OF TERRORISM, SECESSIONISM'

Sri Lankan Tamils issue cannot split NDA: Advani

By M. R. Venkatesh

ERODE, JULY 2. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today ridiculed the Opposition's bid to create a rift in the National Democratic Alliance over the Sri Lankan Tamils issue, even as he emphasised that the concern for the dismal plight of the island's Tamils should give no room for secessionism here by "agents of our neighbours".

In a tenuous balancing act, Mr. Advani, on the one hand, had no reason to suspect the credentials of the BJP's Tamil Nadu allies in fully backing the Centre's line on Sri Lanka, and, on the other underscored, "terrorism and secessionism are two evils the country is facing today".

The BJP's allies in the State including the DMK, the MDMK and the PMK have "unreservedly supported the Government of India's policy on Sri Lanka", which will disappoint "our political opponents" who have again tried to divide the NDA, Mr. Advani said.

In his special address, lasting nearly an hour, on the second day of the MDMK's "Tamil Nadu Awakening Conference", at "Periyar's Erode", the Home Minister said, "we are all concerned about the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka." After all, Sri Lanka was a country with a sizable Tamil population which 'dominated' the scene there but was now in a very serious situation, he pointed out.

The Centre's endeavour was to ensure peace prevailed in Sri Lanka and "justice is done" to the Tamils so that they were able to live in peace and dignity, he said.

Further, the Government was concerned not only about the Tamils in Sri Lanka, but also about people of Indian origin in whichever part of the world they lived, Mr. Advani said adding, "we would like to exercise our diplomatic pressure in their favour." But the Government was certainly not "going to go the IPKF way."

In the same breath, after explaining how the security envi-



The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani (second from right), with the Union Power Minister, Mr. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, the PMK leader, Dr. S. Ramadoss, the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, and the Union Minister of State for Sports, Mr. Dhindsa, at the MDMK conference at Erode on Sunday. — Photo: M. Moorthy

ronment in the subcontinent had deteriorated over the last 25 years with Pakistan taking recourse to a "proxy war" through infiltration, terrorism and religious fundamentalism, Mr. Advani cautioned that "we should not say or do anything that seems to promote secessionism, particularly by our neighbour (Pakistan)."

Even the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, had told him that "he (Vaiko) was to advise him" not to come to Erode as Mr. Advani faced threats to his security, the Minister mentioned in passing to drive home his point about the changed security environment.

Mr. Advani also mentioned how his recent visit to Israel and France had helped "us to learn a lot" about dealing with insurgency, infiltration and border-management.

"Just as we in India are concerned about the unity of India, I am sure every country will like it that way," Mr. Advani argued, to

ring in the message that questions on territorial integrity could not be wished away.

Adverting to how the Opposition led by the Congress(I) tried to drive a wedge among the NDA partners over issues such as subsidy cuts in the Union Budget, Mr. Advani said that once those at-

Ramadoss hits out at Eelam critics: Page 13

tempts failed, it thought that the situation in Sri Lanka could be exploited.

Congressmen led by the TNCC (I) president, Mr. E. V. K. S. Elangovan, staged a blackflag stir, protesting Mr. Advani's participation at the "pro-Eelam, pro-LTTE" conference. All were arrested. The Union Power Minister and BJP leader, Mr. Rangarajan Kumaramangalam, in an obvious reference to the sensitive "Eelam issue" being at the centre of concerns for parties like PMK and the

MDMK, said the BJP was not opposed to voicing the plight of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Mr. Kumaramangalam was only worried that under the pretext of espousing "Suya Aatchi", which could be translated variously in English from autonomy to even formation of a separate country, India should not become vulnerable to forces conspiring to destabilise it and undermine its unity. "Our basic duty is to protect our unity and integrity," he added.

Our Chennai Special Correspondent reports:

Earlier, talking to reporters at the Chennai airport shortly after arrival from New Delhi, Mr. Advani said he was attending the MDMK rally as it would give him a "good opportunity" to explain the Government's stand on Sri Lanka. Also, the MDMK had been an ally of Vajpayee Government from the outset and so he had accepted Mr. Vaiko's invitation.

THE HINDU

2000

RSS cautions Govt. on J&K resolution

By Manas Dasgupta

KOBA (Gandhinagar), JULY 2. The national executive of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh today has cautioned the Vajpayee Government against the autonomy resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly and demanded "full and final" integration of all regions of the State with India including the part currently under "foreign occupation."

Through another resolution, the RSS denounced the "apolitical" attitude of the Government on the question of alleged atrocities on Christians and ask the Church to "cultivate the goodwill of Hindus" in the larger "long range interests of the Christians themselves".

The two-day session of the RSS national executive which concluded today at Koba near the Gujarat capital, adopted two resolutions, including one on the Kashmir situation which, however, fell short of demanding dismissal of the Farooq Government. In another resolution, the RSS saw in the "mischievous propaganda" of alleged Christian-bashing, a "long-term conspiracy" to demoralise the Hindu community and organisations.

An attempt was made to exclude the BJP-led Central Government from the events that led to the present situation. The RSS joint general secretary, Mr. Madandas, who briefed reporters about the meeting, however, admitted that the Vajpayee Government had "compromised" on issues such as abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir which had ultimately led to the autonomy resolution "in a bid to stay in power".

To persistent queries, Mr. Madandas said the RSS' view was that if necessary the Vajpayee Government should drop the National Conference from the National Democratic Alliance or dismiss the Farooq Abdullah Government.

Reiterating the demand for abrogation of Article 370, the resolution said the opposition to the move by all the "so-called secular parties" except the BJP had led to the present impasse.

Stating that the J&K Assembly resolution was "fraught with disastrous consequences" and manifested the "divisive, communal mindset of the National Conference", the RSS document hailed the people of Jammu and Ladakh regions for resolving to stay with India and asked the Centre to consider the "sentiments and aspirations" of these people during the talks with the Hurriyat leaders.

A 'conspiracy': Page 15

THE HINDU

- 3 JUL 2000

J&K move to face Cabinet test

SHIVNATH JHA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 3. — The Union Cabinet is likely to hold a meeting to discuss the autonomy resolution, adopted by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly and forwarded by Dr Farooq Abdullah to the Centre last month.

Most Opposition parties have criticised the resolution. "The decision — whether to forward the resolution to Parliament — will depend on the outcome of the Cabinet meeting," Mr LK Advani said.

Talking to **The Statesman** after launching an Internet site, *freedialin.com*, the home minister said the Centre was not getting "adequate support" from state governments in implementing recommendations of various commissions and committees on improvement of law and order.

He reiterated the Centre's decision to combat terrorism and Left-wing extremism. The home minister said he was misquoted by the media on the autonomy resolution: "I didn't say that Parliament, whose composition is well known, will decide the autonomy resolution. I was misquoted."

He said: "After all if there is any decision to be taken, it will be taken by Parliament. But before that the resolution will be tabled before the Union Cabinet that will decide its fate."

He hoped that the Cabinet, before taking a final decision, will discuss all issues pertaining to the resolution. "We can't

say anything until and unless it is decided in a formal meeting."

Mr Advani said ever since Pakistan's proxy war began, states were finding it difficult to deal with terrorism, infiltration and supply of illegal arms and ammunition from across the border, but "we can't do anything unless we get their support."

On the Pande Committee, set up to study and suggest plans for setting up a central law enforcement agency, the home minister said: "The government has mooted a proposal whether we should have an agency like the FBI of the USA, but unless states agree we can't implement it."

When reminded that recommendations of the Police Commission's reports were not being implemented, Mr Advani said: "What can the Centre do when it has no right to intervene in the law and order as well as police affairs of

ADVANI DENIAL

NEW DELHI, July 3. — Mr LK Advani has denied that he supported the Gorkhaland demand. He said though a GNLF team had submitted a memorandum to him last month, "I never supported the demand for Gorkhaland." On 12 June, a section of the press had quoted Mr Advani saying that "he is willing to support the demand for Gorkhaland and will take up the matter with his Cabinet colleagues." — SNS

states?"

The law and order and the police were state subjects under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. "We can't provide any agency or commission executive power — as the FBI has — by flouting guidelines of the Constitution," the home minister said.

Though security forces have contained the Jammu & Kashmir situation, the threat perception still exists, he said. On ethnic violence in the North-east, Mr Advani said barring Tripura, the situation in other states was under control.

BJP move to neutralise Vaiko effect in TN

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 3. — The NDA should keep an eye on the movements of its two Tamil Nadu constituents — the PMK and MDMK — in the coming days, according to some BJP leaders. They apprehend that the two parties that contribute nine Lok Sabha members to the NDA kitty are looking for an alternative.

However, the BJP leaders are not worried as the two allies' strength is not sufficient to bring down the NDA government.

The BJP is unlikely to take things lying down and plans an offensive against these parties.

The PMK, led by Mr S Ramadoss and the MDMK, led by Mr Vaiko, are trying to form a new political arrangement in Tamil Nadu with an eye on the next year's Assembly polls, a

Ramadoss in Delhi

NEW DELHI, July 3. — The PMK leader, Mr S Ramadoss, today met Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani and assured them that his party would abide by the Centre's policy on Sri Lanka. — SNS

(Details on page 6)

■ More reports on page 6
■ Editorial: Advani and Eelam, page 8

senior party leader said. Mr Ramadoss even approached Miss Jayalalitha to work out the formula, he said.

The reason is simple. Both the PMK and the MDMK are trying to use the pro-Eelam sentiment in the state to fight the polls, the BJP leader said.

Even at Mr Vaiko's rally in

Erode, it was evident that the two parties would not hesitate to express their sympathy for the LTTE chief Pirabhakaran. The DMK and the smaller parties supporting it are against keeping any truck with Pirabhakaran.

Everyone in Tamil politics is today talking of the likelihood of these two parties leaving the NDA, the BJP leader said.

The BJP plans a rally in Chennai on Saturday to counter the impact of the MDMK rally. Senior BJP leaders are slated to address the rally to present a national perspective of the Eelam issue. The party's state executive meeting is also slated from Saturday.

The party is likely to come out with a plan of action which could include extensive tours by BJP leaders of the state and rallies at the district level to isolate the pro-LTTE elements from Tamil politics.

THE STATESMAN

1997

Delhi set to return autonomy Bill

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 3: In a move that could provoke the National Conference to quit the coalition at the Centre, the Cabinet is set to return the autonomy resolution adopted by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly back to the state without taking it for a debate in Parliament.

Top government sources said the resolution, which was passed by the brute majority of Farooq Abdullah's National Conference

in the Assembly last week, will come up for discussion in the Cabinet on Wednesday.

The sources said the observations of NDA partners as well as the Congress are already clear and most major parties hold the firm view that pre-1953 status cannot be granted to Jammu and Kashmir.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has already held informal talks with his allies and has even met BJP president Kushabhau Thakre on the issue. Vajpayee is also believed to have sent feelers to the Congress that the govern-

ment is not inclined to bring the matter to debate in Parliament. The essential reason for this is that the government feels a debate may focus "unnecessary" international attention on pre-1953 autonomy terms for Jammu and Kashmir and the matter may get "out of hand" or be exploited by "anti-India elements".

Besides, the government also feels that considering the autonomy demand may lead to similar claims from other parts of the country.

Already, there is some concern within the Centre at the manner

in which chief minister Farooq Abdullah has begun campaigning for autonomy in various state capitals.

The Centre is keen to differentiate between the general demand of states for greater autonomy and devolution of powers and the kind of demands made by the Assembly in Srinagar.

Devolution of powers is one thing, top sources said, and demanding jurisdiction on all matters other than defence, communications and foreign affairs quite another. According to the Assembly's resolution, the package

should also include a separate constitution for the state, a separate supreme court, a separate administrative services and rights to run almost all administrative and financial affairs.

The BJP is against the resolution and yesterday the RSS went to the extent of saying that the autonomy demanded was a step short of secession from the Union. The Sangh even prescribed dismissal of the Abdullah regime.

The Congress, too, has spoken strongly against granting any such autonomy. Senior leader

Pranab Mukherjee said in Bangalore today that his party would "never ever agree" to give Jammu and Kashmir the kind of autonomy being demanded because it would lead to the country's disintegration.

Well-placed sources said the government's views will become clear on July 6 when Vajpayee will address party workers to mark the birth centenary celebrations of Jana Sangh founder Shyama Prasad Mookerjee in Calcutta. Home minister L.K. Advani will make speeches on similar lines in Mumbai.

THE TELEGRAPH

Resolution will be rejected, say BJP men

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 3. — The Union Cabinet is slated to reject the Jammu and Kashmir autonomy resolution, some senior BJP leaders said today.

This would, they said, preclude the need for the resolution to go to Parliament.

The Cabinet could highlight the need for greater devolution of powers to states, they said. The Cabinet meeting, scheduled on Wednesday, has been postponed to Saturday as Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is going on a two-day tour of Chennai from tomorrow.

The Cabinet meeting may not take up the autonomy resolution in the formal agenda but the issue is slated to figure prominently during deliberations, an official source said. The J&K resolution talks of going back to the pre-1953 position.

The Prime Minister has spoken to almost all constituent leaders of the NDA so as to avoid post-Cabinet problems. He is scheduled to meet the NDA leaders from Tamil Nadu.

The BJP president, Mr K. Shabha Thakre, who hurriedly came here from the ongoing RSS annual meeting in Ahmedabad, has been consulted, a BJP leader said. The PMK leader, Mr Ramadoss, met Mr Vajpayee in the evening.

The BJP and its managers in the government have realised the need to prevent the resolution from being tabled in Parliament. They argue that sending the resolution to the House could set a bad precedent.

Many leaders, cutting across party lines, have not favoured the tabling of the resolution, a BJP leader said. The former Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, is one among them.

Leaders feel that tabling the resolution in Parliament will give it unnecessary international publicity. In the presence of a political consensus, rejection of the resolution by the Cabinet is expected, the BJP leader said.

However, leaders feel a resolution passed by a state assembly must be treated with respect.

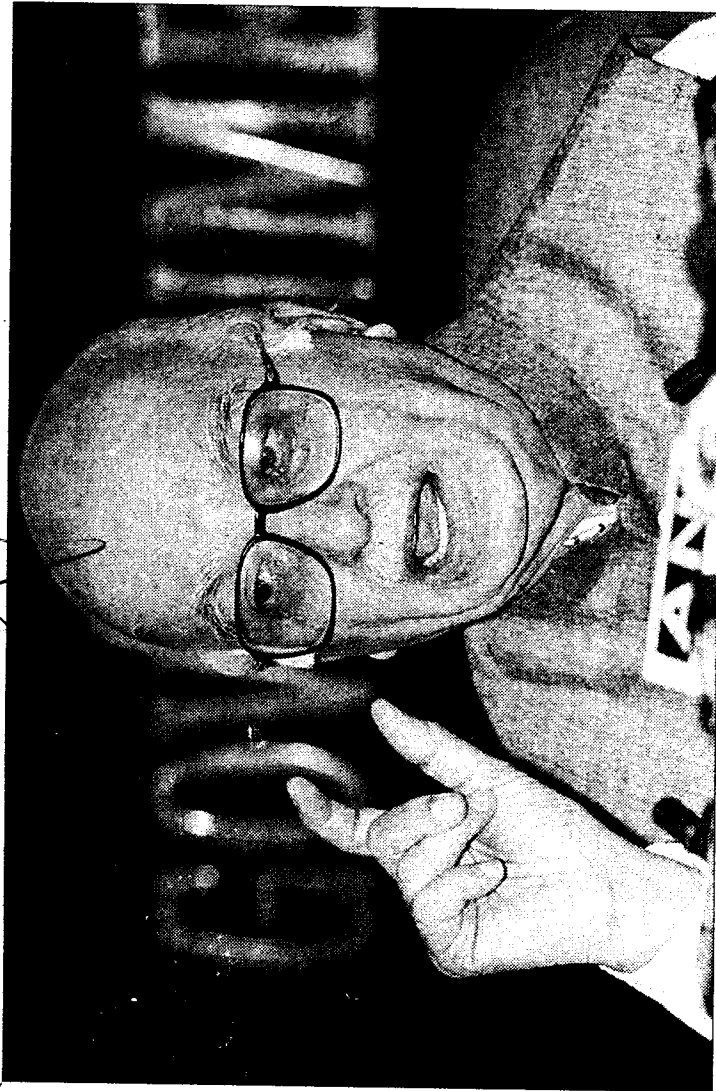
THE STATESMAN

JUL 2 000

IRON FIST IN VELVET GLOVE: FIRM OFFICIAL RESPONSE COUCHED IN FORGIVENESS

Cabinet throws out J&K autonomy plea

Hardliners
succumb to
Vajpayee logic



Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 4 JULY

THE UNION Cabinet on Tuesday rejected the "autonomy" resolution of the Jammu & Kashmir assembly but decided not to push its author, Farooq Abdullah, to the wall.

The Cabinet devoted its 90-minute session on how to put across the "no" which had looked a certainty from day one. The stress was on ensuring that the response did not sound harsh. The Shiv Sena representative, Mr Manohar Joshi, pressed for a stringent position but fell in line when Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee intervened.

Mr Joshi and his Cabinet colleague Suresh Prabhu advocated aggression. The Akali representative, S.S. Dhindsa, also struck a discordant note but only to favour Mr Abdullah. He asked whether the Centre could meet Mr Abdullah half way by considering reversal to pre-1975 status if a return to the pre-1953 situation was non-negotiable.

The formal response adopted by the Cabinet is characterised by restraint and has been designed to send the message that while the government is committed to devolution of powers and the spirit of federalism, it could not be expected to compromise on national integrity.

"The government is of the conviction that national ratification and devolution of powers to states must go together," said the "response" and formally released some minister L.K. Advani. Implied in this, is the unanimous sense of the Cabinet that acceptance of the autonomy resolution was fraught with the risk of secession.

The formal response, however, is restricted to reminding

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 4 JULY

THE CABINET'S rejection of the autonomy proposal for Jammu and Kashmir has given the BJP an opportunity to refurbish its Kashmir plank, and it accused Farooq Abdullah of appeasing Muslim fundamentalists in the state.

"The naked truth is that Mr Abdullah is encouraging fundamentalism in the state as no one in Jammu or Ladakh supports the resolution," BJP leader J.P. Mathur told reporters here welcoming the Cabinet's rejection of the autonomy resolution.

"The acceptance of pre-1953 status for the state would have encouraged fissionary tendencies in the country. Only Muslim fundamentalists in the Kashmir Valley represented by Farooq Abdullah want the resolution on autonomy. Hindus in Jammu and Buddhists in Ladakh are not for it," the BJP leader said.

He said the BJP hoped that Mr Abdullah would appreciate the Cabinet decision and not rake up the issue again. "Now, there is no question of bringing the resolution before Parliament as the Cabinet has rejected it," he said.

The party, which ridiculed the Congress' attack on the government, reminded the Sonia establishment that it was Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao who had said that "sky was the limit" on the autonomy issue. "Our government has not given in to pressure," the BJP leadership maintained.

However, Congress tried to deflect the Vajpayee regime's hand in the resolution and said that they are guilty because of the association with Mr Abdullah. "It was passed by an integral constituent of the NDA. In the immediate aftermath of the resolution both the Prime Minister and the home minister had said that the resolution could be considered and discussed," the Congress spokesman said.

MAKING A POINT: Advani speaks to the media on autonomy plan in New Delhi on Tuesday

Unfortunate, says Farooq

New Delhi

4 JULY



JAMMU AND Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday termed as "unfortunate" and hasty the Centre rejecting the proposal for greater autonomy for the state but scotched speculations that his national conference will retaliate by withdrawing from the ruling National Democratic Alliance.

"The decision of the Union Cabinet to reject the autonomy resolution passed by the state Assembly is unfortunate but that does not mean end of the road for us," Mr Abdullah said in his reaction on the development. Asked whether his party will snap ties with the NDA, the chief minister said the question did not arise. "Granting of autonomy and being a part of the ruling alliance at the Centre are two different issues and they should not be co-related," he said. — PTI

Stand vindicated, claims Cong

New Delhi

4 JULY



CONGRESS ON Tuesday said the Union Cabinet's outright rejection of the resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly on the issue of autonomy has vindicated the party's stand and has exposed the "flip-flop" of the Vajpayee government in the sensitive matter.

Party spokesman Ajit Jogi told reporters that government's "gross inconsistency" of conduct on a vital and sensitive issue of national significance like J&K was not only deplorable but also a "blatant and crude" to escape the government's "undeniable guilt by association." — PTI

Cabinet rejects autonomy, says no setting clock back

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 4

THE UNION Cabinet today rejected the controversial Jammu and Kashmir Assembly resolution seeking restoration of the pre-1953 status on the ground that it sought to reverse application of Constitutional provisions to the detriment of the country's integrity and interests of the people of the State. The Cabinet also disfavoured presentation of the report in Parliament.

"The Government is of the firm conviction that national integration and devolution of powers to States must go together," the Cabinet resolution said.

The resolution adopted at the Cabinet meeting, presided over by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, noted that "acceptance of the (J&K) resolution would set the clock back and reverse the natural process of harmonising the aspirations of the people...with the integrity of the nation."

Later in the afternoon, Home Minister L.K. Advani spoke to newsmen to spell out the reasons for the Cabinet's rejection of the autonomy resolution. He said most of the recommendations of J&K's autonomy panel had sought to reverse application of Constitutional provisions which "may not only adversely affect the interests of the people...but would also tantamount to removal of some of the essential safeguards enshrined in the Constitution."

Mr Advani, however, kept the doors open for devolution of more financial and administrative powers to States, including J&K.

The discussions in the Cabinet were reportedly stormy with at least three Ministers advocating a soft line to afford Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah an "escape route" in the face of militant posturing by a large number of his party leg-



Home Minister L.K. Advani addressing a Press conference after the Cabinet meeting on the J&K autonomy issue in the Capital on Tuesday. Photo: Manish Swarup

islators. But Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan later claimed that the Cabinet decision was unanimous.

The dissenting Ministers are understood to have cautioned others against the possible political implications in the Valley.

Hours before the Cabinet met, Mr Vajpayee is reported to have summoned Dr Abdullah, currently in Delhi, for a one-to-one meeting at his Race Course Road residence. The Prime Minister is believed to have used the opportunity to express his strong disapproval of the manner in which the contentious resolution was adopted in the State Assembly despite Dr Abdullah assurances to restrict the matter to a debate.

The PM is also reported to have taken exception to the Chief Minister's diatribes against the Sangh Parivar, the RSS in particular, in Bangalore yesterday.

Emerging from the brief meeting, Dr Abdullah uncharacteristically avoided newsmen who were keeping a vigil outside the PM's residence.

Efforts to contact the Chief Minister later proved futile as he remained incommunicado. He instead let his senior Cabinet colleagues do the talking.

Denouncing the Union Cabinet's decision as a challenge to the country's secular democratic forces, J&K Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr P L Handoo told *The Hindustan Times* that the National Conference would continue with its "ideological struggle" for restoration of the pre-1953 status.

However, Mr Handoo, who had moved the autonomy resolution in the State Assembly, ruled out any NC move to break ties with the NDA.

See also Page 10

Let them do what they want, we'll do what is proper: NC

HTC & Agencies
Srinagar, July 4

THE NATIONAL Conference has expressed its shock over the rejection of the autonomy resolution and described it as unfortunate. The party has also thrown a poser: "If this was the treatment meted out to those shedding blood for India, what will the government give to those who question the Indian sovereignty over Kashmir?"

National Conference leader and Works Minister Ali Mohammad Sagar said that the decision has been taken under the influence of the "Sangh Parivar".

He said that it clearly showed that the Centre has taken this "unwise decision without applying its mind on the subject". He said, "Let them do whatever they want, we'll do whatever is proper."

Party general secretary Sheikh Nazir said the NC would meet very soon to discuss today's decision and chalk out its future strategy.

However, the reaction from Leh and Jammu, was that of jubilation and relief.

The two places had witnessed anti-autonomy shutdowns and demonstration in the week following the passing of the autonomy resolution by the state legislature. BJP workers burst crackers and distributed sweets. They said the party's stand had been vindicated.

Vajpayee leaves alliance decision to Farooq PM for debate on J&K autonomy in Parliament

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, July 5. — The Prime Minister today said he was willing to have a discussion on Jammu and Kashmir autonomy if the Opposition wanted it.

"If any member brings forward a motion on the issue, we will discuss it," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee told journalists at Chennai airport.

He, however, ruled out going back to the pre-1953 status for J&K and left it to Dr Farooq Abdullah to decide whether he wanted to remain in the NDA.

"When the chief minister met me, I told him that his case was before the Cabinet and it was the Cabinet that had to decide. There was no question of going back to the pre-1953 status," Mr Vajpayee said.

"If there's any demand concerning political or fiscal powers, then it is a different issue," he said.

The Union Cabinet yesterday rejected the J&K autonomy resolution, saying its acceptance would set the clock back.

Mr Vajpayee didn't see any problem in NDA's Tamil Nadu allies airing different views on Eelam. "I had discussions with various leaders. All problems would be solved through discussions. The NDA policy had always been to solve problems by consensus," he said.

On LTTE's reported plea to India to mediate in Sri Lanka's ethnic problem, Mr Vajpayee said Delhi wouldn't. "There may be some differences among Tamil groups there regarding the devolution package of the Sri Lankan President but there does not seem to be any major divide," he said. "A way has to be found to resolve the crisis."

On devolution of powers to Indian states, Mr Vajpayee said: "Strengthening states by giving them more powers is

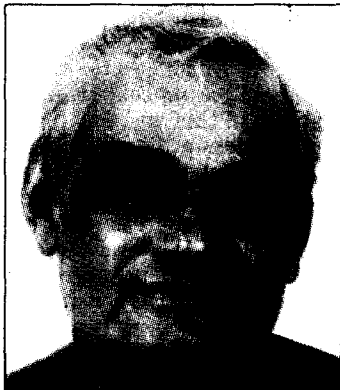
part of the NDA agenda. We have already started taking steps in that direction."

Mr Vajpayee, in the city to inaugurate the Tidel Park project yesterday, went to Madurai today to dedicate to the nation a test station of the Centre for Wind Energy Technology.

BJP's suggestions

The BJP favours separate development councils for Jammu, Ladakh and Srinagar and opposes the state's division into three, the party general secretary in charge of J&K said in New Delhi today.

The BJP wants political and



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

economic anomalies removed in the state to make elections more representative and institutions more democratic, Mr Narendra Modi said. For removing anomalies, the party suggested delimitation, besides development councils.

Years of neglect and discrimination by the Srinagar-dominated administration has led to mistrust among people of Ladakh and Jammu. Development funds were not being spent proportionately. Hence the people of Ladakh and Jammu demand more autonomy within the state, he said.

Pointing out the anomalies in electoral representation, Mr

Modi said the National Conference with around 200,000 votes won four Lok Sabha seats, but the BJP with about 500,000 votes won two. The Congress failed to win a single seat despite securing about 300,000 votes.

He criticised the autonomy demand because Dr Abdullah didn't enjoy support of most of the people. Referring to the discrepancies in representation to the Assembly, Mr Modi said the Jammu region with a majority of the state's population had 37 of the 87 seats whereas the Srinagar valley, with far less population, had 47 seats.

The Jammu region should have at least 50 seats and Srinagar about 35, he suggested.

A party with control over Srinagar could rule the state even by ignoring other regions since it would need only 44 seats to form the government. This is a major reason for the growing frustration among the people of Jammu and Ladakh, Mr Modi said.

Hurriyat

The Hurriyat is ready for talks with the Centre if it accepts the outfit as a party to the Kashmir problem, the former Hurriyat chairman, Mr Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, said today, adds PTI.

"Yes, of course we are willing to hold dialogue with the Centre ... But it should be result oriented and ensure ending of decade-old bloodshed in the state," Mr Farooq said before leaving New Delhi for Srinagar.

But no pre-conditions should be attached to the talks, he said. He was reacting to the home minister's statement yesterday that the government was willing to talk to anyone within the country and not with those operating from outside.

■ Editorial: Widen our options: page 6

THE STATESMAN

6 JUL 2000

Decision to close PSUs final: PM

Economic compulsions forced Govt hands: Pankaj

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 6

THE CABINET decision to close down four public sector units in West Bengal is final and there is no question of a review, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told workers' representatives at the Raj Bhavan today.

"The Prime Minister told us that the Cabinet will not go back on its decision to shut down Mining and Allied Machinery Corporation, Rehabilitation Industries Corporation, Weighbird India Ltd and Bharat Process and Mechanical Engineers Ltd," CPI(M) Rajya Sabha member Dipankar Mukherjee said after meeting the Prime Minister, who was in the city to kick off Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee's birth centenary celebrations.

The Trinamool Congress, which had earlier gone to town claiming it had forced a rethink on the closure move, responded to Vajpayee's statement saying the Government's hands were forced by economic compulsions.

"It is true that Mamata Banerjee was trying to keep the decision on closure of the PSUs in abeyance.

But economic compulsions were behind this Cabinet move. Some tough decisions have to be taken to solve problems," said Trinamool Policy Making Body chairman Pankaj Bandyopadhyay.

He blamed the Left trade unions for the closures, though. "The Left unions, since Independence, have been encouraging strikes and closures at the expense of productivity. These trade unions ought to be taken to task."

Subsequently, outside Mamata's south Calcutta house, Vajpayee told reporters: "We will discuss the matter with Mamata later."

Later, Dipankar Mukherjee broke the news to the PSU workers assembled at a Left rally to protest against the closure move. "The Prime Minister is convinced about the need to wind up these units, though the expert committee set up to review the viability of these units did not suggest the closure," he told them.

Mukherjee maintained he was sure the units could be revived if the Centre were sincere enough in drawing up a revival package in consultation with engineers, technicians and floor-level workers.

To substantiate his claim,

Dipankar Mukherjee referred to the Centre's plan to privatise three other PSUs—Jessop, Bharat Brakes and Valves and Reyrolle Burn Limited—though the revival schemes prepared by these companies were cleared by the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR).

"The present privatisation spree is not merely to hand them over to private parties, but to do away with the production process altogether for more imports," CITU state secretary Chittabrata Majumdar said.

Earlier in the Assembly, Trinamool MLA Dipak Ghosh endorsed a non-official motion urging the Centre to reconsider the closure move.

The Left Front and the Congress had moved the motion and GNLF MLA Nar Bahadur Chhetri backed it. The BJP's Badal Bhattacharyya, however, was not present in the House.

The Congress's Satya Ranjan Bapuli urged Speaker Hasim Abdul Halim to adopt an all-party resolution on the matter. CPI(M)'s Rabin Deb and RSP's Tapan Hore attacked Mamata for misleading the public days before the civic polls.

More reports on Pages 3 and 5

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 JUL 2000

BJP uses allies as shield after RSS tough talk on J&K

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 7

RSS CHIEF K.S. Sudershan's demand to annul Article 370 and impose President's rule in Jammu and Kashmir, and effect corrections in the economic policy has drawn a blank response from the BJP.

The party says the Government will listen to the Sangh Parivar's demands only if they were acceptable to its allies and in consonance with the ruling NDA's agenda.

Responding to the RSS chief's remarks in a TV interview to be telecast on Sunday, BJP general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu said the BJP-led Government was not in a position to accept or implement all views of the RSS.

"We cannot thrust our views on our allies on any subject, which is not on the agenda of governance. Only those demands that are acceptable to them can be implemented," he said.

Mr Naidu said the BJP would not press its views on Article 370 since it had been kept out of the NDA's agenda.

The BJP spokesperson said the RSS had every right to express its opinion on any subject as it was a separate organisation.

"We respect everyone's right to express their opinion. But only what is acceptable to our allies can be considered by the Government."

In an interview to Zee TV, the RSS chief is quoted as saying that the Vajpayee

Government's economic policies need to be changed and the Centre must clamp President's rule in Jammu and Kashmir and do away with Article 370.

"Whatever we find unacceptable in the Vajpayee Government's economic policy, we will place before the people. The policy is not beneficial to them in any respect," he was quoted by PTI today as telling the TV network.

Mr Sudershan said he had urged the Government to withdraw the proposal to

allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment in e-commerce as it was dangerous and tantamount to "selling the nation".

On the Government's move to disinvest equity in the PSUs, the RSS chief said privatisation was no big deal. "We should not hand it over to foreigners in a bid to privatise. This is wrong," he said.

On the construction of Ram temple at the disputed Ayodhya site, the RSS chief said the Government should hand over the place to the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust or pass a legislation if

it was possible. Both, he said, seemed unlikely with cases dragging in the courts. "The only other option is that the Muslims relinquish claim to the place."

Mr Sudershan said it would be easier to convince the Muslim leadership that there was no mosque on the site and such a piece of land was not acceptable for Muslim place of worship under Islam.

"The Ram temple will be built. No one can stop it," he said.

Sudershanspeak

- Scrap Article 370, clamp Central rule in J&K
- Convince Muslims to hand over Ayodhya site for Ram temple
- Do not hand over nation to foreigners
- Sheikh Abdullah worked for separation from India
- Anti-Christian violence ploy to defame RSS
- Economic policy not beneficial to the country
- Allowing 100 p.c. FDI in e-commerce is dangerous

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JUL 2000

DELHI SENDS EMISSARIES TO SRINAGAR

Centre mounts pressure on Farooq not to quit NDA

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, JULY 9. Alarmed over the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah's stance ever since the Union Cabinet rejected the autonomy resolution passed by the J&K Assembly, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is trying hard to persuade him not to take a decision against his party's continuance in the alliance. But so far, the Chief Minister has not responded positively.

Though Dr. Abdullah made a mild speech while inaugurating a two-day conference on autonomy implementation committee (RAIC) here on Saturday, his winding up remarks at the end of the day had a strident tone.

"Let them put me in jail for 30 years I am not afraid as my father the late Sheikh Abdullah also was in jail for 22 years". He also cautioned that in case in Sri Lanka a separate Eelam came into existence, Tamil Nadu would go out of hands.

He was apparently enraged over the demand for his dismissal and arrest made by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Shiv Sena. Dr. Abdullah did not attend the Chief Ministers' conference on water resources in Delhi on Friday and sent his PWD Minister, Mr. Ali Mohammad Sagar, to represent him.

The NDA Government, headed by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, does not want to send wrong signals

vis-a-vis the federal concept of Government as also its handling of Kashmir even though it is not unduly worried over the support of the four NC MPs in the Lok Sabha. Hence, the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, whose party is an NDA constituent was here to attend the autonomy conference. Though Mr. Vaiko made it clear that he was against the restoring the pre-1953 position to Kashmir, he tried to drive home the point that the "BJP alone was not the NDA".

He also tried to impress upon Dr. Abdullah in private that any pull-out would in no case be in the interest of the alliance and Dr. Abdullah himself.

Informed sources told *The Hindu* that at least two emissaries from New Delhi were camping in Srinagar to monitor the developments. They are in constant touch with their conduits here who are in a position to influence Dr. Abdullah against taking a decision to withdraw his son Mr. Omar Ab-

dullah from the Union Government. Mr. Omar, who reached here on Saturday, when contacted said, "I have nothing to say. I will go by party decision whatever it is". All eyes are set on the NC's working committee meeting tomorrow. Though Dr. Abdullah holds the key to any decision, he is not in a position to ignore his party sentiments which are in favour of snapping the ties with the NDA to save "the political base in Kashmir".

'Delhi cannot dismiss me'

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, JULY 9. Feeling hurt and alienated over the manner in which the Central Government has responded to the autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, the J&K Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, today finally broke his silence saying, "Delhi cannot dismiss me". He said the ruling National Conference working committee would meet tomorrow to discuss all issues.

Dr. Abdullah, who for the first time agreed to talk to mediapersons here after Centre's decision, said the issue of his party's continuance in National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would be discussed at tomorrow's meeting. "Let us meet tomorrow. We will let you know on Tuesday about the decisions taken," he told reporters adding, "we have not thought of it as of now." (The working committee meeting has been delayed in view of the two current conferences here on the subject of autonomy).

A visibly demoralised Dr. Abdullah said in unequivocal terms that Delhi cannot dismiss him. "Dismissals do not take place now," he said. To brand him anti-national was nothing new, he said "in the past also I was branded Khalistani and Pa-

kistani." Even if he was put in jail, he would not give up the autonomy demand but would not demand azadi (freedom) as "I am not going to misguide my people the way Hurriyat is doing and I am an Indian from the core of my heart". "I tell you there will be never Pakistan or 'azadi' in Kashmir," he asserted. "I feel hurt and alienated," said Dr. Abdullah.

At the same time he felt sorry for the BJP and Sangh Parivar for the rejection of the resolution. The Chief Minister said the BJP's demand for abrogation of Article 370 (which confers a special status on J&K) was not new but "they will never succeed in it". Dr. Abdullah believed that the door on autonomy had not been closed saying that only the Assembly resolution had been rejected, not the report. He would continue to look towards his people rather than Delhi.

Coming down heavily on the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, he said, "he can say anything as they are people who are against Muslims in India. Even he had even once called for throwing Muslims into the sea, has he succeeded?" he asked.

THE HINDU

10 JUL 2003

PM under more pressure on economic front

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, July 9

PRIME MINISTER A. B. Vajpayee faces more pressure on economic issues than on Kashmir from the RSS.

The RSS has made no bones about its apprehensions on the country's economic front, particularly to allow foreign direct investment in key areas including e-commerce.

Notwithstanding the tough stance of RSS chief K. S. Sudershan on abrogation of Article 370 and clamping President's rule in Jammu and Kashmir, BJP leaders say the Sangh Parivar's focus is on economic issues.

The Prime Minister and other Government leaders have apparently sounded the RSS leadership that they are willing to study their objections and clarify matters.

The RSS leaders allege the government's decisions are influenced by a powerful lobby that includes bureaucrats close to the PM.

Disinvestment Minister Arun Jaitley had a unpublicised meeting with Mr Sudershan recently to explain the salient features of the Disinvestment Policy in the wake of controversy over the decision to privatise Modern Foods. Other Ministers may also be asked to meet the Sangh leaders, according to BJP officials.

Mr Vajpayee, however, is not happy that the RSS has chosen to go public with its criticism.

Although there is an understanding between the BJP and the RSS-affiliates that they are free

to pursue their programmes, Mr Vajpayee wants the Sangh leaders to convey their objections in a quiet manner, so that the Government can look into them dispassionately.

According to BJP economic cell convenor Jagdish Shettigar, the party will come out with a fact sheet to explain the Government's compulsions in introducing liberalisation.

A direct dialogue between the PM and the Sangh leaders was originally thought of to clear the air on economic issues but it is not clear whether Mr Vajpayee is keen on such an interaction before Parliament's monsoon session.

Mr Vajpayee and other BJP leaders are, however, likely to have a discussion with the Sangh

RSS Criticism

chief on the next BJP president. According to a key RSS functionary, the Sangh understands that the BJP-led Government cannot take up issues like annulment of Article 370, which is not on the NDA's agenda of governance.

In fact, BJP general secretary M. Venkaiah Naidu was quick to respond to Mr Sudershan's demand for abrogation of Article 370. He had made it clear that the Government was not in a position to accept or implement all demands of the RSS even if the BJP agreed with them. He said the party would not thrust its views on matters that were not on the NDA's agenda.

The RSS functionary said with the Union

Cabinet's rejection of the autonomy demand of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, the Sangh is happy that the Government did not allow the matter to drift any further.

Initially, the RSS leaders were upset that both the PM and Home Minister L. K. Advani did not quickly reject the autonomy resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. The RSS leaders were unhappy that the Government had given the impression of confusion and even toyed with the idea of discussion in Parliament, the Sangh functionary said.

On July 2, top RSS leaders asked BJP chief Kushabhau Thakre, who had reached Ahmedabad to attend the Sangh's central executive, to return to Delhi to convey to the PM that the Government must immediately reject the autonomy demand. Mr Thakre promptly met the PM and Mr Advani that evening.

On the same day, the RSS meet adopted a tough resolution on the autonomy, describing it as being "fraught with dangerous consequences for the unity of the country." On July 4, the PM called a meeting of the Union Cabinet to reject the demand for return to pre-1953 status, much to the relief of the Sangh leaders.

What worries the RSS leaders now is the economic policy, which the Vajpayee Government calls the beginning of the second generation of reforms. One of its affiliates, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, has strongly criticized the Government's approach as being not in the national interest.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUL 2000

NC leaders divided on staying with NDA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

SRINAGAR, July 10. — Sharp differences surfaced today at the National Conference working committee meeting here on whether to remain in the NDA after the Union Cabinet rejected the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly autonomy resolution.

NC leaders said several speakers favoured pulling out of the NDA because the resolution was linked to the party's political base in the state.

The speakers said the Centre's response to the resolution and the BJP's attack against the NC have made it untenable for the party to continue in the alliance.

However, some senior party leaders are understood to have voiced the need for continuing in NDA as they feel the state government should work in tandem with the Centre to stamp out militancy from the state.

Dr Farooq Abdullah bought time by announcing extension of the working committee deliberations by a day tomorrow to allow all 31 members to air their views.

Earlier, the NC general secretary came out of the meeting and said his party would not go for a confrontation with the Centre.

Militancy: Security forces defused two powerful bombs at Dhara Sangla village last evening, while elsewhere in the valley four militants, one CRPF jawan and a villager were killed in insurgency-related incidents in the past 24 hours, adds UNI.

Militants also killed a man at Azmatabad village at his home early this morning while four people were injured in a grenade explosion at Achhabal Garden last evening.

11 JUL 2000

Vajpayee invites Farooq for talks

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, July 11. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today invited Dr Farooq Abdullah to New Delhi for dialogue after rushing to Srinagar for the funeral of the Chief Minister's mother Begum Akbar Jehan.

He was accompanied by Mr LK Advani and Mr George Fernandes in his trip, which is being widely seen as a move to build bridges with an embittered ally. "There are many things to talk about," the Prime Minister told reporters after the funeral at Hazratbal shrine.

When asked what was left to discuss after the Cabinet had rejected the autonomy resolution outright, he said the dialogue would continue and that there was nothing called outright rejection. But he maintained that there were a variety of reasons for not accepting the demand.

Dr Abdullah said he would go to Delhi on 15

July to discuss the autonomy issue. Before proceeding to Delhi for talks, he said, the National Conference working committee would meet in Srinagar in the morning. The inconclusive meeting of the working committee that was supposed to continue today, was called off after Begum Akbar Jehan's death.

Asked on the significance of the Prime Minister being taken to Hazratbal, he said: "You must know Hazratbal is a religious and political centre. Therefore, his visit has political and religious significance."

Most National Conference leaders are in favour of snapping ties with the ruling NDA as the party feels that it is the only way to respond to the Centre's outright rejection of the autonomy demand. Dr Abdullah is at pains to convince his colleagues of the need to maintain restraint. The visit may thus strengthen the cornered Chief Minister's hands within the party.

THE STATESMAN

Governors' panel on Dalit welfare

Govt goes along with Narayanan

FROM DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR

New Delhi, July 13: President K.R. Narayanan today had his way in setting up a committee of Governors to look into "the serious lacunae in the implementation of programmes for the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as also the inadequate utilisation of funds allocated for the purpose".

The composition of the committee will be announced later.

Some government sources agreed that this was an area within the jurisdiction of the elected government but thought that this could not be considered interference by the nominal heads because the role of this committee would be merely that of a "catalyst".

The two-day conference of the Governors had initially caused some fear in government circles. There was anxiety that Narayanan would go out of his way to raise issues that would embarrass the government. But, he had caused only a few ripples.

"There was no confrontation between Rashtrapati Bhavan and South Block," a government official said.

But the President's sympathetic attitude towards Scheduled

Castes and Tribes is a known attribute. Besides, Narayanan himself did not have to take the initiative to suggest such a committee.

The number of complaints made by quite a few Governors about welfare funds not reaching the people they are meant for paved the way for his announcement when he summed up the two-day conference this evening and thanked the Governors for their insight and contribution.

The Vajpayee government had taken the conference quite seriously. Two days before the meet, the Prime Minister had driven over to Rashtrapati Bhavan to discuss the agenda. Even the President responded to the courtesy by toning down his criticism of the government when he referred to the ongoing "disharmony" in society without mentioning the onslaught on Christians openly. He also kept his known dislike for fast-paced economic reforms at a low pitch.

Home minister L.K. Advani, who addressed the gathering, did mention the government's discomfort over Christian-bashing. Advani said his government "deplored the attacks on Christians and Christian institutions and exhorted the states to investigate all such attacks and take action

against the guilty and those who were behind the attacks".

That the conference was taken with more than a degree of seriousness was apparent from the tenor of Vajpayee's speech. He said the "views expressed by the Governors will serve as inputs in formulating policies as well as in streamlining Centre-state relations".

Vajpayee spoke about the important constitutional responsibilities discharged by Governors and the crucial role they play in serving the interests of the common man.

The five seniormost ministers of the Vajpayee government addressed the meet. External affairs minister Jaswant Singh briefed the Governors on foreign policy and on relations with neighbours. He spoke of the upswing the country's foreign policy has achieved in the recent past with a large number of exchange of visits and several countries supporting India's case for permanent membership of the Security Council. Others who spoke were defence minister George Fernandes and finance minister Yashwant Sinha.

Advani advised states to be vigilant on law and order and "make special efforts to deal firmly with elements that attempt to destabilise the nation".

THE TELEGRAPH

14 JUL 2000

NC to remain a part of NDA: Farooq

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 17

SHORTLY AFTER his much awaited meeting here tonight with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah ruled out any possibility of the National Conference walking out of the National Democratic Alliance on the vexed autonomy issue.

Without going into the nitty-gritty of his interaction with the Premier, Dr Abdullah dropped enough hints to suggest that he did not intend standing on prestige on his party's original demand for restoration of the pre-1953 status for J&K. In fact, he said that "all options are open" in the larger national interest.

"The ice has been broken and we will now work out the parameters of resolving contentious issues (relating to the autonomy

demand)," Dr Abdullah told The Hindustan Times after a 30-minute-long one-to-one meeting with Mr Vajpayee. The NC president said he would brief his party's working committee on the outcome of the talks upon his return to Srinagar tomorrow.

Officially, there was no word from the PMO about what exactly transpired at the parlyes at the

Premier's 7, Race Course Road residence. But a visibly effusive Dr Abdullah described the talks as fruitful that were held in a positive atmosphere. "One cannot bring down a mountain in one meeting," quipped the Chief Minister when queried about the outcome of the talks. He reaffirmed his commitment to a strong India and a strong Jammu and Kashmir: "Pakistan

should not be allowed to take advantage of the situation..."

From Dr Abdullah's comments, it was obvious that his son, Umar Abdullah, would remain a member of the Union Council of Ministers even as the NC continues to press for greater devolution of powers to the sensitive border State.

Significantly, Dr Abdullah's ministerial colleagues, who had accompanied him to Delhi, stayed put at the State Guest House while their leader held talks with Mr Vajpayee. That there were no immediate prospects of delegation-level negotiations between the two sides was evident from Dr Abdullah's plans to return to the State Capital tomorrow along with most of his team-members.

Informed sources said that the Centre's attempt to buy time was aimed at bringing down the temperature on either side to create a propitious climate for the future substantive rounds of discussions.

'Govt stand on autonomy dubious'

THE CONGRESS has charged the Government with "deliberate encouragement" to the forces of "disintegration and disruption" in different parts of the country. It has also charged the NDA Government with taking a "dubious stand" on the autonomy issue. It has condemned the "divisive activities" in targeting the Christian community. The party also took strong exception to Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray's threat to dismiss the duly-elected Maharashtra Government and said such assertions would not come in the way of the law taking its course. Talking to journalists here, Congress spokesperson Ajit Jogi said that President K. R. Narayanan is the ultimate deciding authority on whether Central rule should be clamped in any State.

HTC, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 JUL 2000

Govt-RSS tussle on reforms continues

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 17. — The high-level meeting between RSS representatives and the Vajpayee government today failed to resolve the deadlock on economic reforms. Both sides tried to put up a brave front saying they would meet again.

The RSS-affiliate, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, said it would continue with its agitation; the BJP said it would bring out status papers on the economy. The government refused to roll back any economic decisions which rattled swadeshi hawks. A BJP minister privately said there was no question of the government bowing to swadeshi pressure.

The fate of the meeting had become evident after the meeting of the Prime Minister's economic advisory council, where Mr AB Vajpayee declared his intention to expedite reforms programmes.

The formal meeting between the Union finance minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, and SJM leaders was cancelled and an informal meeting was immediately convened by senior party leaders in a bid to appease swadeshi leaders.

The RSS representatives were the organisation's joint general secretary, Mr Madan Das Devi, Mr Murlidhar Rao, MR S Gurumurthy, Mr Ravindra Mahajan and Mr Bhawati Prakash Sharma. The meeting at Mrs Sumitra Mahajan's residence lasted about five hours.

The SJM organisation secretary, Mr Mrulidhar Rao, said the organisation had not come to a

stage to take any decision about a change in its stance towards the government. "We have changed neither our perception nor the programmes," Mr Rao told **The Statesman**.

"We merely placed the issues we have been raising since the last few months," he said and conceded the BJP's viewpoints and the government's were different to that of SJM and RSS. He suggested there was no room for compromise.

SJM reportedly tried to corner government representatives by raising the issue of foreign investment, particularly in e-commerce, WTO-related concerns like removal of quantitative restrictions, repatriation without condition and disinvestment.

It also sought to know the reasons for the BJP to bring out status papers on economic issues of which SJM was critical. SJM leaders reportedly argued they would be forced to retaliate if anyone criticised the organisation's arguments.

BJP leaders argued the party could not be seen as not defending its own government's policies. The leaders, however, gave an assurance that the papers would not touch on SJM's sensitivities. The BJP general secretary, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, said status papers were aimed at highlighting economic decisions and challenges faced by the country. They had nothing to do with the SJM or RSS, he said.

A BJP leader said everybody agreed that there was a communication gap that needed to be bridged through interactions. Mr Rao and Mr Naidu said the meeting was to understand each other's viewpoints.

THE STATESMAN

Ice breaks over Kashmir

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 17. — The meeting between the Prime Minister and Dr Farooq Abdullah ended on a positive note tonight with the chief minister dropping broad hints that the National Conference would stay on in the NDA.

"We have agreed to continue the talks on the autonomy issue and I am happy that we have been able to break the ice," Dr Abdullah said after the 40-minute one-to-one meeting.

He dismissed suggestions that the Indira Gandhi-Sheikh Abdullah pact of 1975 had been the basis of dialogue.

"I am sure the National Conference's leaders would be happy about the outcome of the talks," he told reporters.

"Have I left the NDA?" he shot back when asked if his party would continue in the ruling alliance.

The meeting was earlier slated over dinner hosted by the Prime Minister — a plan that was cancelled in view of the air tragedy in Patna this morning. The home minister, Mr LK Advani, showed up for a while, but left before the meeting started — leaving the Prime Minister and Dr Abdullah to themselves.

The National Conference leader apparently conceded ground on Mr Vajpayee's appeal not to "insist" on restoring the pre-1953 autonomy status to J&K. "Please forget about the cut-off years 1952, 1953, 1964 ... we are in year 2000 and in 21st century. Jammu and Kashmir's consti-

tution was adopted in 1957. Please don't try to pin me down on the cut-off year for negotiations," Dr Abdullah said.

Though many parties were involved, "a solution has to be found and I am sure that we will find a solution to the autonomy issue," he declared.

"This is just the beginning, no parameters have been decided for continuing the dialogue but we have agreed to carry forward the negotiations for a strong India and a strong J&K."

Dr Abdullah clarified he did not want to begin the talks on a negative note by raking up the Union Cabinet's rejection of the Assembly resolution. "I have to remove misgivings in people's minds ... there has been a disinformation campaign on the autonomy issue."

THE STATESMAN

18 JUL 2000

Autonomy flipside for Farooq

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 18: Home minister L.K. Advani today told Farooq Abdullah that there would be greater devolution of financial and administrative powers for Jammu and Kashmir, not greater autonomy.

The climbdown in Abdullah's stand, evident during his talks with the Prime Minister last evening, today appeared complete after his breakfast meeting with the home minister. Far from pushing his demand for a return to the pre-1953 status, the chief minister looked "more positive", even saying "autonomy and devolution of powers were two sides of the same coin".

Top government sources said the "apparent constitutional crisis, which some believed to have arisen after the state Assembly

19/7
passed the autonomy resolution and the Union Cabinet's rejection of the proposal, was now over".

Abdullah also had a 30-minute meeting with A.B. Vajpayee today, at which he introduced his six-member autonomy team to the Prime Minister. The government is not for such a group of ministers and wants Abdullah to spell out what he really wants.

A senior government official said anything other than greater autonomy was agreeable. "The government has indicated clearly that it is prepared to devolve more financial and administrative powers to the state. But the onus is now on Abdullah and his autonomy committee to come up with concrete proposals on what kind of authority in what sectors they are interested in."

The official said the Centre would always welcome fresh proposals on areas where Jammu and

9.20/9.20
Kashmir wanted greater say, but there was "no need" for a group of ministers to handle the issue. No time-frame had been set for the state to furnish its demands or for the Centre to act on them, he added.

In spite of differences on the autonomy panel, Abdullah indicated his willingness to go along with the Centre by seeking a meeting with Planning Commission deputy chairman K.C. Pant. Abdullah, who has ruled out walking out of the government, is reported to be keen to discuss the gamut of financial powers that can be transferred to the state.

There also appears to be some confusion on whether residual powers will be held by the Centre or the states. Referring to a clause in the state autonomy report upheld by the Assembly, sources said residual powers in the case of Jammu and Kashmir would re-

main with the state. But in the case of all other states, they rest with the Centre.

The autonomy report has apparently said that the Centre took over some residual powers in 1986. But an official explained that by that time militancy had begun and the Centre's intervention was necessary.

Abdullah today called on former Prime Minister I.K. Gujral to exchange notes on the autonomy issue. He also held a one-to-one with Sonia Gandhi at 10 Janpath.

Abdullah's autonomy committee comprises state urban development minister G.M. Shah; law and parliamentary affairs minister P.L. Handoo; finance minister Abdul Rahim Rather; education minister Mohammed Shafi; and former industries minister Bodh Raj Bali.

■ Picture on Page 8

THE TELEGRAPH

19 JUL 2000

Cabinet nod for HMT turnaround plan

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 18. The Union Cabinet today cleared a turnaround plan for the public sector HMT involving an investment of Rs. 250 crores, the closure of five unviable units and conversion of three divisions into subsidiaries. The decision was taken on the recommendations of the Group of Ministers last month.

The new subsidiaries will be the Machine Tool and Watch groups as well as the Srinagar-based watch factory. The machine tool and watch groups are to be converted into subsidiaries by December 31 this year and may be disinvested up to 74 per cent. The watch factory in Srinagar will be provided budgetary support for three years as grant-in-aid. Conversion of the tractor division and later disinvestment is also proposed on a time-bound basis.

Briefing newsmen, an official spokesperson said the infusion of Rs. 250 crores as equity by the Government was aimed at making the company's net worth positive by April 1 this year retroactively. The Rs. 39.70 crore loan would be converted into equity and the interest written off.

The turnaround plan also envisages issue of bonds by HMT to raise Rs. 469 crores. This will fund a Voluntary Retirement Scheme for 6,493 retiring employees in the next two years.

The five unviable units proposed to be closed by December

31 this year are the Central Metal Forming Institute, the watch case unit, the lamp factory, food processing machinery plant and the miniature battery unit.

The Cabinet also gave ex-post facto approval to the extension of additional budgetary support for the Calcutta-based National Instruments Limited (NIL). This is meant to help implementation of the company's revival scheme.

Cable operations

The Cabinet also decided to make it obligatory for cable operators to show two terrestrial and one regional language channel of Doordarshan in a manner so as to retain their quality and to enforce adherence of programme and advertisement codes by all satellite channels.

The Cabinet approved a proposal to fix a quantitative ceiling on export of sugar at 10 lakh tonnes for the licensing year 2000-2001 in order to liquidate the large surplus stocks.

The Workmen's Compensation Act of 1923 will be decided to substantially increase both the minimum and maximum amounts of compensation. The minimum will be raised from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 80,000 for death, and from Rs. 60,000 to Rs. 90,000 for permanent total disablement. The maximum, in turn, is envisaged to be increased from Rs. 2.28 lakhs to Rs. 4.56 lakhs and from Rs. 2.74 lakhs to Rs. 5.48 lakhs respectively.

THE HINDU

Arrest rumour puts Mumbai on edge

Thackeray Sena quits Atal govt ✓

FROM KAY BENEDICT IN NEW
DELHI AND DEBASHIS
BHATTACHARYYA IN MUMBAI

July 19: The epicentre of the Mumbai drama enacted by Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray today shifted to Delhi with all three ministers from the party resigning from the government.

The move is being seen as a last-gasp attempt by the Sena to arm-twist the BJP-led government into preventing Thackeray's arrest over the 1992-93 Mumbai riots. The Prime Minister has not accepted the resignations of the ministers — Manohar Joshi, Suresh Prabhu and Balasaheb Vikhe Patil.

As Mumbai slipped into high alert amid swirling rumours of Thackeray's imminent arrest, the Congress-led Democratic Front government pushed the Sena further back to the wall by withdrawing security personnel attached to several top leaders. The government argued that the Sena leaders were not under any threat.

The Rapid Action Force fanned out across Sena bastions, including Dadar, Parel and Lalbag. The Bombay Stock Exchange senex plunged 118 points immediately after the ministers announced

their resignations.

In Delhi, the Sena ministers said they will not join the government and were awaiting further orders from Thackeray. The ministers, however, made it clear they will not pull out of the NDA. Joshi said the resignations were to "stop the illegal action of the Maharashtra government".

The BJP, too, asserted that there was no danger to the Atal Behari Vajpayee government. Party leader J.P. Mathur said the "resignations are directed at the Maharashtra government for its vindictive action".

Though the Sena has put Vajpayee in a piquant situation by demanding the dismissal of the Vilasrao Deshmukh government, sources said the Prime Minister has so far not given any indication that he will bail out Thackeray.

Vajpayee's image of a liberal and no-nonsense politician does not allow him any elbow room to soft-pedal the issue as Thackeray's threat that the country will burn if he was arrested has not gone down well with the people.

The Prime Minister has discussed the situation with home minister L.K. Advani and is likely to speak with Thackeray over phone tonight. Sources said Vajpayee is also likely to talk to Desh-

mukh and Nationalist Congress chief Sharad Pawar to ensure the situation does not snowball.

A Sena delegation led by Joshi met Vajpayee this evening and apprised him of the "gravity" of the situation in Maharashtra.

After the hour-long meeting, Anand Geete, Sena leader in the Lok Sabha, said: "The Prime Minister told us that Thackeray will not be arrested." But a PMO aide said Vajpayee gave no such assurance, only a "patient hearing". Joshi is flying to Mumbai tonight to apprise Thackeray of his talks with the Prime Minister. He also met Advani.

Earlier, Joshi told reporters that he and his colleagues were resigning as they felt "uncomfortable" with being in the ministry because the state government appeared to have decided to arrest "my leader".

Mumbai police commissioner M.N. Singh said they had not yet decided whether to chargesheet Thackeray first or arrest him. "The government ordered his prosecution, not his arrest," Singh said.

A police official said the government's nod was required to arrest the Sena chief. "The government has not made any decision yet," DCP M.B. Gaur said.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 JUL 2000

Cabinet agrees to disinvestment of PSUs on case-to-case basis

Strategic status for oil and heavy engineering companies ruled out

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 19

THE CABINET Committee on Disinvestment agreed today that the disinvestment of public sector enterprises will be decided on a case-to-case basis.

According to sources, this is expected to involve a more cautious approach to the disinvestment exercise. The Cabinet, however, did not accept the view that the oil and heavy engineering companies should be accorded "strategic" status. Manohar Joshi and Ram Naik were of the view that these industries should be declared 'strategic' on the lines of the railways, defence and atomic energy sectors.

According to a senior official, the merit of each individual enterprise will have to be taken into consideration instead of rushing ahead with disinvestment on the basis of "a general thumb rule".

Disinvestment Minister Arun Jaitley said that there had been a "complete unanimity" on the strategy for disinvestment and the modalities of its implementation.

Heavy Industries Minister Manohar Joshi is reported to have expressed the view that the government could not rush through with the disinvestment process. He has come out in favour of a careful and gradual implementation of the dis-

vestment process. There seems to have been a consensus on this issue.

The meeting is reported to have agreed on the point that the public sector has a crucial role to play "as a countervailing force to curb monopolistic practices and to control prices. According to Joshi, the promotion of self-reliance and industrialisation of far flung areas are other goals that have to be pursued through the public sector.

Sources disclose that Petroleum Minister Ram Naik and Joshi did not agree with the premise expressed in today's paper on policy and procedure that the private sector is inherently more efficient than the public sector.

Naik has already expressed the view that the public sector oil companies are being efficiently managed and the government must not dilute its equity in these companies to less than 51 per cent.

Both the ministers are of the view that the efficient PSEs such as Maruti Udyog, BHEL, and the national oil companies are capable of emerging as global players. The greater autonomy that the government has given to these companies after conferring the *navratna* status on them is cited as a step in this direction.

Jaitley disclosed that an in-principle approval was given today for large scale divestment in Hindustan Organics Ltd

and Metal and Scrap Trading Corporation. Both the companies have been performing poorly. While government equity will be brought down to 26 per cent in HOCL, it will be reduced to zero in MSTC.

Sources said that DoD would take specific proposals for the remaining 12 PSUs, accorded in-principle clearance by CCD at its last meeting on June 23, to respective administrative ministries over the next few weeks before seeking the Cabinet's approval in the next three months.

CCD had given in-principle clearance for divestment in 14 PSUs, including privatisation of MMTC, STC and Shipping Corporation of India and IBP.

The meeting also considered various procedural aspects of disinvestment and decided that reply to any query in Parliament would be made by disinvestment minister after consultation with his counterpart in concerned administrative ministry.

The CCD has dispensed with the earlier system wherein a joint secretary in the administrative ministry furnished information to DoD secretary for any question raised in parliament, sources said.

The new procedure was to ensure that ministers in concerned administrative ministries were involved in the process.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JUL 2000

'CENTRE HAS NO LOCUS STANDI IN THACKERAY CASE'

PM rejects resignations of Shiv Sena Ministers

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 19. The 'Bal Thackeray eclipse' of the Vajpayee Government lasted only a few hours today when the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, rejected the resignations of the three Shiv Sena nominees — Mr. Manohar Joshi, Mr. Suresh Prabhu and Mr. Balasahib Vikhe-Patil — from the Union Council of Ministers. The resignations were seen as part of the "loyalty demonstration" that these Shiv Sainiks had to perform, and were being treated as totally Mumbai-centric.

The three letters, sent separately during the course of the afternoon, were a variation of the theme set by Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers, who wrote: "I am unable to redress genuine difficulties of my leader [Mr. Bal Thackeray] and fellow Shiv Sainiks in this hour of crisis in Maharashtra." Mr. Prabhu accused the Maharashtra Government of vitiating the atmosphere, but stopped short of demanding Central intervention under Article 356.

Mr. Joshi, Minister for Heavy Industries, who did attend a Cabinet Sub-committee meeting this morning, was the next to send in his papers; while Mr. Vikhe-Patil, Minister of State for Revenue, Banking and Insurance, was the last to perform the ritual.

The Prime Minister promptly



The Rajya Sabha member, Mr. Pritish Nandy (from left), the Minister of State for Finance, Mr. Balasahib Vikhe-Patil, the Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Public Enterprises, Mr. Manohar Joshi, and the Shiv Sena leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Anant Geete, outside the Prime Minister's residence after the party Ministers presented their resignations. — Photo: V. Sudershan

turned down the resignations, and explained to the various Shiv Sena interlocutors that the matter of possible detention of the Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, was entirely within the jurisdiction of the Maharashtra Government, and that the Centre could possibly have no *locus standi* at this stage.

In fact, an official spokesperson felt constrained to contradict a claim made by a delegation of the Sena MPs that Mr. Vajpayee had assured them that Mr. Thackeray

would not be arrested. The delegation, led by Mr. Manohar Joshi, also called on the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and told him of their view of the unfairness and untenability of the Maharashtra Government's proposed prosecution of Mr. Thackeray.

However, it is believed that the Prime Minister has indeed asked the Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, to have the whole gamut of legal issues in the possible

prosecution of Mr. Bal Thackeray examined. Mr. Jethmalani also held consultations with Mr. Advani.

With the resignations of three Ministers being rejected, these aggrieved sainiks would have to await the instruction from their "leader" as to what they should be doing next. But, by the end the day, the resignation drama had failed to create an atmosphere of crisis.

Jethmalani's stand: Page 13

THE HINDU

No doublespeak on riot report, SC tells Centre

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 21

9:20 am
HT/1

THE SUPREME Court today directed the Centre to clarify its stand on the Srikrishna Commission report while expressing distress over the remarks of some Cabinet Ministers' on the Maharashtra Government's decision to prosecute Shiv Sena Chief Bal Thackeray for his alleged complicity in the 1993 Mumbai riots.

The Apex Court pointed out that the Ministers' statements were in conflict with what had been stated in an affidavit submitted to the Court by the Central Government.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice A.S. Anand noted that it was distressing that the Cabinet Ministers had made the comments, pending a petition for implementation of the Commission's report before the highest court of the land.

Referring to the Centre's earlier affidavit that it (the Centre) had no role in the matter and that it was for the State Government to act on the issue, the Chief Justice drew the attention of Attorney General Soli J. Sorabjee to newspaper reports based on statements made by several Ministers.

22/7

"Is there something called collective responsibility or not?" the Bench asked and wondered whether "this concept is not known to this Government".

The Bench which also comprised Justice R.C. Lahoti and Justice K.G. Balakrishnan observed: "Saying something to the Court and playing to the

Jethmalanispeak

A DEFIANT Law Minister Ram Jethmalani reacted sharply to the SC's criticism of remarks by Union Ministers on the Thackeray case. "The learned Chief Justice should at least have realised that he was making comments about a minister who knows his law as well as anyone else," he said in a statement from Mumbai.

Text of statement on Page 12

gallery by saying something else to the public, hardly behoves a person in a civilised society."

At this point, the Attorney General told the Court that the Centre's stand would be as stated in its affidavit.

The Chief Justice said that though the Court gave utmost respect to the

Attorney General's statement, it would not be out of place to ask the Government to file another affidavit spelling out its stand on the issue. The Court also asked the Maharashtra Government to file an affidavit on the panel's report. Both parties were granted six weeks' time to file their respective affidavits.

(Mr Sorabjee told Star News tonight that he agreed with the Court's observation. He said the Ministers should speak in one voice if they are speaking on behalf of the Government. Otherwise, they should clarify (that) it is their personal opinion and avoid such embarrassment.)

The Centre's September 10, 1999 affidavit had said: "The Central Government is not the appropriate government either to implement the findings (of the Commission) or to conduct prosecution....and it cannot also direct the State Government on these two aspects since the jurisdiction of the appropriate Government is exclusive."

The Apex Court also mildly pulled up the Maharashtra Government upon being informed by its counsel Ashok Desai that the matter has been referred to the crime branch for further investigation and action.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

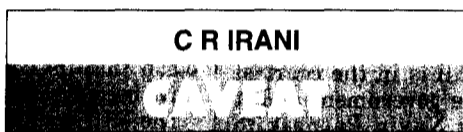
22 JUL 2000

Ram Jethmalani overplays his hand!

Age does not seem to wither nor custom stale the formidable criminal lawyer's penchant for the unexpected and the unfortunate. I do not have details of any letters that Ram Jethmalani may have written in the run-up to his resignation from the Union Ministry as Minister for Law and Justice but his statement after he complied with the Prime Minister's request for his resignation is enough to earn the compliment. He squarely blames the distinguished Attorney-General for his conduct in the Supreme Court on 21 July. The facts are simply stated. His Lordship the Chief Justice, was presiding over a Bench considering the affidavit of the Union Government on the subject of the implementation of the Srikrishna Commission Report on the Bombay riots in the wake of the demolition of the Babari Masjid. The Report quite clearly held Bal Thackeray guilty of incitement to violence by his communal writings in the Shiv Sena organ *Saamna*, and the Chief Justice drew attention to the conflict between the affidavit of the Union Government and the statements being made by the Minister for Law and Justice on attempts to bring Thackeray to justice. The question to the Attorney-General was to clarify which represented the views of the Union Government. Ram's grievance seems to be that Sorabjee did not invite the Court to send for the Law Minister who himself claims in an earlier statement that *his views have illumined many judicial minds in the past*. Soli Sorabjee can speak for himself and much better than any words of mine, but it does seem that the choice before him was to do just what Ram suggested and in the

process admit that the Government were speaking in different voices or do what any Attorney-General worth his salt would do — state unequivocally that their Lordships should rely on the affidavit on oath before them. It is a different matter that the Court decided to ask all parties including the Union Government to file fresh affidavits.

Ram being Ram does not stop at that. He accuses the Attorney-General of administering pin-pricks to him right from the beginning, it is difficult to believe why Soli Sorabjee should spend his time in such



pursuits. Soli's brief but dignified response, published elsewhere in the newspaper suggests that Ram himself has an inexhaustible source of pinpricks. Ram is not himself if he is not controversial; His tenure in the Urban Affairs Department has been dogged by controversy as well. I must record that his action in declaring all files in his department open to the public earned our approval; he was frustrated by a communication from the Cabinet Secretary who poured cold water on the proposal asking the Minister to wait until the whole Government could be similarly opened to scrutiny. It is interesting to speculate what skeletons would have come tumbling out of the cupboards of the Government had Ram succeeded in his bid to earn public esteem, some may have sur-

prised even him. Then he goes and asks for a Presidential pardon for his friends the Hinduja's inviting a retort from me that a lawyer of his eminence should know that a pardon can only follow an admission of guilt and if he could use his influence with the Hinduja brothers to disclose who received the payments through them instead of resisting disclosure of bank documents in the Swiss courts, I would support the bid for a Presidential pardon.

Adhik Shirodkar, a senior Shiv Sena leader gives the game away. It also explains one possible reason for Ram's public statement on television which we had occasion to criticise in an editorial carried on 21 July that no proceedings lie against Bal Thackeray because of delay — this was a matter for the courts and as a minister bound by the doctrine of collective responsibility, he should have resigned from the Cabinet before making a statement contrary from the position of the Union Cabinet that they would not interfere in the matter. Shirodkar reminds everyone that Ram has been *Bal Thackeray's senior counsel for a long time*. Ram is loyal to his friends whether the Hinduja's or Thackeray but loyalty to former clients and friends has its limits. Ram's statement on television that the Prime Minister had to choose between *that kind of an Attorney-General and a no-nonsense law minister*, may add grist to the charge of his being a genuine loose canon. It does not affect the Attorney-General's enormous reputation but it does belittle the former Union Law Minister. And that is a pity.

THE STATESMAN

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Jethmalani and his 'pinpricks' ✓

By Harish Khare

HD-1
24/7

NEW DELHI, JULY 23. Mr. Jethmalani is right. There were far too many pinpricks, though entirely of his own making. The foremost pinprick the former Law Minister got from the Attorney-General was an opinion to the Prime Minister in what is known as the "M.S. Shoes scandal". Only seven weeks ago, Mr. Sorabjee is understood to have, finally, given the opinion that certain decisions and orders of Mr. Jethmalani do "raise eyebrows", and that perhaps the Central Bureau of Investigation could be asked to satisfy itself whether the former Minister's conduct was actionable under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The "M.S. scandal" dates back to the first Vajpayee Government, and at one time the Prime Minister was toying with the idea of asking the former Chief Justice, Mr. J. S. Verma, for his opinion on Mr. Jethmalani's conduct. However, since it was also deemed that the Law Minister would have to go in case an outside opinion (of Justice Verma) pronounced his action dubious, the final decision was to seek in-house advice of the Attorney-General. In fact, the legal fraternity was surprised when in his

second Prime Ministerial innings, Mr. Vajpayee chose to retain Mr. Jethmalani as the Law Minister.

In the last few weeks, Mr. Jethmalani probably came to know what advice Mr. Sorabjee had given to the Prime Minister in the "M.S. Shoes scandal" matter. And to the extent Mr. Jethmalani had taken a stand that the Attorney-General was a subordinate officer of the Government (rather than a statutory officer, under Article 76 of the Constitution), he thought Mr. Sorabjee ought to defer to the Law Minister's superior station and knowledge of law. That was not to be the case.

But this was not the only rub. Mr. Vajpayee was exasperated that the Law Minister was possibly doing everything possible to hamper a smooth relationship with the judiciary. For example, Mr. Jethmalani had needlessly wanted to deny the Chief Justice of India, Mr. A. S. Anand, his statutory right of consultation in the matter of appointment as chairman of the MRTP commission. Or, Mr. Jethmalani had first accused the Chief Justice and later the Rashtrapati Bhavan of sitting on judicial appointments while all the time the files were held up in the Law Ministry.

THE HINDU

24 JUL 2000

REMARKS AGAINST CJI CAUSED EXIT

Forced to quit Cabinet, Jethmalani blames Sorabjee

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 23. The Union Minister for Law, Justice and Company Affairs, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, was forced by the Prime Minister to resign from the Cabinet. The sacked Mr. Jethmalani made a characteristically messy exit, hurling taunts at Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and accusations at the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee.

(It is understood that Mr. Vajpayee has decided to allocate the Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, to Mr. Arun Jaitley in addition to his charges. Also, Mr. Arun Shourie will be the new Minister for Disinvestment.)

The Law Minister's place in the Union Cabinet had become clearly untenable after he chose, last Friday, to pick a public quarrel with the Chief Justice of India. After his outbursts against the highest court in the land, the Prime Minister had no choice but to show him the door.

"My resignation was asked for



and I do not want to pretend that I resigned on my own. The call came from the Prime Minister and I resigned," confessed an uncontrite Mr. Jethmalani, in a statement from Pune.

Mr. Jethmalani's letter of resignation was promptly forwarded late last night to the President. This afternoon, a press communique from the Rashtrapati Bhavan announced that Mr. K. R. Narayanan had accepted the resignation. It is believed that the Home Min-

ister, Mr. L. K. Advani, was of the view that even if Mr. Jethmalani had to be stripped of his law portfolio, he could still be retained in the Cabinet. But obviously Mr. Vajpayee could not take lightly Mr. Jethmalani's intemperate remarks against the Chief Justice.

In his statement, Mr. Jethmalani notes, "I also confess that I was unhappy with the Prime Minister, but then he is wearing a crown of thorns and I do not want to put one more thorn in his crown by making some uncharitable comments."

However, Mr. Jethmalani did not feel the need for such restraint in the case of the Attorney-General. Mr. Jethmalani notes that "the Prime Minister had to make a choice between a pliant Attorney-General and a no-nonsense Law Minister. Now he has made his choice." The former Law Minister and Mr. Sorabjee found themselves giving the Prime Minister conflicting advice on the question of how much Constitutional elbow room was

available to the Centre to issue directions to the Maharashtra Government on prosecuting the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray.

Mr. Jethmalani, himself a Shiv Sena nominee, was of the opinion that the Centre had a constitutional obligation to direct the Maharashtra Government not to prosecute Mr. Thackeray; Mr. Sorabjee thought otherwise. Mr. Jethmalani was certainly not amused that Mr. Vajpayee chose to go by the Attorney-General's advice. As it was, Mr. Jethmalani was peeved that the Attorney-General had not defended him adequately when the Chief Justice, in his oral observations, was ticking off the Cabinet Ministers, including the Law Minister, for speaking in different voices.

On his part, though Mr. Sorabjee has so far refused to join issue with the former Law Minister, he does point out that since Mr. Jethmalani was not present he could not possibly pass a judgment about what happened in the Chief Justice's court on Friday last (in the matter of the Central Government's stand on implementation of the report of the Srikrishna Commission). It is, however, learnt that Mr. Sorabjee was merely sticking to the "clear-cut" instructions received only a day earlier from the Home Ministry.

Sorabjee refutes charge

PTI reports:

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Sorabjee rejected Mr. Jethmalani's charge that he was responsible for his exit from the Cabinet saying the former Law Minister with an "inexhaustible store of pinpricks" was himself to blame.

"Jethmalani knows the reasons for his resignation. He did not require my help for his exit from the ministry," the Attorney-General said.

"Mr. Jethmalani has an inexhaustible store of pinpricks, the recent example being his intemperate criticism of the Chief Justice of India and the Supreme Court in his press statement issued after the court proceedings."

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

24 JUL 2000

Jethmalani may make statement in Parliament

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 24. — Mr Ram Jethmalani today said he might make a statement in Parliament tomorrow about his controversial resignation from the Vajpayee government.

However, he would first check if the law permitted such a statement. "I may make a statement and I may not, depending on the situation", the former law minister told reporters on reaching here.

Mr Krishan Kant, Rajya Sabha chairman, has already clarified in the House that Mr Jethmalani could make a statement if he so desired. Mr Kant was responding to Opposition demands that either Mr Jethmalani or Mr Vajpayee make a statement in the House.

The fuming former law minister hit out at the Attorney-General. He said Mr Sorabjee had betrayed his longstanding

friendship by "plotting his ouster from the Union Cabinet".

The former law minister said he would explain everything at an appropriate time. "I have to collect the facts and check everything before I say anything. I will speak to the media after that." The restraint, he said, was self-imposed, and denied having spoken to the Prime Minister even over the phone.

Mr Jethmalani was enraged by reports that the M/S shoes case could have influenced his ouster. He had asked the CBI two years ago to probe the case, without insisting on the limitations on his prosecution as a minister, he said.

"How can an issue that happened two years ago come back now?" he asked. "Ask Sorabjee why he did not do anything regarding this during the past two years." Thirty-five MPs had written to him arguing the

case for M/S shoes. Even a district judge favoured the same line in his verdict, he added.

The former law minister said he would have resigned in any case. "I was going to resign the next day, but they (those in government) anticipated me and asked me to resign the same day," he said.

The Opposition in the Rajya Sabha demanded a full picture of the circumstances leading to Mr Jethmalani's resignation. Mr Krishan Kant said he could not press for a statement. But if Mr Jethmalani so chose, the rules did permit him to offer an explanation. It was for Mr Jethmalani to decide whether or not to exercise that right. No pressure could be brought on him, he said.

While Mr Suresh Pachouri of the Congress got into arguments with Mr M Venkaiah

■ See JETHMALANI: page 6

THE STATESMAN

25 JUL 2000

There is no depth of conviction on any serious subject in this NDA Government

Double standards with a vengeance

BY K. NATWAR SINGH

CONFUSION IS the natural state of the BJP-led NDA Government. When it comes to foreign policy, it is confusion worse confounded. Language and with it thought and reflection undergo a spectacular process of dehydration, laced with verbal banality by senior ministers. From Jerusalem to Japan, from New Delhi to New York, from Ladakh to London, they offer a shopworn store of sterile non-ideas which make professional diplomats run for cover.

During the last session of Parliament, the NDA Government ducked a debate on more than one occasion on its foreign and nuclear policies. The Prime Minister did in a rhetorical manner ask the leader of the Opposition to spell out the nuclear policy of the Congress. She did not fall into his trap. It is not for the leader of the Opposition to spell out the nuclear policy. It is for the Government to do so. There cannot be a Congress nuclear policy and a Government nuclear policy. The real question is: does the Government have a coherent nuclear policy, or do they simply want to toe the US line and resurrect the corpse of the CTBT buried by the US Senate? What have Messrs Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbott been talking about in their dozen meetings — non-proliferation or nuclear disarmament? Parliament and the country have so far been kept in the dark.

Let us take the much touted 'minimum credible deterrent'. Deterrent against whom? China? Pakistan? Or another country? How many nuclear bombs for China? How many for Pakistan? More importantly how does the Prime Minister expect to achieve national consensus on the CTBT if he does not take Opposition parties into confidence? As of today, there is no national consensus on the CTBT. The Congress does not have a closed mind on the subject. The Government should spell out the pros and cons and work towards forging a national consensus commanding bipartisan support. But advancing economic aid and lifting of sanctions as rewards for signing the CTBT will not do. The Congress has always maintained that our security and nuclear policy cannot be linked with economic

benefits. Our security is not for sale. On the question of a permanent seat in the Security Council, the NDA Government has gone about seeking certificates from all and sundry. This is unseemly. As far as I know, none of the permanent five — USA, Russia, China, UK and France — has categorically said that they would revise the UN Charter to give India a permanent seat with a veto. There has been some talk of giving India, Brazil, Egypt, Nigeria/South Africa permanent seats without the veto. No self-respecting country can accept such blatant discrimination, especially when steps are afoot to bring in Germany and Japan with the veto bestowed on them.

It is pertinent to ask why this insidious veto cannot be abolished to make the Security Council a more democratic institution. Here is the historical reason. When the UN Charter was being drafted in early 1945, President Roosevelt's Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, told the US Senate that:

The veto provision was an absolute condition for US participation in the UN. The superpowers would not be subject to any collective coercion. The veto ensured that the General Assembly and the Security Council could not act against any of the permanent five. In other words, the vital interests of the permanent five (P5) would not be submitted to UN jurisdiction. No wonder the Mexican delegate at San Francisco in mid-1945 bemoaned that under the UN Charter, "the mice would be disciplined, but the lions would be free!" We should never beg for a permanent seat — we must demand it as a right. On Pakistan, the Vajpayee Government has done a U-turn. In February 1999, the PM took his infamous bus ride to Lahore to embrace Mian Nawaz Sharif when trans-border terrorism was at its peak.

Now the Government says trans-border terrorism must cease before any talks can take place! The other reason is even more bizarre. No talks with a military dictator. But we did talk to Ayub Khan and Zia-ul-Haq. Each was at the helm for 11 years. It is never wise to close the diplomatic door. Even at the height of the Vietnam war, the US and Vietnam were in touch in Paris. Perhaps the Government is waiting for July 26 — to 'celebrate' the first anniversary of Kargil.

The NDA's establishment will, one presumes, obey the *obiter dicta* of the G-8 issued last week at Okinawa. Thus the agenda for Indo-Pak talks is beginning to be decided outside the subcontinent. There is also the whispering about 'back channel' diplomacy, involving, it is rumoured, a distinguished newspaperman and a former Foreign Secretary. Good luck to them.

It is imperative that Indo-US relations should be further strengthened. The US provides unprecedented opportunities to our best and brightest young men and women to open new windows in the IT sector and other areas. President Bill Clinton in his memorable address to members of both Houses in the Central Hall on March 21 spelled out the scope of further enlarging Indo-US cooperation for our mutual benefit. He did so with eloquence. However, on Kashmir and the CTBT, he gave no comfort. He referred to Kashmir as a *dispute*, a *problem*:

"Let us also make clear, as I have repeatedly, I have certainly not come to South Asia to mediate the *dispute* over Kashmir. Only India and Pakistan can work on the problems between them. But if outsiders cannot resolve this *problem*, I hope you will create the opportunity to do it yourselves, by calling on the support of others who can help

where possible, as American diplomacy did in urging the Pakistanis to go back behind the Line of Control in the Kargil crisis."

This was greeted with thunderous applause. Mr Clinton actually got away by calling Kashmir an area of dispute between India and Pakistan in the Central Hall of our Parliament. When President Nelson Mandela just uttered the word Kashmir, at the Durban NAM summit in 1998, all hell broke loose and an apology was demanded by the over zealous minions of the Vajpayee entourage. Not a word of protest from Messrs Vajpayee, Jaswant Singh *et al* on Mr Clinton's peroration on Kashmir. Double standards with a vengeance!

India is recognised as the power of the Indian Ocean. Henry Kissinger has written that from Singapore to Suez, the area is under Indian influence. Yet the NDA Government, disregarding vital geo-political imperatives, is letting outside powers dabble in the troubled waters in and around Sri Lanka. "We will not take the IPKF route" is their parrot-like response. Then which route will the NDA take — the Karunamidhi route?

It is not an agreeable sight to see senior Cabinet ministers attending a conference where pro-Eelam slogans are raised and none protests. Sri Lanka can burn but Mr Karunanidhi and Mr Vaiko cannot be restrained.

This Government practised sterile inactivity on Fiji and Sierra Leone. It has all but turned its back on non-alignment. The NDA Government lacks foresight, and is unable to foresee the consequences of its actions. The glaring example is Sri Lanka.

The External Affairs Minister came perilously close to endangering our relations with our Arab friends when he distorted Indian history to gain cheap popularity during his visit to Israel. The responsibility of Foreign Ministers is to enlarge the areas of agreement, to find solutions for complexities and not just 'contemplate them'. But there is no depth of conviction to be seen on any serious subject in this Government. Only their media management shows sinister Goebbelsian skills. That cannot be a substitute for policy. Not in AD 2000.



Arun's responsibilities

Consensus on divestment top on Shourie's agenda

Jaitley fills in for 'close friend'

VINAJ JHA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 24. — The new minister for disinvestment, Mr Arun Shourie, is expected to spend the next few months trying to evolve a consensus on disinvestment even as he tries to expand his fledgling department.

If Mr Arun Jaitley set the ball rolling over the past few months, his successor has the difficult task of pushing it forward in the face of criticism from the Opposition, sections of the ruling coalition and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch.

While the political aspects will have to be dealt with cautiously, there is talk of the nascent department of disinvestment being converted into a full-fledged department.

As of today, the department has a minister, a secretary, a joint secretary of the finance ministry who also works for the department and a deputy secretary with a similar profile.

When Mr Jaitley was in charge, the minister had his office in Shastri Bhawan, New Delhi, the secretary in Bhikaji Cama Place, south Delhi, and the other officials in North Block (finance ministry). Sources said the department was now likely to move to a central location where all of



Mr Arun Shourie

them would be located.

But Mr Shourie has an equally grave challenge at hand when it comes to opposition to the disinvestment process. His predecessor had to put in considerable effort and skill to try and subdue criticism of the process.

Sources said Mr Shourie will also have his hands full, trying to convince "Opposition parties and the Swadeshi Jagran Manch

that disinvestment does not amount to selling family silver".

They pointed out that the Prime Minister, who also heads the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment (CCD), had been keen that members of his Cabinet speak in one voice over the disinvestment process.

Mr Arun Jaitley has also been seeking collective responsibility and his department is keen that a long-term roadmap for disinvestment be approved at the earliest.

The Centre has so far cleared divestment proposals broadly based on the recommendations of the Disinvestment Commission.

The Commission, headed by Mr G V Ramakrishna, had submitted proposals for the disinvestment of 58 public sector units (PSUs), 33 of which have since been cleared by the Cabinet.

The CCD has cleared 19 PSUs for disinvestment during the current financial year and given an in-principle clearance for another 14 units, including MMTC and the Shipping Corporation of India.

Two of these 14 PSUs, Metal Scrap Trading Corporation and Hindustan Organics Ltd, were formally cleared for disinvestment by the CCD last week.

■ Editorial: The two Aruns! page 8

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 24. — The new Union law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, avoided what was potentially an embarrassing situation as he took over from his "senior" Mr Ram Jethmalani, today.

Facing a barrage of questions about Mr Ram Jethmalani and the Shiv Sena today, Mr Jaitley said he had just taken over and would have to study the situation before he made a statement.

Mr Jaitley said Mr Jethmalani was a dear friend and he had the highest regard for him. For, Mr Jethmalani was not only his senior in the ministry but also in the Bar. Mr Jaitley has not only interacted with Mr Jethmalani on legal matters for over two decades, he has had some experience of the law ministry.

As one official lightheartedly said, just when Mr Jaitley was invited by the Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to lecture its students, Mr Jethmalani informed him that he had to go



Mr Arun Jaitley in his office on Monday. — API/PTI

abroad and asked him to unofficially keep a watch on his ministry.

As a result, Mr Jaitley was forced to cancel his visit. Officials said the minister was briefed by senior functionaries of the ministry today.

One side-effect of the situation may relate to the Bills the information and broadcasting ministry is trying to push through.

The law ministry had not accepted Mr Jaitley's Broadcast Bill, and now the I&B ministry is readying the

JAITLEY CLOSES SHOP

NEW DELHI, July 24. — It was M/s Arun and Arun at work during Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha today.

Several questions on disinvestment were listed for the day and it was Mr Arun Jaitley who answered them, though, last evening, it was announced that Mr Shourie would be in charge of the disinvestment department.

The latter sat beside Mr Jaitley, who dealt with the queries for which he seemed well prepared. They talked amongst themselves occasionally, sharing information.

Though Mr Jaitley was closing shop, he fielded tricky queries and did not pass the buck on to Mr Shourie. — SNS

final touches to the convergence bill, called the Communications Bill, 2000.

With Mr Jaitley wearing two hats, he may find the drafting process and the final clearing of the Bill, before it is placed in Parliament, easier.

SHIV SENA 'BOYCOTT' PROMPTED DECISION?

NDA meeting put off

25/7 HD- 9-24-98
By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JULY 24. A meeting of the National Democratic Alliance MPs scheduled to be held this evening has been postponed to tomorrow following a decision by the Shiv Sena parliamentary party this morning to stay away from it. The BJP parliamentary party will meet on Tuesday morning.

The Bharatiya Janata Party officially said the NDA meeting had been put off as some felt it would not be proper to hold a meeting the same day the Lok Sabha paid tributes to Rajesh Pilot and other colleagues who had passed away. However, the fact that Mr. Anant Geete, leader of the Shiv Sena parliamentary party, announced after a meeting that his MPs would boycott the NDA meet, and the subsequent postponement of the meeting, made it clear that the BJP wanted to avoid the embarrassment of a Shiv Sena boycott. The Sena had not participated in yesterday's meeting of NDA leaders at the Prime Minister's residence.

Mr. Geete later told reporters that he hoped the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, would reconsider acceptance of Mr. Jethmalani's resignation. The view was that the demand for the resignation and its acceptance had all been done "in a hurry". It almost appeared as if the Shiv Sena was pleading for taking Mr. Jethmalani back into the Cabinet. However, Mr. Geete said the party MPs would take part in the proceedings of Parliament.

The BJP is hoping that by tomorrow the Shiv Sena crisis could be somewhat defused. Senior party leaders in and out of the Government believe that the three

Sena Ministers who had resigned — but whose resignations were not accepted by the Prime Minister — would resume official duties tomorrow.

The party is keeping its fingers crossed and has put its faith in the Maharashtra Government deciding not to arrest the Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray. The chargesheet against him could be filed in court and he could be prosecuted, but taking him into custody was not necessary.

The BJP spokesperson, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, appealed to all parties to allow the Government to peacefully introduce the three Bills for the creation of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. The Bills were listed in the business agenda for today which will be carried over to Tuesday.

He pointed out that even the Rashtriya Janata Dal was committed to Jharkhand as it had adopted a resolution on it in the Bihar Assembly. The Congress(I) had made it clear that its support to the RJD was tied to the latter supporting the creation of Jharkhand. State-level differences on including Haridwar in the proposed Uttarakhand State would not be allowed to come in the way of the BJP's support for the creation of the new hill State, Mr. Naidu said.

PM 'not indisposed'

Eager to explain why the scheduled NDA meeting was postponed to Tuesday, Mr. Naidu, at one point said informally that the Prime Minister was suffering from a throat infection and therefore the meeting had been put off.

However, as news of the Prime Minister's "indisposition" was put out by a news agency, Mr. Naidu began clarifying that while Mr. Vajpayee did have a slight

throat infection, he was "not indisposed" and that he had never said he was. The Prime Minister was in fact attending the dinner hosted by the Vice-President tonight, and he would be attending the BJP parliamentary party meeting tomorrow. In short, none of his engagements has been cancelled.

Plea for PM's statement rejected

NEW DELHI, JULY 24. The Vice-President and Rajya Sabha chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, today turned down a vociferous demand by Opposition members that the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, make a statement on the circumstances of the resignation of the former Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani.

The chairman's ruling came after the Congress(I) member, Mr. Suresh Pachouri, raised the issue after question hour, with a number of senior Opposition members including Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Ms. Jayanti Natarajan (TMC), Mr. Mohammed Salim (CPI-M) and others supporting him.

The nominated member, Mr. Kuldip Nayyar, demanded that the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee, be asked to come to the bar of the House to explain the controversy. However, the chairman ruled that it was up to the former Law Minister, to decide whether or not to make a statement.

Mr. Pachouri and the former Law Minister, Mr. Hansraj Bhardwaj, said the Government, the Law Minister and the Attorney-General owed an explanation to the House. — PTI

THE HINDU

25 JUL 2000

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Jethmalani defends role in M.S. Shoes affair

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By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 24. The former Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, today defended his decision (as the then Urban Development Minister) to favour the M.S. Shoes company in extending the time limit for payment of the second instalment to HUDCO for the lands allotted to it.

Talking to reporters here at his residence after returning from Mumbai, Mr. Jethmalani said, "I had asked the CBI two years ago to probe into it (the alleged scandal) and I had made it clear that I will waive all my ministerial immunity." He pointed out that besides a court direction to extend the time limit to M.S. Shoes, there was a letter from 35 MPs to grant more time to the firm to pay the second instalment.

"Ask Mr. Soli Sorabjee (Attorney-General of India) why he did not do anything regarding this in the last two years," he said in reply to a question. Renewing his attack against Mr. Sorabjee, the former Minister said "he has betrayed my friendship by plotting my ouster from the Cabinet".

(Speaking to reporters in Pune on Sunday, Mr. Jethmalani had said that "the Prime Minister had to make a choice between a pliant Attorney-General and a non-nonsense Law Minister. Now the Prime Minister has made his choice").

Mr. Jethmalani said, "I had made up my mind to resign after returning to Mumbai from Pune even before the Prime Minister could ask for it. But when it was sought on my way to Pune, I tendered my resignation on reaching there." *HO-1*

Asked whether he would make a statement in the Rajya Sabha on the resignation issue, Mr. Jethmalani said, "I am yet to take a decision whether to make a statement in Parliament first or speak to the press. I may make a statement tomorrow and only then will I talk to the media." When reporters wanted to know whether he would meet the Prime Minister, he said "very unlikely". *25/7*

On the possible prosecution of the Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Bal Thackeray, he said, "I personally think that nothing is going to happen. Even if he is arrested, it will be only a formal paper arrest. They will touch him and take a bail bond and it means nothing." The correct procedure would be for the Maharashtra Government to move the court to condone the delay for prosecuting Mr. Thackeray. "It is for the court to take cognisance of the petition. If the court condones the delay, it may either issue summons or a warrant and it is not for the Mumbai Police Commissioner to take a decision in this regard," he added.

THE HINDU

25 JUL 2000

PM's clean chit to Jethmalani

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 25. Mr. Ram Jethmalani is not a man who can be easily counted out. Two days ago he was shown the door; today he had reason to permit himself a smile. For the time being he has the satisfaction of being proved right about the status of the legal case against the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray.

There was another victory of sorts when he got a certificate of good conduct from the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. Three days after asking for his resignation as Union Law Minister, Mr. Vajpayee today found himself clarifying that by asking him to quit "no reflection was sought to be cast on his integrity." Mr. Vajpayee's thinking on Mr. Jethmalani was conveyed in a statement by the Prime Minister's Press Adviser, Mr. H.K. Dua.

There have been suggestions that Mr. Jethmalani was probably guilty of misconduct in the so-called

"M.S. Shoes scandal." Mr. Vajpayee asked for the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee's opinion, who in turn gave a view not entirely favourable to Mr. Jethmalani. On his part, Mr. Jethmalani asserted that he had to resign because of 'pinpricks' from the Attorney-General.

However, the Prime Minister's Press Adviser makes it clear that Mr. Jethmalani's resignation was sought mainly because "he (Mr. Vajpayee) has been keen to have the best of relations between the Executive and the Judiciary." Mr. Jethmalani last Friday used 'intemperate' language against the Chief Justice of India, which most observers felt was unbecoming of a Cabinet Minister.

By issuing a clarification, the Prime Minister has also sought to mollify the Chief Justice and other judges who have not been amused by Mr. Jethmalani's rhetorical excesses.

In any case, Mr. Vajpayee is hardly in a position to pick a fight with the judiciary.

THE HINDU

26 JUL 2000

Jethmalani insists on making statement today

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 26. The former Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, today said he would insist that the Rajya Sabha Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, allow him to make an "amended" statement — about the events leading to his resignation from the Union Cabinet — tomorrow; in case the Chairman's permission was not forthcoming, he would "withdraw" his statement and release it outside the House.

Earlier, Mr. Jethmalani's much-awaited personal explanation in the House was deferred by Mr. Krishan Kant.

Making the announcement in the post-lunch session, the Deputy Chairperson, Ms. Najma Heptulla, said Mr. Krishan Kant wanted time to authenticate some of the attachments with the statement, submitted to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat only this morning. She admitted that the explanation had been listed in today's "list of business", usually not altered without consulting the leaders of all parties.

However, it was not possible to take it up because the House Secretariat got the copy only at 9.45 a.m. and the Chairman had "no time" to satisfy himself that the attached documents were authentic.

It is learnt that the statement, including the documents, runs into 80 to 90 pages. The official "objection" seems to be that the "documents" are official Government papers, and the question is whether Mr. Jethmalani, who is no longer a Minister, can be allowed to place official papers on the table in the House.

The second objection was that there were references to "some dignitaries" in Mr. Jethmalani's explanation, and this too was against the rules.

INDU

27 JUL 2000

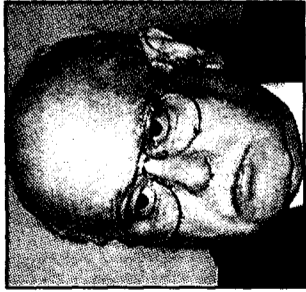
Jethmalani to attack Sorabjee, CJI Anand

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, July 26

THE VAJPAYEE Government is bracing itself for an explosion as former Law Minister Ram Jethmalani prepares to go public with a denunciation of the mighty and powerful. Jethmalani was prevented from making a statement in the Rajya Sabha today on procedural grounds. But he hopes to be allowed to make the statement in a day or so. Failing which, say sources close to the former Law Minister, he will simply go to the Press.

The *Hindustan Times* has learned that Jethmalani intends to launch an unprecedented attack on Soli Sorabjee, the Attorney-General of India. He will also suggest that the Chief Justice of India, Dr. A S Anand has behaved improperly. Nonetheless, he holds no grudge against Sorabjee for sacking him but believes the Minister was misguided by those substance of Jethmalani's grievances follows:

Chief Justice of India's hostility to Jethmalani might have some connection to that as Law Minister, he was looking for the prosecution of S Anand. One petition came from Usha Mehta. Another was from the office of the President of India. Jethmalani informed the President that he was examining these charges relate to a case subordinate judiciary decided a



Anand (top) and Sorabjee



Ram Jethmalani

matter in favour of the Chief Justice's family). Perhaps this contributed to Dr Anand's mindset when he made damaging remarks about Jethmalani in court four days later, or so Jethmalani alleges.

In any case, Jethmalani believes that the Attorney-General should have protested when the Chief Justice said that this was not a 'civilised government' and had no under-

standing of collective responsibility because Justice Anand's remarks were improper.

The Chief Justice of India, Jethmalani believes, was wrong to take offence when the Chairman of the MRTD Commission was appointed without consulting him. Justice A S Anand wrote to the Prime Minister to complain only to be later informed by Jethmalani that the precedents

only required the Chief Justice to be consulted when a sitting judge was to be appointed. In this case, a retired judge was being appointed and no consultation was required. The Chief Justice resented being corrected on a matter of law and that this also accounts for his hostility to the former Law Minister, Jethmalani thinks.

Attorney-General Soli Sorabjee has behaved improperly with regard to the Hindujuas and the Bofors case. Though Jethmalani is often described as a friend of the Hindujuas, he claims that it is Sorabjee who gave a legal opinion to the Hindujuas in May 1999, when he was already the principal law officer of the Government of India. This is improper because the CBI, which is investigating the Hindujuas, goes to the Attorney-General for advice. Such behaviour should have led to Sorabjee's dismissal, feels Jethmalani.

Soli Sorabjee charged the government lakhs of rupees in fees for opinions in the telecom tangle. Jethmalani says that an Attorney-General should not charge fees from his own government and that the fees were paid in contravention of the rules. According to Jethmalani, Sorabjee has charged fees from the government in other cases as well.

Ministers in the Vajpayee government are apprehensive of the reaction to Jethmalani's views. Should he be allowed to make his statement in the Rajya Sabha, the Opposition is certain to turn it against the government. Efforts are on to get him to moderate his views.

'Of course, I defended Govt before the SC'

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, July 26

ATTORNEY-GENERAL Soli Sorabjee is understood to have sent a letter to former Law Minister Ram Jethmalani to "clarify" that he had indeed defended the Government's position before the Supreme Court when it was hearing the petitions on implementing the Srikrishna Commission's report.

According to BJP sources, Sorabjee's letter rejects Jethmalani's charge after his resignation that he had not defended him adequately in the Court, when Chief Justice A S Anand ticked off some Union Ministers for "speaking in different voices."

Soli Sorabjee is said to have told Ram Jethmalani that he had indeed conveyed to the Supreme Court that the Government's stand was what was already indicated in the affidavit filed by it sometime ago.

The Chief Justice, in his oral

observation, had expressed "distress" and "concern" at the statements of some Ministers, which he said, were at variance with what was stated in the affidavit.

He wondered whether the concept of collective responsibility of the Council of Ministers was not known to them.

The Attorney-General said in his letter that Jethmalani had "over-reacted" to the Court's observation by issuing a strong statement against the Chief Justice when the Court had not named him or any other Minister.

According to Sorabjee, it was Jethmalani's remarks against the Chief Justice in his written statement that left his position as Law Minister untenable and not the Court's observation.

Sorabjee's letter is seen as a follow-up to the clarification yesterday by the Prime Minister's Office that "no reflection was sought to be cast" on the integrity of Jethmalani.

Govt accepts finance commission report

The Times of India News Service
NEW DELHI: The Centre on Thursday announced acceptance of the 11th Finance Commission's recommendation for devolution of 29.5 per cent of revenue from central taxes to states within a cap on the overall tax and non-tax transfers of 37.5 per cent of the Centre's gross revenue receipts.

The government, which tabled an action-taken report along with the commission's report in Parliament, accepted the devolution formula as well as a few other recommendations on debt relief, grants-in-aid and calamity relief. It said it will consider the other recommendations later on.

The commission's report contains a number of other far-reaching recommendations: Revise the ceiling on profession tax and user charges for electricity and water; appoint pay commissions only in consultation with the states instead of routinely once in every 10 years; and expand the indirect tax base by roping in the services sector.

Among the recommendations

accepted by the government are: a moratorium till 2005 on the payment of instalments of debt and interest on special loan to Punjab during 1984-94 for combating militancy; debt relief to Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir on the basis of specified expenditure incurred on security; an annual grant of Rs 2,000 crore for local bodies and discontinuation of the National Fund for Calamity Relief (NFCR).

In accordance with the commission's recommendation, 28 per cent of the shareable central taxes and duties will devolve to the states every year beginning 2000-01 till 2004-2005.

Besides, an additional 1.5 per cent of the net proceeds of central taxes will be shared among states which do not levy sales tax on sugar, tobacco and textiles.

The percentage share of each state on devolution of central taxes is: Andhra Pradesh (7.7 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (0.2), Assam (3.2), Bihar (14.6), Goa (0.2), Gujarat (2.8), Haryana (0.9),

Himachal Pradesh (0.6), Jammu and Kashmir (1.3), Karnataka (4.9), Kerala (3.1), Madhya Pradesh (8.8), Maharashtra (4.6), Manipur (0.3), Meghalaya (0.3), Mizoram (0.2), Nagaland (0.2),

Orissa (5.0), Punjab (1.1), Rajasthan (5.5), Sikkim (0.2), Tamil Nadu (5.4), Tripura (0.5), Uttar Pradesh (19.8) and West Bengal (8.1).

The commission has considered the trends of the total quantum of transfers to the states on revenue account while fixing a cap of 37.5 per cent of the Centre's total tax and non-tax receipts.

The Union government has accepted this ceiling but it has

made it clear that the acceptance does not imply the establishment of a principle of mandatory sharing of a fixed percentage of centre's revenue receipts with the states.

The government has announced that it will bring in legislation to implement the commission's suggestion about calamity relief. In the place of NFCR, the commission has recommended the setting up of a national calamity contingency fund which could be created with an initial core of Rs 500 crore.

This will be financed by levy of a special surcharge on central taxes for a limited period. The draws from the fund will be accompanied by imposition of special surcharge.

Among the recommendations which the centre is yet to consider is introduction of user charges for water and power linked to input index, regular revision of the royalties on minerals, dispensing with routine appointment of pay commissions every 10 years, introduction of a pension scheme that does not become a burden on state exchequer.

TAXING FINANCE

● 28% of the shareable central taxes and duties will devolve to the states every year

● Revision of ceiling on profession tax and user charges for electricity and water

Govt to probe 'leakage' of Jethmalani annexures

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 27

XY8
THE GOVERNMENT today bowed to Opposition pressure in the Rajya Sabha and promised to investigate how "secret" documents used by former Law Minister Ram Jethmalani in a letter to the Rajya Sabha Chairman were "leaked."

Mr Jethmalani had communicated to Chairman Krishan Kant a copy of the statement he wanted to make to explain his exit from office. The Chairman today rejected his plea since the annexures to the statement contained several documents marked secret and confidential. Mr Jethmalani could however make a "modified statement," the Chair ruled.

The Rajya Sabha witnessed most of the day confrontation between

26/7 9/10/97
the Government and the Opposition on the Jethmalani affair. The Opposition charged Mr Jethmalani had by threatening to go to the Press with his statement tried to "manipulate" the functioning of the House. The Elders pleaded with the Chair that the dignity of the House had to be protected. Mr Kant agreed that nobody could force the Chair to do anything.

Although the Chair did not accept the Opposition's demand for the suspension of the question hour, the House could take up the first question after more than first half of the hour was lost in heated exchanges. The House was adjourned for the day after about 50 minutes of the post-lunch sitting. The Congress members were not satisfied with the Government assurance on the inquiry. They

pointed out that the "source of the leakage" was not as important as that Mr Jethmalani was in possession of the secret documents. This was sufficient to prosecute him, they stated.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee and Mr Kapil Sibal of the Congress wanted the Government to explain whether Mr Jethmalani had resigned or was sacked. Law Minister Arun Jaitley told the House that his Ministry would submit its response to the Chairman on Mr Jethmalani's communication in one hour and the Chair could decide on the issue.

Persistent with their queries regarding the Government stand, the Opposition members were told by the PM during the stalled question hour that the matter was between the resigned Minister and the Chair.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 JUL 2000

'Attorney-general has a lot to explain'

The following are excerpts from the statement (prepared for Parliament) issued by Ram Jethmalani.

I resigned without murmur because what the attorney-general, Mr (Soli) Sorabjee, did or did not do during the hearing of the Justice Srikrishna case was the culmination of a series of incidents which tell their own tale and give to the last act of Mr Sorabjee the effect of the last straw on the camel's back. I must first draw attention to an incident that happened early this year.

A scurrilous attack was mounted by Mr Soli Sorabjee on the law ministry in a letter he addressed to my law secretary. Contemporaneously, the letter got leaked to the press. Correspondence ensued and consists of:

- i) AG's letter to law secretary dated 10.2.2000.
- ii) My letter dated 15.2.2000.
- iii) AG's letter dated 16.2.2000.
- iv) My letter of the same day.

Hinduja link & phone fee

The people of India and honourable members of both Houses are doubtless anxious about the progress of the Bofors investigation. I know the Hindujas. It is true that at one time out of sheer disgust, I had written to the then Prime Minister Shri Narasimha Rao that instead of corrupting witnesses, police officers, judges and polluting the whole judicial process in the country, it is better to pardon the accused — known and unknown — if some of the suspects are willing to make ex gratia payment of 10 times the amount said to have been disbursed as bribe. I am still of that view. To the best of my knowledge no serious investigation is taking place even now. But our principal law officer, the attorney-general of India, in a matter concerning the government of India and its financial interests and presumably for his usual fee had given a legal opinion to the Hindujas.

The attorney-general has a lot to explain how he decided to give this opinion to a party who has serious conflict of interest with the Union of India which he represents.

Huge bills for fees in the telecom matter (dispute between the government and private cellular operators over

licence fees) came from the attorney-general which ran into lakhs. This was on the basis that the matter was complicated. Surely, the attorney-general is expected to deal with complicated matters without charging fees. My ministry raised objection that these fees are not permissible under the rules. I was asked to amend the rules and I had put up a note on the file that the rules be amended.

A shocking illustration of the attorney-general's pliancy, to which I referred in my press statement the other day, is provided by the notifications which were issued in the pending case against Dr Jayalalitha. Notifications were issued on his advice transferring the cases from the normal courts to other courts more congenial to Dr Jayalalitha. I tendered my resignation. Ultimately, these notifications were declared ultra vires by the Supreme Court. It is, therefore, not difficult for honourable members to see that my being law minister is certainly not congenial to the attorney-general.

What went wrong with chief justice

The first problem arose only recently over the appointment of the chairman of (the) MRTTP Commission. I looked into the relevant Act and the rules and enquired about the existing practice. I was told that no consultation with the honourable chief justice was either essential or even required.

Rules framed under the Act required the new incumbent to be sworn to the office by the Chief Justice of India, for which a request was sent on June 12, 2000. The chief justice wrote a letter on June 14, 2000 to my honourable Prime Minister complaining that he had not been consulted.

The chief justice thinks that I am impertinent. Yes, I do not easily surrender the privilege of the executive merely to keep a chief justice happy and contented. If that is impertinence, so be it.

I would only request honourable members of this House to read my last two letters (not released) to the chief justice which have angered the chief justice. Both are dated July 20, 2000, only one day, in fact, a few hours, before the fateful



Ram Jethmalani addresses the press at his residence. (PTI)

WHY JETHMALANI QUIT

- In a letter to the law secretary, Soli Sorabjee mounted an attack on the ministry. It was leaked to the press.
- Sorabjee advised Hindujas in the Bofors case. Little progress has been made in the investigations.
- Sorabjee transferred cases against Jayalalitha to courts more congenial to her.
- Sorabjee was angry that his nominee for Centre's advocate was rejected by the law minister.
- Chief justice was upset that he was not consulted in the appointment of the monopolies commission chairman.
- Jethmalani heard rumours that the chief justice was trying to remove him. Went to chief justice's residence to iron out differences.
- But a magazine published a report on a land deal involving the chief justice's family.
- A file seeking sanction to prosecute the chief justice was pending before Jethmalani.
- On July 17, Jethmalani spoke to the chief justice for his version.
- Four days later, Supreme Court criticises the government in the Srikrishna Commission case.
- On July 22, Jethmalani resigns as law minister.

hearing which took place in the Supreme Court on Friday the 21st July, 2000. The observations of the chief justice in open court, which I protested, must be seen in the background of this unfortunate conflict. The mood of the honourable chief justice on the 21st July, 2000, is well contained in his two replies (contents not released), both dated July 21, 2000, to my two letters of the previous day. Throughout this controversy, the honourable Prime Minister had not either told me to surrender to the will of the chief justice nor had he disapproved of the stand taken by me.

The land deal

A magazine called *Kalchakra* published a startling and somewhat partially documented story of a huge fraud on the public

exchequer. This story, if true, showed how the subordinate judiciary had decreed, in favour of Dr (chief justice) Anand's wife and mother-in-law, a suit which had been barred by limitation for two decades. I did not know of this attack on Dr Anand's family and of course inferentially on Dr Anand himself.

One of my Cabinet colleagues, whom I do not wish to name, informed me that Dr Anand was very upset with me and, in fact, moves were on to drop me from the Cabinet. I have no evidence to prove that Dr Anand instigated these political moves. I called on him at his residence. I had a heart-to-heart talk with him. He admitted to me that he believed that I had encouraged this publication. I told him that the *Kalchakra* publisher has made allegations against me and there has been

a serious fight by correspondence between me and him and I have neither met the man nor cared to meet him. At the end of our meeting, Dr Anand assured me that he no longer entertains that grievance but he refused to tell me who had put this idea in his mind.

I made my own queries thereafter and came to know that this matter had come to the notice of the Committee on Judicial Accountability, of which I was, once upon a time, an active member and from which I resigned after I became minister. The documents in possession of this committee did not provide conclusive proof of Dr Anand's personal complicity in the highly questionable action of his family, the Madhya Pradesh government and the hapless subordinate judiciary. The facts, however, were questionable. I did what I could to

persuade the committee not to rake up this matter.

I was compelled to deal with this matter only a few days before my resignation.

On my return July 8, 2000, I asked my officials to trace out this document (petition seeking the chief justice's prosecution) and place it before me. On July 17, it was placed before me and was contained in an earlier file seeking sanction for prosecution in a case of a few years back, perhaps 1996, which I do not wish to dwell upon now.

This also led to placing of another file containing a reference from the office of the honourable President of India forwarding a representation on the subject governed by *Kalchakra*. I was duty-bound to deal with it.

On the morning of the 17th of July, I called up Dr Anand and told him that the President's Office had invited my attention to that old *Kalchakra* story and I wanted to put on record what he had told me earlier orally. I informed him that I had forgotten the details of the facts and would he be good enough to send me a typed sheet containing his version of the facts. Dr Anand told me that he will dictate it and see that the note reached me within a couple of days.

The final verdict

The propriety of the chief justice in making the observations which he did on July 20, 2000, is questionable case before the court about the non-implementation of Srikrishna report. I had made comments on that report on implementation. When I can know what observations been made I did not believe that the court was not apprised it should have been, by attorney-general that observation had nothing to do with the issue before the court.

Had the attorney-general done his duty the chief justice would not have himself delivered the observation that my government was not a "civilised government" and that "the notion of collective Cabinet responsibility seemed to be totally missing."

I believe that even the honourable Prime Minister may share my perception that his action to relieve me of my office was based on a carefully-orchestrated campaign unleashed against me.

Ruling coalition cornered as Opposition demands legal action

Jethmalani used secret papers, admits govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 27. — The government has conceded that Mr Ram Jethmalani used classified documents after resigning from the Cabinet, but could not convince the Opposition that legal action would be taken against the former law minister. An angry Opposition brought both Houses of Parliament to a virtual standstill today.

Mr Jethmalani's statement, which was not made in the Rajya Sabha yesterday, despite being listed, was not even mentioned in today's agenda paper. The Vice-President joined Opposition members in criticising the former minister's threat to reveal to the media the reasons for his resignation, unless he was allowed to make a statement in the House today.

Sharing the Opposition's view that the impression created was that Mr Jethmalani was seeking to "manipulate" the House, Mr Krishan Kant declared that the former minister had cast a reflection on "all of us". "This House, its Chairman, cannot be manipu-

'NOT ON WRONG SIDE'

NEW DELHI, July 27. — The government, it is believed, doesn't plan to prosecute Mr Ram Jethmalani over his use of "classified" documents in the statement he had been scheduled to make. A Union minister said Mr Jethmalani had not violated the Official Secrets Act by attaching copies of his correspondence with the Chief Justice of India and the Attorney-General to the draft statement. Even Mr Arun Jaitley reportedly did not write with certainty on the Rajya Sabha file that the documents supplied by Mr Jethmalani violated the OSA. He merely noted that the documents were taken out from confidential files marked "secret" and that the government was to ascertain the source of the leakage. — SNS (More reports on page 8)

lated," he asserted.

He said the law ministry had informed the Rajya Sabha secretariat that some of the 87 documents appended to Mr Jethmalani's 17-page draft explanation were officially classified as "secret" and "classified" and so could not be used in Parliament.

The secretariat had sought clarifications from the law ministry. Mr Kant also said that Mr Jethmalani had been told that his statement would have to be modified in accordance with the rules of procedure and conventions of the Rajya Sabha.

The Opposition, which took exception to Mr Jethmalani's threat, was not satisfied with the government's position. The law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, said: "Government shall inquire into the sources of the leakage of the documents and the consequences thereof." The Opposition insisted on an announcement that legal action would be started.

With the Opposition accusing Mr Jethmalani of action attracting provisions of criminal law, the former minister's proposed statement was put on the back burner. The Opposition said that was some-

thing the Chairman would have to decide.

The government found itself in a fix, particularly when it tried to place the onus of dealing with secret documents on the Chairman. The Opposition said it could not pass on the buck.

The issue was raised the moment the House met this morning. Mr Pranab Mukherjee (Congress) drew attention to the way Mr Jethmalani's explanation was not made yesterday despite being listed, and was dropped from today's agenda paper. He also referred to media reports this morning which suggested that the former minister was resorting to pressure tactics.

It was not possible to accept that Mr Jethmalani was unaware of the rules, Mr Mukherjee said, so it seemed to be a "clear case of manipulation". Mr Nilotpal Basu (CPI-M) was among members who supported Mr Mukherjee's view.

Opposition members, with Mr Kapil Sibal (Congress) taking

THE STATESMAN

28 JUL 2000

KRISHAN KANT ASKS FOR MODIFIED STATEMENT

Uproar in Parliament over Jethmalani's charges

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 27. The Government had a torrid time in Parliament today over the issues thrown up by Mr. Ram Jethmalani's exit from the Union Cabinet, as the Opposition blocked proceedings in both the Houses insisting that the Prime Minister clear the air. Noisy scenes were witnessed, leading to a premature adjournment, amid indications of a further disruption tomorrow.

Mr. Jethmalani's own statement was held back again today. The Rajya Sabha Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, directed him to modify it as in the opinion of the Law Ministry some of the annexures had been marked "secret and confidential". The ruling came after the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, told the House in the morning that the documents accompanying Mr. Jethmalani's statement would have to be looked into by the Ministry.

Meanwhile, citing media reports of Mr. Jethmalani's fulminations against the Chief Justice of India, Dr. A.S. Anand, and the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee, the Opposition in the Lok Sabha charged that a "confrontation" was brewing between the executive and the judiciary. Equally disturbing was that Mr. Jethmalani's allegations were purportedly based on documents that were confidential, the Opposition pointed out.

The Congress(I) led the onslaught, with its deputy leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, insisting that only a statement by the Prime Minister

would satisfy his party. Serious allegations against the Chief Justice and the Attorney-General had been made by someone who was the Law Minister till a few days ago and the House had a right to know the facts.

How were "secret documents" leaked to the media? What were the circumstances that led to Mr. Jethmalani's resignation? What was the Government's response to the developments? These were important issues and the Prime Minister must explain, he said.

'Judiciary, executive confrontation'

His party colleague, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, said the nation was witnessing a "strange spectacle" — the executive and the judiciary appearing to be engaged in a confrontation. The Prime Minister owed an explanation to the House — a point also made by the CPI(M)'s Mr. Basudeb Acharya and the AIADMK's Mr. P.H. Pandyan.

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, speaking amid interruptions, denied that there was any "confrontation". This was about all he could say as the Opposition virtually shouted him down saying "no, no" to the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi's appeal to let Mr. Mahajan speak.

Amid turmoil, the Speaker adjourned the House for 90 minutes — till 4 p.m. When it resumed, the Opposition was back on its feet and the House was adjourned for the day. In the morning, there was a nearly two-hour adjournment soon after question hour, when the

Opposition members collected in the aisle, saying they would not allow the House to function unless the Prime Minister clarified the Jethmalani affair.

Serious matter, says PM

In the Rajya Sabha, the Prime Minister intervened after the Congress(I) leaders, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Arjun Singh, pointed out that it was a "serious matter". Mr. Vajpayee said the Law Ministry would examine all the documents annexed by Mr. Jethmalani to his personal explanation submitted to the Chairman. "It is a serious matter. All these documents, whether they are secret or not, will have to be looked into. The Law Ministry will do it within an hour," he said.

The Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley's announcement an hour later, that his Ministry had examined the documents and it was now for the Chairman to give his ruling, led to a fresh round of protests.

The issue cropped up again later when Mr. Kapil Sibal demanded action against "a person" who was in possession of confidential documents. He was supported by the CPI(M)'s Mr. Nilotpal Basu.

However, the BJP leader, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, and the Shiv Sena's Mr. Sanjay Nirupam said the matter should be treated as closed after the Government conceded that some of the documents were confidential and promised further inquiries.

COURT: Barbs for CJI, A-G, PM spared with mild criticism

(Continued from page 1)

Confidentiality was "widely different from others, referring to colonial beliefs" as reflected in the Official Secrets Act.

Mr Jethmalani said he had "received communication" from the Rajya Sabha saying he could make a statement but not refer to higher authorities.

There were hard-hitting barbs at the Chief Justice of India and the Attorney-General, but Mr Jethmalani did not come out with a strong criticism of the Prime Minister or his government. He merely said he was "disappointed with the Prime Minister".

On the relationship between the judiciary and the executive, he said there have been a lot of complaints about the judiciary taking over functions that do not belong to it. He said he, as a Union minister, would not permit further infringement on the executive's powers. Mr Jethmalani said he would be betraying the people of India if he, as a Union minister, had bowed before the judiciary.

He said his relations with the Chief Justice were always very cordial, but there was friction about the appointment of the MRTP Commission chairman. He had chosen Mr Justice B M Lal, a retired Chief Justice of Patna High Court, and had apparently found that no consultation with the Chief Justice

of India was necessary. He said the Chief Justice had complained to the Prime Minister that he had not been consulted, quoting two Supreme Court judgments. Mr Vajpayee agreed with the Chief Justice.

Mr Jethmalani said he had found that the Chief Justice was usually not consulted and the only time such consultations had taken place was when a sitting judge was involved. But the Chief Justice stuck to his guns saying that the law minister had violated the spirit of the law. As Mr Jethmalani would have said to the Rajya Sabha: "I do not easily surrender the privilege of the executive merely to keep a Chief Justice happy and contented. If that is impertinence, so be it."

Mr Jethmalani also mentioned a story in a magazine about a questionable land deal where members of the Chief Justice's family were involved. He said Rashtrapati Bhavan had invited his attention and also, that a veteran Gandhian, Ms Usha Mehta, had brought to his notice a petition seeking the prosecution of Mr Justice Anand. He mentioned that shortly afterwards, the Chief Justice had observed that the NDA government was not a civilised one.

Mr Jethmalani criticised Mr Soli Sorabjee saying that the latter failed to defend the government when

were made. He also took Mr Sorabjee to task for neglecting his duty in the Thackeray episode.

"I was advising the government of Maharashtra not to take a stupid step. The Prime Minister had said everything should be done (within the constitutional framework) to help an ally," he said. Mr Jethmalani said the Attorney-General presumably had not read the brief before he went to court.

Mr Jethmalani said Mr Sorabjee had given legal opinion to the Hinduja, who were involved in Bofors, even when he was a government servant. He also mentioned the huge bills for fees in the telecom scam issues.

"Surely, the A-G is expected to deal with complicated matters without charging fees. My ministry raised objections that these fees are not permissible under the rules... I believe that Mr Soli Sorabjee had never been comfortable with me as law minister," he wrote in his undelivered speech to the Rajya Sabha. He also suggested links between Mr Sorabjee and Ms Jayalalitha in the speech.

Mr Jethmalani also defended himself vis-a-vis the M/S Shoes case. He said he had asked the CBI chief to take notice of allegations of corruption against him, and if necessary to search his belongings and arrest him.

copies of the letter to Dr Trinath Mishra.

Hinduja links: Mr Jethmalani today spoke of his links with the Hinduja brothers, who may be involved in the Bofors pay-offs case.

He told reporters that he knew the Hinduja as they came from his hometown and were distantly related to him. He said people had insinuated that he was trying to help them. He said that his friend, Cushrow Irani, (editor-in-chief of **The Statesman**) had 'published' a story in **The Statesman**. In his undelivered speech to the Rajya Sabha, a copy of which was made available he had said: "Time and again, some inspired members of the public keep insinuating that I am trying to help them (The Hinduja). Latest illustration is CR Irani's writing in **The Statesman**."

Mr Jethmalani said he had written to Mr PV Narasimha Rao, saying that "instead of corrupting witnesses, police officers, judges and polluting the whole judicial process in the country, it is better to pardon the accused known and unknown if some of the suspects are willing to make ex-gratia payment of ten times the amount said to have been dismissed as bribe".

Mr Jethmalani added that he still believed this as "no serious investigation is taking place".

Let them take
me to court

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 27. — Mr Ram Jethmalani today dared prosecution for placing "secret" documents before the Rajya Sabha secretariat, while expressing his disappointment with the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"Let them prosecute me," he said when asked whether he should have leaked confidential documents. "There is no confidentiality of my own documents... It was my personal correspondence," the former law minister told reporters today, adding that he would challenge anyone to go to court on the issue.

He also said his sense of con

■ See COURT: page 8

THE STATESMAN

28 JUL 2000

Jethmalani questions Sorabjee's role

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 27. The former Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, who was dropped from the Cabinet last week, today launched a tirade against the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee, and the Chief Justice of India, Dr. A.S. Anand.

Soon after he was denied permission to make a statement in the Rajya Sabha, Mr. Jethmalani addressed a press conference and released a 17-page statement he had prepared for reading in Parliament giving the reasons for his resignation. But he did not make public the secret and confidential documents which he had enclosed with the statement presented to the Rajya Sabha Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant.

Mr. Jethmalani, who was upset at the happenings in the Rajya Sabha when he was asked to modify his statement, alleged that Mr. Sorabjee tendered advice to the Hindujas, accused in the Bofors case, when the CBI was pursuing the matter. "The AG has a lot to explain how he decided to give his opinion to a party who has a serious conflict of interest with the Union of India which he represents."

Mr. Jethmalani was also critical of the Attorney-General giving advice on telecom transactions "when he has no business" to tender advice on matters of policy. "His (AG's) opinions on policy matters are freely taken and even used as if they form Consti-



The former Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

tutional advice from him." Huge bills for fees, which ran into lakhs, in telecom matters came from the Attorney-General.

Mr. Jethmalani said a "shocking illustration" of the Attorney-General's "pliancy" was his role in the notification issued by the Centre transferring corruption cases against the AIADMK supremo, Ms. Jayalalitha, and others

from special courts to normal courts, which was more agreeable to her. Ultimately the Supreme Court quashed this notification. Mr. Jethmalani said the "AG should go for his role in all these matters".

On his relationship with Dr. Anand, Mr. Jethmalani said "except for a misunderstanding, my relations with the CJI have been

extremely cordial". He maintained that in the appointment of Mr. B.M. Lal, retired Chief Justice of the Patna High Court, as Chairman of the MRTP Commission, he did not consult the CJI as he was told that no consultation was "essential or required".

But the CJI complained to the Prime Minister that his views were not sought. Mr. Jethmalani said he explained to the CJI that when a retired judge was appointed no consultation was necessary. "This seems to have offended the CJI's dignity... I thought that the matter was settled. But I thought wrongly. The CJI thinks that I am impertinent. Yes, I do not easily surrender the privilege of the executive merely to keep a Chief Justice happy and contented. If that is impertinence, so be it."

Referring to the sharp observations by the CJI during the hearing of the Srikrishna report case, Mr. Jethmalani maintained that his statement on the arrest of the Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Bal Thackeray, was not the subject matter before the Supreme Court. He was sore that Mr. Sorabjee had not properly explained this to the court. Asked whether he wanted the CJI also to resign, Mr. Jethmalani said: "Who am I to ask for his resignation? It is for the people to infer and decide."

PTI reports from London:

Dr. Justice Anand cut short his week-long visit to the U.K. and returned to Delhi today.

No violation of secrecy law: Page 13

THE HINDU

Govt rejects charges against CJI, Attorney-General

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 27. — The Vajpayee government today rejected Mr Ram Jethmalani's charges against the Chief Justice of India, Mr AS Anand, and the Attorney-General, Mr Soli Sorabjee.

The Prime Minister's crisis managers have reportedly spoken to Mr Sorabjee and are satisfied with his explanation.

The government disagrees with Mr Jethmalani's perception on the Chief Justice and the Attorney-General, Mr Arun Jaitley, said. "This was not the way to run government, by pit-

ting one institution against the other," he said.

Some other Union ministers described the charges as "frivolous", saying these were small issues that could have been avoided. One of them said Mr Jethmalani had been talking nonsense and was aware that the Chief Justice wouldn't reply to his charges.

"Should the law minister take offence if the CJI says he should have been consulted on the appointment of the chairman of the MRTP Commission?" he asked. Particularly, when Mr Justice Anand had cited convention, rather than legal position.

The minister also observed that the Attorney-General, Mr Soli Sorabjee, had taken the then law minister's permission, in writing, before giving legal advice to a power company, for which he charged a fee.

Trying to link Mr Sorabjee with the Bofors case was a complete lie on Mr Jethmalani's part, he asserted. In the telecom case, Mr Sorabjee gave a written opinion. Altogether, the Attorney-General charged Rs 4.71 lakh for 18 appearances, six conferences and affidavits.

This was half of what Mr Jethmalani got for one case, he pointed out.

THE STATESMAN

28 JUL 2000

Jethmalani hits out at Vajpayee

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 28. — The former Union law minister, Mr Ram Jethmalani, who was till yesterday careful not to be critical of the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, today demonstrated that the restraint was over.

Mr Jethmalani said it was the Prime Minister's right "to get rid of me", but clarified that he did not share Mr Vajpayee's perception. "Your perception prevails for you. My perception for me. Finally it is the perception of the people that will prevail at the next election," he said.

He asserted that he could not have been silent as "silence is fatal to democracy when some corruption has taken place". He said the Prime Minister was wrong to say that he tried to restrain him. "I am sorry. I don't know when he tried to restrain me."

Mr Jethmalani was sarcastic about Mr Vajpayee's statement that the former law minister had been asked to resign to remove the imbalances that were sought to be created between the judiciary and the executive.

The government was trying to patch up with the judiciary by making one more surrender to it, he said. "The situation is such that if you want to have cosy relations with the judiciary, you have to surrender," he said.

"I was just preventing another encroachment by the judiciary on the executive's domain," Mr Jethmalani said, referring to Chief Justice AS Anand's observation that he should have been consulted on the appointment of the chairman of the MRTTP Commission.

The CJJ wants a new convention, I refused in order to protect the Executive. Let them surrender if they want," he said.

The former law minister scoffed at Mr Vajpayee ordering an inquiry into the leakage of secret documents by him. There was no need for an inquiry "when I myself said that I got those documents photocopied for use later".

Yesterday, Mr Jethmalani had not used strong words against the Prime Minister, reserving his most pointed barbs for the Chief Justice and Attorney-General.

Some parliamentary managers of the government are reportedly happy that Mr Jethmalani is going abroad by the weekend and the government would not have to put up with his barbs for a while.

Mr Jethmalani said his grandson is getting married in Detroit and the world Sindhi conference is slated for 3 August in the United States of America.

THE STATESMAN

29 JUL 2000

Marching orders to 2 officials

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, JULY 28. Even as the Government has ordered an inquiry into the leakage of certain classified and privileged documents in the possession of the Law Ministry, it issued marching orders on Thursday night to the former Personal Secretary to Mr. Ram Jethmalani and the Officer on Special Duty. When members in the Rajya Sabha complained that Mr. Jethmalani had annexed certain secret and confidential documents along with his statement given to the Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, the Government assured them that it would conduct an inquiry.

As a first step, Mr. V.K. Garg, PS to Mr. Jethmalani, and Mr. K. Mahesh, OSD, were asked to leave the premises of the Law Ministry and told that they would not be allowed to touch or remove any of the papers. While Mr. Garg belonged to the Indian Revenue Service, Mr. Mahesh belonged to the Delhi and Andaman Nicobar Island Civil Service.

According to Law Ministry sources, the two officials allegedly tried to remove some secret papers and also take away the computer installed in the former Minister's room. It was at this juncture that

they were asked to leave on a "as is where is condition". The sources said there was circumstantial evidence pointing out that the two officials had breached the service code by assisting the former Minister lay hands on certain classified and privileged documents. The Government also obtained information that the two had openly assisted Mr. Jethmalani at his residence in preparing his statement to the Rajya Sabha which was later given to mediapersons.

There is also some suspicion that they had parted with some more documents to Mr. Jethmalani, which he was expected to use at a later date selectively and sparingly. Therefore as a damage control exercise they were given marching orders and they had to wait for fresh postings, sources added.

UNI reports:

The Minister for Law and Justice, Mr. Arun Jaitley, said the chief vigilance officer of the legal department in the Ministry would investigate the leakage of classified and secret documents relating to the controversy involving Mr. Jethmalani.

The Government would decide on further action in the matter after the inquiry report was submitted, he added.

THE HINDU

29 JUL 2000

PROBE ORDERED INTO LEAKAGE OF DOCUMENTS

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Jethmalani had to go for the sake of harmony: PM

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By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 28. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today asserted the only reason he asked Mr. Ram Jethmalani to resign from the Union Cabinet was because his Government was committed to "promoting a harmonious relationship between different wings of the State". Mr. Vajpayee also dissociated himself and his Government with the charges made by the former Law Minister against the Chief Justice of India, Dr. A.S. Anand, and the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee.

"We completely disagree with his perceptions of the facts," Mr. Vajpayee said in a statement placed before both Houses of Parliament. While in the Lok Sabha a dissatisfied Congress(I) contingent walked out, in the Rajya Sabha the Opposition provoked Mr. Vajpayee to take the high road.

Rising to clarify the points raised by the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, the Prime Minister said he had to ask Mr. Jethmalani to leave the Cabinet because it "was my responsibility to have a harmonious relationship between the Executive and the Judiciary". He regretted that Mr. Jethmalani did not practise the art of reticence, and that he was often counselled to exercise restraint when speaking out. However, Mr. Jethmalani was not prepared to listen to this counsel of restraint, and had to be sacked when his loquaciousness crossed the threshold.

Though the Prime Minister, and earlier the Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, spoke out in defence of the Attorney-General, there was a tinge of disapproval in Mr. Vajpayee's observation that Mr. Sorabjee too was not entirely amenable to restraint and had insisted on his right to defend him-

self against the charges levelled by Mr. Jethmalani.

The Prime Minister also announced that an inquiry had been instituted on how certain "secret" documents got leaked, but noted the irony that while the Government had only a few days ago introduced a right to information bill, it was now compelled to invoke the "secrecy" principle.

While Mr. Vajpayee was explicitly disapproving of Mr. Jethmalani's conduct in levelling charges against Dr. Anand and Mr. Sorabjee, he did give a clean chit to his former Law Minister in the matter of the "M.S. Shoes" scandal. He read out portions from the "opinion" rendered by Mr. Sorabjee to the effect that even he had not cast any aspersions on Mr. Jethmalani's integrity; however, the question of how certain official documents vis-a-vis the "M.S. Shoes" issue were made available (which were cited against the

Government) was under inquiry.

Instead of getting involved in details, Mr. Vajpayee preferred to state the larger Constitutional issues, and asserted that he would not like to be grilled on the communication between him and his Ministerial colleagues; nor would he be denied the right to choose or sack his Ministerial team. And, for good measure, he used the occasion to state that he had not acted under pressure (in seeking Mr. Jethmalani's resignation). "The day I do that you may not find me in Parliament."

Earlier, Mr. Jaitley mounted a spirited defence of Mr. Sorabjee and noted, "There is absolutely no violation of principles, propriety, conventions or practices" in his giving advice to a private party. (Mr. Jethmalani had raised the matter of Mr. Sorabjee giving legal opinion to "the Hinduja National Power Corporation" on counter-guarantees.)

Whereas the Opposition benches sought to contend that because Mr. Sorabjee had given legal advice to the Hinduja Brothers it could help them slow down the CBI probe into the Bofors case, Mr. Vajpayee gave his Government a certificate of good intentions. He asserted that there was no pressure on the CBI to slow down the Bofors probe but the problem was that since the Hinduja Brothers had changed their citizenship status, they were refusing to cooperate with the probe.

The Congress(I)'s tactics were somewhat baffling. For some time it appeared that Mr. Kapil Sibal and Mr. Jaitley were using the floor of the Rajya Sabha to carry on their professional rivalry. Though Mr. Sibal and Mr. Hansraj Bhardwaj sought to find fault with Mr. Sorabjee's conduct, the Congress(I) did not respond to Mr. Vajpayee's challenge to bring a motion (demanding Mr. Sorabjee's presence in the House to explain his conduct.)

THE HINDU

29 JUL 2000

New agricultural policy tabled

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 28

THE GOVERNMENT today announced the new National Agricultural Policy envisaging more than four per cent annual growth rate. The 'rainbow revolution', it promises, would cover all aspects of the farm sector.

The policy is the outcome of several drafts and discussions held over the past decade. Tabled in both Houses of Parliament today by Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar, the policy document talks about increased private sector participation through contract farming and land-leasing arrangements. It also emphasises price protection for farmers to safeguard their interests amid removal of quantitative restrictions on import of agriculture produce.

Addressing a Press conference here, Mr Kumar ruled out imposition of taxes on farmers or any cuts in subsidies. "Agriculture has become an increasingly unrewarding profession and corrective measures are the need of the hour. This policy will help the farm sector to meet the challenges of economic liberalisation and form the basis of an action plan for agricul-

'Rainbow Revolution'

- Over 4 per cent annual growth rate.
- Greater private sector participation through contract farming.
- Price protection for farmers.
- National agricultural insurance scheme to be launched.
- Dismantling of restrictions on movement of agricultural commodities throughout the country.

tural growth," he said.

A major highlight of the new policy is promotion of private sector participation through contract farming and land leasing arrangements to allow accelerated technology transfer, capital inflow and assured markets for crop production, especially of oilseeds, cotton and horticultural crops. Lease markets will be developed for increasing the size of holdings, and legal provisions will be made for giving private land on lease for cultivation and agro-business.

While stating that the farmers would remain out of the ambit of taxes, the policy said the

farmers would be exempted from payment of capital gains tax on compulsory acquisition of agricultural land. On the tax structure, the policy paper said the structure of taxes on food-grains and other commercial crops would be reviewed and rationalised.

The policy takes into view the pressures on Indian farmers in view of the dismantling of quantitative restrictions on imports as per the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreement on agriculture. It has, therefore, recommended formulation of commodity-wise strategies and arrangements to protect farmers from adverse impact of undue price fluctuations in the world market and promote exports.

It aims to achieve sustainable development of agriculture, create gainful employment on a self-sustaining basis in rural areas and raise the farming communities' standards of living.

According to the document, new plant varieties will be protected through a legislation to encourage research and breeding of new varieties, particularly in the private sector.

Updating of land records while carrying out consolidation of land holdings in the entire country is another objective.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

PARLEYS WITH HIZBUL WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS?

Farooq confers with PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 29. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, today called on the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee and presumably learnt for himself the kind of dialogue that was proposed to be undertaken with the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM), the militant outfit that had only a few days ago announced a three-month unilateral ceasefire.

Dr. Abdullah, who had been kept informed by the Vajpayee Government all along about the

various steps towards a dialogue and peace, informed the Prime Minister about the discussion he had with various Chief Ministers on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly's "autonomy" resolution.

On Friday evening, the Union Government had invited the Hiz-

Operation suspended: Page 11

bul Mujahideen to surface and get in touch with the Home Secretary. The Government formulation took care to avoid any mention of talks being held within the framework of the Indian Constitution.

The expectation, here and in Srinagar, is that a formal contact could come about soon and that the Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, could be traveling to Srinagar next week.

The Army in Srinagar had also formulated its initial response to the Hizbul Mujahideen offer. The para-military forces would be reciprocating the HM's response, without diluting vigilance on the border against infiltration or exfiltration.

It has been noted here that the All Party Hurriyat Conference leadership expectedly chose to

emphasize the deliberate vagueness in the Union Government's offer of talks with the HM leadership. The APHC is now prepared to welcome the possibility of talks between the Centre and the militant outfit(s), without any pre-conditions.

The Centre's willingness to enter into a dialogue with any militant group was also indicated by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, in Chennai today. But, curiously enough, the BJP leadership from Jammu and Kashmir was raising a din about the "autonomy".

The Union minister of State for Civil Aviation, Mr. Chiman Lal Gupta, in fact led a delegation of BJP MLAs from Jammu and Kashmir to the Prime Minister. "There are no talks being held with the State Chief Minister on the autonomy issue and the Union Cabinet stands by its July 4 decision of rejecting the proposal outright," Mr. Gupta said after his meeting with the Prime Minister. In fact, the Minister claimed that Mr. Vajpayee had assured him that "no talks would be held on autonomy".

Mr. Gupta, who represents the Jammu region sentiments, also advised "caution" in dealing with the Hizbul Mujahideen. "Every step in this direction should be taken with utmost care, keeping the past history of the neighbouring nation in mind," he advised.

Mr. Gupta was not alone in striking a discordant note. The party president, Mr. Kushbhau Thakre, was quoted as dismissing the notion of "autonomy" unacceptable and that the people would never agree to any "secessionism".

No role in truce offer: Pak.

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JULY 29. Pakistan today maintained that it will be to the benefit and advantage of the entire region and the world if India responded positively to the ceasefire announcement made by the Hizbul Mujahideen. At a news conference on 'questions about developments relating to the struggle of the Kashmiri people', a Pakistani Foreign Office spokesman said that India did not have to wait for any opportunity to respond positively to the "aspirations of Kashmiris and allow them their right to self-determination". There was no reference to the Hizbul offer in the one-page written statement read out by the spokesman.

He said Pakistan favoured the resumption of dialogue with India and the position of Pakistan was clear. "We have stated this on several occasions and at various levels." He said Pakistan had consistently pursued a negotiated solution in accordance with the United Nations decisions.

The statement said Pakistan recognised the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) as the true representative of the Kashmiris and endorsed its demand for involvement in any Indo-Pak dialogue on Kashmir.

"Pakistan is closely following events since the Indian decision to release the APHC leaders, which

was a positive development. Since then, the APHC leadership has maintained unity of response to Indian contacts with individual APHC leaders. They have maintained a firm position on the principles of their legitimate struggle for self-determination, which is fully supported by Pakistan," it said.

It noted the observations by the Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharaff, while addressing the envoys conference two days ago reaffirming Pakistan's resolve to support the 'freedom struggle of Kashmiri people under all circumstances' and centrality of the Kashmiri issue to peace and security of the region.

Asked about the ceasefire by the Indian forces, the spokesman said "we do not know the ground situation and therefore we are not in a position to comment". He denied any decision by Pakistan to observe ceasefire on the Line of Control. He said Pakistan did not have any role in the Hizbul ceasefire and maintained that his country did not exercise any control over 'freedom-fighters'.

The spokesman said Pakistan Government was not aware of any TRACK II endeavour which culminated in the latest developments in Kashmir. Asked about media reports on involvement of some prominent Pakistanis in U.S., the spokesman said that there could be individual efforts.

THE HINDU

30 JUL 2000

PM buys peace with President

OUR BUREAU

June 3: The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has bought peace with Rashtrapati Bhavan with a string of important appointments meant to please President K.R. Narayanan.

Beneficiaries of the peace package include his daughter, an Indian Foreign Service (IFS) officer, the President's secretary, Gopal Gandhi, and a judge who will potentially be the first Dalit chief justice of India.

Some of the appointments have been announced while others are in the pipeline. They have caused severe heartburn and resentment within New Delhi's establishment.

But sources in the BJP, on condition of anonymity, justified the expedient choices on the ground that "in addition to a coalition Cabinet, we now have a coalition with the President as well. In coalition politics, it is necessary to parcel out patronage. The President is no exception."

The first cause of annoyance — in the foreign service — is the appointment of the President's daughter, Chitra Mohan. A middle-level IFS officer of the 1978 batch, she has been named ambassador to Sweden.

In Stockholm, she will succeed a string of secretaries who have held the job, including the incumbent, Sushil Dubey, her senior by 14 years. Dubey is due to retire shortly.

Chitra Mohan's last posting abroad was as a junior first secretary in the Indian embassy in Washington.

She has not only not headed any mission or post before, she has not even had any responsibility at a senior or even middle level in any Indian embassy or in the ministry of external affairs (MEA).

Since her return from Washington, Chitra Mohan was given lightweight jobs since she was partly engaged in ceremonial duties at Rashtrapati Bhavan along with her mother, First Lady Usha Narayanan. She has frequently travelled with the President, cre-



K.R. Narayanan presents a bouquet to A.B. Vajpayee. (A PTI file picture)

ating protocol problems. While travelling abroad, she has always been ranked higher than her IFS seniors in the presidential entourage by virtue of being the President's daughter, though as a serving officer she was usually the junior most on the VVIP aircraft.

In recent years, she has worked mainly out of the Nehru Memorial Museum on what is called a policy planning job for MEA in view of her inability, owing to responsibilities in Rash-

trapati Bhavan, to cope with the demands of a post in South Block.

If Chitra Mohan's appointment was not difficult for the PMO to push through, this was not the case with the choice of Gopal Gandhi, the President's secretary, as high commissioner to Colombo.

Sri Lanka, strategic to Indian foreign policy even in normal times, has become crucial in view of the latest resurgence of Tamil Tiger activity.

Traditionally, MEA has posted its senior most diplomat after the foreign secretary or someone with considerable experience as envoy in neighbouring countries as high commissioner to Colombo. The only exception was the incumbent, Shiv Shanker Menon, but his outstanding reputation and his record of handling China stood him in good stead.

Among the previous high commissioners in Colombo are the formidable J.N. Dixit, N.N. Jha,

who was the senior most career diplomat when Dixit became foreign secretary, and N. Dayal, who was until recently the senior most secretary in South Block before being sent as high commissioner to London.

Gopal Gandhi, who resigned from the IAS a few years ago, has little diplomatic experience. He headed the Nehru Centre in London in the early 1990s and was briefly high commissioner to South Africa, a job offered to him

since he is Mahatma Gandhi's grandson.

IFS officers with experience of Colombo had set eyes on the high commissioner's job there at this important time.

But, apart from the IFS, the PMO had to placate the BJP's ally, the DMK, which wanted a South Indian with understanding of Sri Lanka and sensitivity towards the problems there to get the Colombo job.

Both Menon and Dixit were from Kerala. So were several previous high commissioners such as Thomas Abraham and K.P. Kesava Menon. In trying to mollify the DMK, the PMO argued that Gopal Gandhi, being the grandson of C. Rajagopalachari, India's first governor-general, was half-Tamilian.

The argument did not wash with the Tamil Nadu chief minister, but in the end M. Karunanidhi appears to have accepted that it was necessary for the National Democratic Alliance to have a coalition with the President as well.

The third appointment where the government appears to have acted as the President would like it to do is of K.G. Balakrishnan as Supreme Court judge. Before being appointed to the Supreme Court, the swearing-in is yet to take place. Balakrishnan was chief justice of Madras High Court.

Balakrishnan, 58, will have a seven-year run at the Supreme Court and could become its first chief justice with a Dalit background.

After the retirement of Justice K. Ramaswamy, also a Dalit, President Narayanan had despatched a note to then Chief Justice M.M. Pundhri that there were meritorious candidates among SC/STs also who should be considered for the Supreme Court.

The incident kicked up a controversy which persisted after Pundhri retired. Chief Justice A.S. Anand openly declared during the golden jubilee celebrations of the Indian judiciary that merit alone should matter in the appointment of Supreme Court and high court judges.

Atal signal to silence DMK

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, June 7: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has summoned the senior DMK minister, Murasoli Maran, to tomorrow's Cabinet Committee on Security meeting on Sri Lanka in an attempt to send out the signal that the party should keep its own views under wraps.

Under fire from the Opposition parties for not reining in Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi, the Prime Minister today asserted that the DMK leader's remarks calling for Sri Lanka's division were "his personal views" and not that of the National Democratic Alliance government.

Karunanidhi had kicked up a storm on Saturday by suggesting that Sri Lanka follow Czechoslovakia's example and split into two nations to end the ethnic war without further bloodshed.

Vajpayee, who returned to Delhi today from a holiday in Manali, made it clear that there has been no shift in India's policy on Sri Lanka. Karunanidhi's remarks on Sri Lanka were his "personal views or at the most of his party, but certainly not the views of the ruling NDA which is committed to the common agenda", the Prime Minister told reporters at the New Delhi airport.

Though foreign ministry spokesman R.S. Jassal had earlier clarified the government's stand vis-à-vis Karunanidhi's com-

ment, the Prime Minister's statement will reassure the Chandrika Kumaratunga government in Colombo that Delhi continues to believe that a solution has to be found within the framework of the island-nation's constitution.

"There is no change in India's position on Sri Lanka. We are for a peaceful settlement of the ethnic strife within the framework of Sri Lankan unity and territorial integrity," Vajpayee said.

By asking Maran to join the security committee meeting tomorrow, the Prime Minister is trying to make it clear to the DMK that it should refrain from making statements, irrespective of whether they had the support of some sections in Tamil Nadu, that went against the nation's interest and put India in an embarrassing position.

Senior officials in South Block admitted that the remarks made by the DMK leader were aimed at appeasing hardliners within and outside the party who were sympathetic to the Tamil Eelam cause.

But being an important coalition partner, Karunanidhi should desist from making any public statement that contradicted India's stated position, the officials added.

Miffed at the remark, Sri Lanka's media minister has replied that India, too, should follow the Czechoslovakia example to take care of the aspirations of different ethnic groups in the country who want to secede.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 JUN 2000

Paswan, Sinha spar over free phone

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 7: Union finance minister Yashwant Sinha and communications minister Ram Vilas Paswan seem to be on a collision course over free telephones for telecom employees.

Even as Paswan today labelled the media as anti-poor for criticising his move, Sinha said "proper user charges should be paid by everyone".

Participating in an online chat show, Sinha said: "I entirely agree that proper user charges should

be paid by everyone. Not only VIPs when not in office, but by everyone when in office, too. And it should apply not merely to telephones and bungalows, but also to other facilities, like water and electricity."

In a bid to defend his scheme, Paswan blamed the media for being insensitive to "issues related to the poor and downtrodden". Free telephone facility, already being availed by class I and II employees, was now being extended to class III and IV employees, said Paswan. He pointed out that all re-

tired telecom employees were already availing of the free phone facility.

Paswan also said Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Limited (MTNL) had recently decided to grant service telephone facility to its employees and the proposed move would provide a parity between MTNL and telecom employees.

His announcement spurred Indian Oil employees today to demand free LPG gas connections and supply as a work incentive.

Addressing the first meeting of the National Telecom Advisory Committee and National Telephone Services Committee, Paswan said the issue was blown out of proportion. The move was designed to boost the morale of employees, especially when the Department of Telecom Services is expected to be corporatised in the next six months, he said.

Earlier this week, the telecom commission, including secretaries in the ministries of finance, industry and information technology, approved the contractual

free phones to employees of the Department of Telecom and Telecom Services at an annual loss of up to Rs 100 crore.

Sources said the department has decided that these phones would be private and would not be provided with STD facility.

Sources in DoT said the department is set to lose Rs 101.8 crore by way of free installation and waiver of rentals and on interest on security deposit. Moreover, the waiver on rentals will be a further blow to the coffers.



Ram Vilas Paswan

THE TELEGRAPH

8 JUN 2007

PM okays Paswan 'bonanza'

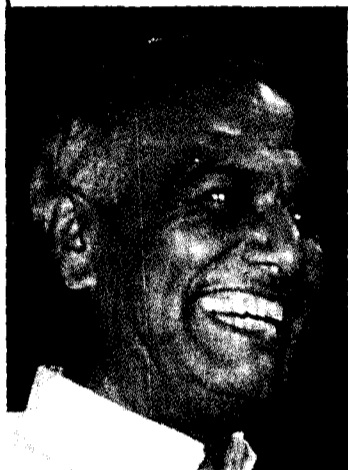
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By Alok Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, JUNE 10. A crucial meeting at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) today approved the controversial "free-telephone bonanza package" announced by the Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, for the serving employees of the Department of Telecom (DoT) and the Department of Telecom Services (DTS).

However, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, succeeded in pruning the facility of free telephone calls to the normal 150 in two months as in the case of the general subscribers. Mr. Sinha also managed to extract a firm commitment from the Communications Ministry that corporatisation of the DoT would be done by October 1.

Consequently, the DoT and DTS employees will now be eligible for rent-free telephones, but without the extra free calls which had earlier been pegged at 250. Also, there would be no installation charges or charge for the instrument. Another aspect of the package is that the bonus for the DoT and DTS employees for 1999-2000 would be frozen at 70 days wages against 73 sought by the employees. Finally, a crucial element of the package is that the DoT and DTS employees would cooperate in the corporatisation process and a new corporate entity called Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (and not India Telecom as proposed earlier) would be launched on October 1, 2000.

The one-and-half hour meeting



Yashwant Sinha

today was convened by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to sort out the differences between the Communications Minister and the Finance Minister who had sent an internal note to the PMO on this issue. However, the Finance Minister's case turned weak against the argument by the Communications Ministry that the package would be financed through the internal resources of the Ministry and no additional grants would be sought from the Finance Ministry.

Talking to presspersons, Mr. Paswan said that today's meeting had more or less approved the package cleared by the Telecom Commission. The employees' federation had wanted rent-free telephones with 250 free calls, bonus equivalent to 73 days wages



Ram Vilas Paswan

and a debate and discussion on the corporatisation process. In return, the Telecom Commission proposed rent-free telephones with 250 free calls, bonus for 70 days wages only and co-operation in the corporatisation process. This package has more or less been approved today, but for the reduction in the number of free calls, the Minister said.

'Package to cost Rs. 68 cr. only'

Mr. Paswan maintained that the cost of this package for the employees would be Rs. 68 crores a year only and not Rs. 1,200 crores as put out by various sources. He claimed that while it did cost the DoT Rs. 20,000 to provide a telephone connection, this huge amount was not charged from the general subscribers. Similarly, the

employees would also not be charged this amount and would be given connections from the lines already laid or planned to be laid by the DoT in the normal course of the year. As for the registration charges, he said, these were notional in any case for the general subscribers, as the amount was adjusted in the bill subsequently.

Secondly, with the DoT becoming a corporate entity by October 1 this year, all the existing DoT employees would be deemed to have retired from the department, which in any case makes them entitled to free telephone facilities as per the existing norms.

Apart from the Prime Minister and the two Ministers, today's meeting was attended by the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, and the Secretary in the PMO, Mr. N. K. Singh. Later, in the presence of the two Ministers, Mr. Mishra briefed the press. He said the decision of the Telecom Commission to provide rent-free telephone to the employees of the DoT and DTS was "a negotiated package arrived at after careful deliberation. The package comprises bonus being frozen at 70 days for 1999-2000, facilitate corporatisation and providing free rentals for telephones, instead of extra free calls. It was also decided to launch the corporate entity to be called Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited on October 1, 2000. This overall package was considered reasonable and acceptable," Mr. Mishra said.

11 JUN 2000

11 JUN 2000

CRITICISM OF ECONOMIC POLICIES

PM to meet RSS chief, explain compulsions

By Harish Khare

9-25-2006

NEW DELHI, JUNE 16. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is believed to be thinking of engaging the RSS leadership in a dialogue on the question of the Sangh Parivar's reservations on the NDA Government's economic policies.

A serious note has been taken of the harsh indictment by the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) of the Government's recent decisions, and it is felt the time has come to make the Parivar's leadership understand and appreciate the official thinking and compulsions.

It is believed that the Prime Minister is likely to have "a serious talk" with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) chief, Mr. K.S. Sudershan. The assumption is that the SJM could not have gathered courage to criticise the Government harshly without encouragement from the RSS establishment.

In a statement on Thursday, the SJM had criticised the decision to allow 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) in business to business e-commerce as "a virtual sell-out of a high value national potential to the prejudice of emerging Indian corporates in e-commerce". It is the SJM's view that "some powerful lobbies have succeeded in securing this decision. There appears to be no other acceptable explanation for it."

What has not been particularly appreciated is the charge against the bureaucracy, "sections of which have lost their national moorings".

The SJM has been equally critical of the decision to remove the cap of Rs. 1,500 crores for 100 per cent automatic FDI in power projects.

This criticism has prompted thinking at the highest level that things need to be sorted out with the RSS top brass. In this face-off, the Prime Minister will have the full backing of his senior Ministerial

HQ-1 *17/6*

colleagues such as the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, and the Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Jaswant Singh. Also, Mr. Vajpayee is confident of the full support of the BJP hierarchy, including the party president, Mr. Kushabhau Thakre, and the vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy.

Under pressure from the Parivar quarters, the Government, against its inclination, has allowed a reopening of the debate on iodised salt. This was seen a small price to pay if it could buy peace with the Parivar.

The SJM's latest criticism has prompted a judgment at the highest level that it would be not possible to buy lasting peace with it and the RSS. It is felt that the Parivar leadership had come to posit a clash of opposite approaches between its thinking and that of the government.

For example, in his statement, the national joint convenor of the SJM, Mr. S. Gurumurthy, says, "What worries the SJM is the continuation of the national drift under the NDA Government — the drift that began with the previous Governments, of both the Congress(I) and the United Front. The present announcement is part of this drift. The fits-like and diverse policy announcements by different Ministries about the entry of FDI, as well as the sectoral caps for it, bring out not any strategic thinking about the economy as a whole, but the unwholesomeness, incoherence and even mindlessness in policy-making."

On its part, the Vajpayee Government is proceeding on the assumption that there is no alternative but to invite FDI to enhance production; otherwise, the country would simply have to buy its requirements from abroad. Time, in other words, has come to tell the noisy fraternity to fall in line.

SJM appeals to PM Page 13

THE HINDU

17 JUN 2006

Cabinet committee will meet to finalise privatisation policy

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The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: A big push towards privatisation is in the offing. The cabinet committee on disinvestment (CCD) will hold a crucial meeting on June 23 to finalise a clear-cut roadmap on the sale of government equity in public sector enterprises (PSEs) for the next 18 months. The meeting is expected to be decisive, removing roadblocks and confusion within the government.

Aimed at mopping up proceeds in excess of Rs 25,000 crore, the exercise will involve the selection of specific PSEs for the strategic sale of equities in bulk along with the transfer of management control and policy decisions on methods to be adopted for expeditious divestment as proposed by the department of disinvestment (DoD).

Officials said on Friday that the roadmap was essentially meant to speed up the implementation of the government's disinvestment (privatisation) policy.

The policy, as has been unambiguously enunciated in the finance minister's budget speech this year, is to bring down government holdings in PSEs, on an average to 26 per cent. The selection of PSEs will be made from 58 cases already

examined by the disinvestment commission. As many as 10 to 15 PSUs will figure.

In addition to decisions already taken this year for the privatisation of Air-India, ITDC and HCL, the PSEs which will be included in the roadmap are MTNL, VSNL and petroleum refining and marketing companies.

In all these, government holdings will be brought down to 26 per cent through the bulk sale of equities.

Further dilution of government equity in India's largest car maker, Maruti— at present a 50:50 joint venture between the government and Suzuki Motor Company of Japan—is also slated to be discussed.

With the advent of a number of global car-makers in the Indian market, Maruti's market share is under pressure. The idea is to off-load the government's holding while the going is good.

There is still resistance within the government to some of the proposals going before the CCD. Petroleum minister Ram Naik is of the view that oil PSEs should be treated as "strategic" and the government should retain majority control. The overwhelming view in the government, however, is that pri-

vate companies have already made inroads into oil refining in the country and most countries in the world no longer treat petroleum sector as a public sector domain.

There is also opposition to the move to divest the government's stake in Maruti and it comes from heavy industries minister Manohar Joshi.

In a bid to cut down delays and procedures, which involve shuttling of files among various administrative ministries under which the individual PSEs function, the CCD is expected to empower the DoD as the agency to be in full charge of the PSE being put on the block.

The DoD will be in full control of the disinvestment process involving the search of global advisers and their appointments, as well as the restructuring required to be undertaken in the PSE before the sale-off.

It is not as if the administrative ministries will have no say. They can provide their inputs through the committee of secretaries on disinvestment.

The Vajpayee government not only wants to achieve the target of raising Rs 10,000 crore from disinvestment this year but to surpass it.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 JUN 2000

Advani's reaction to J&K resolution stumps BJP, RSS

Shekhar Iyer

New Delhi, June 29

HOME MINISTER L K Advani's rather non-confrontationist line on the autonomy resolution adopted by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly has flummoxed the BJP and the RSS leaders, who are surprised that he did not quickly reject it.

While Mr Advani may have decided to wait for Prime Minister A B Vajpayee to return from abroad before making any comment, many BJP and RSS leaders are upset that his statement about Parliament deciding the fate of the resolu-

tion has raised needless questions about the BJP's stand as well as the Government's approach.

Interestingly, Mr Advani is the chairman of a committee set up by the BJP recently to observe the centenary of one of its founders, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who lost his life in Srinagar while agitating against Article 370, which grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir.

Although the BJP has been forced to drop its demand for abrogation of Article 370 out of the Agenda of Governance of the NDA, the party has never said that it has given up its demand for good.

On June 27, Mr Advani, who returned from a foreign tour, stated that the Centre would take a "considered view" after receiving a report from the State Government. He also said the Cabinet would meet soon after Mr Vajpayee's return to discuss the issue. If at all anything had to be said, it would be said by the Prime Minister.

According to some BJP and RSS

leaders, Mr Advani need not have taken such a "cautious" line when the BJP's position was clear. Besides, at one of the Cabinet meetings before the Prime Minister's departure on foreign tour, Mr Vajpayee had made it clear that the Centre would not support any move for autonomy mooted by the Farooq Abdullah Ministry.

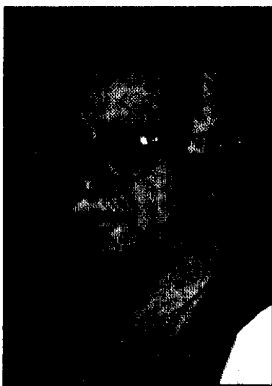
Mr Advani should have straightaway rejected the autonomy resolution to avoid speculations about the Centre's intentions. With Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah claiming that the Prime Minister had welcomed the move during his recent

meeting, Mr Advani's statement had only added to the confusion, they said.

Consequently, it took the BJP central leaders two days to come out strongly against the autonomy resolution. Only last evening, BJP chief Kushabhau Thakre issued a stern statement that the party considered the passage of the autonomy resolution a "retrograde" step and called upon the people to reject it.

Stating that the flow of time and river cannot be reversed, he said the BJP rejected attempts to nullify all the steps taken during the past 50 years to integrate Jammu and Kashmir with the rest of the country.

In equally sharp reaction, BJP vice-president K Jana Krishnamurthi said Dr Abdullah had come out with the autonomy resolution to divert attention on his government's performance because the Centre had indicated that it was ready for a dialogue with the Hurriyat leaders.



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JUN 2000

Poorest of poor to be covered by insurance

Cabinet to clear new social security scheme today

K.A. Badarinath
New Delhi, June 19

THE CENTRE is to introduce a comprehensive insurance scheme for people living below the poverty (BPL) line in the country. Over a crore such families are to be covered by it.

"Jan Shri Bhima Yojana" envisages insurance cover for one member of each BPL family at subsidised premium (50 per cent) rates. The other members of the BPL families would also be eligible for non-subsidised insurance policy covering life and complete or partial physical impairment caused by an accident.

State-owned insurance majors Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) and General Insurance Corporation (GIC) are to provide cover under the scheme that the Union Cabinet is expected to clear tomorrow.

Finance Ministry sources said the heirs of a JSBY policy holder who dies a natural death would receive Rs 20,000 to be provided by LIC. If an accident kills or permanently disables such a policy holder, the compensation would be Rs 50,000. In cases where the injury is partial, such policy holders would get Rs 25,000.

The populist and politically sensitive scheme would be an amalgamation of similar schemes currently in operation. The Rs 311 crore that the Centre has in the Social Security Fund (SSF) would be

Highlights

- Over one crore desperately poor families to be covered.
- One member of each such family to pay 50 per cent premium.
- Rs 20,000 compensation for natural death.
- Rs 50,000 for accidental death or permanent disability through accident.
- Rs 25,000 for partial injury in accident.
- Rs 311 crore in Centre's Social Security Fund (SSF) to be used as seed money for scheme. Another Rs 150 crore to be added during current fiscal.
- Janata Personal Accident Insurance Policy, not covering natural deaths for a mere Rs 15 annual premium.

used for the new scheme. Another Rs 150 crore during current fiscal is to be added to the SSF. An identical amount is to be made available next year too.

All those covered under this scheme will have to pay a premium of Rs 200 per year. Since 50 per cent subsidy is available to one member of each family, Rs 100 per policy on all subsidised cases would be paid from the SSF. The rest Rs

100 per policy could be either paid entirely by the beneficiary or State governments may pitch in.

While all sub-poverty line families are eligible for the subsidised policy, persons in rural areas with certain occupations identified by LIC would be covered as well. Additional policies in each of the BPL families would attract the entire Rs 200 per annum premium.

Simultaneously, the Centre proposes to introduce a Janata Personal Accident Insurance Policy where natural deaths would not be covered. The scheme, to be operated by GIC, would attract a premium of a mere Rs 15 per annum. This could be either paid entirely by the beneficiary or shared by the state government.

However, under this scheme the compensation for deaths would be Rs 25,000 while Rs 12,500 would be paid for those permanently disabled in an accident.

After introduction of the new schemes, those already under operation, i.e. Social Security Group Life Insurance Scheme (SSGIS) and Rural Group Life Insurance Scheme (RGLIS) will be withdrawn. About 49 lakh individuals and families have been covered under earlier schemes.

The Jan Shri Bhima Yojana follows Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's promise that a comprehensive social security scheme for sub-poverty line families would be introduced during the current financial year.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JUN 2000

Cabinet exploits Mamata's absence

Six sick units on way to morgue

FROM DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR
AND NITHYA SUBRAMANIAM

New Delhi, June 20: With Mamata Banerjee safely away on the surcharged streets of civic poll-bound Calcutta, the government today papered over her known objections and pushed through the closure of six loss-making public sector units.

The units which face the axe are Mining and Allied Machinery Corporation, National Bicycle Corporation of India, Tannery and Footwear Corporation, Weighbird India, Bharat Process Mechanical Engineers and Rehabilitation Industries Corporation.

Four of these units are in West Bengal. The shutdown is expected to affect at least 2,500 workers.

"The Cabinet has decided to convey to the Board for Financial and Industrial Reconstruction (BIFR) and high courts that it concurs with the recommendations of the expert group that the six units are unviable and action needs to be taken to close down these units," parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said.

The silver lining for Mamata is that the Cabinet has decided to revive two units which were also facing closure — Bharat Ophthalmic Glass and National Instruments.

Revival plans have been submitted for both. National Instruments is close to Mamata's heart as it is located within her South Calcutta constituency.

But sources close to the Trinamul leader said she is unlikely to be appeased by the survival package as she hates not being consulted.

Mamata's aides raised cain

THE HIT LIST

- Mining and Allied Machinery Corporation
- Weighbird India
- Bharat Process Mechanical Engineers
- Rehabilitation Industries Corporation
- National Bicycle Corporation of India
- Tannery and Footwear Corporation

when they learnt from newspaper reports that the government was planning to sneak into the Cabinet agenda the closure of the six units. They immediately got in touch with the Cabinet secretariat and the Prime Minister's Office for confirmation of the news.

They found out later that the Cabinet papers which had reached the railway minister's office late last night did not mention the closure agenda. Mamata's aides were unwilling to say whether the omission was deliberate or a clerical oversight, but they said that efforts had been made to bypass her.

Railway ministry sources said they tried to get in touch with Mamata who was busy with a street-march in Calcutta.

For Mamata, the Cabinet decision is a big blow as she had taken up the fight on behalf of hundreds of workers whose jobs are now threatened.

Trade unions have lashed out at the decision. President of the Bengal unit of CITU, Niren Ghosh, said in Calcutta that Bengal alone would not be able to fight the BJP which is "determined to cripple the state".

"We had organised strikes and bandhs in protest against this

move by the Centre. But West Bengal alone will not be able to prevent this," he said.

Ghosh took a swipe at the Trinamul leader, saying: "What is Mamata doing to prevent the BJP government from closing down these units?"

But observers said the government move to push through the agenda behind her back could be a blessing in disguise for the Trinamul leader. She can always raise her voice against the Vajpayee government and argue that she had been taken for a ride by the Centre which made good use of her absence.

Along with the revival plans for the two units, the government has decided to re-open a voluntary separation scheme (VSS) for a period of two months for employees in the six PSUs. The Centre will have to fork out an additional Rs 200 crore for the purpose.

The government had earlier introduced VSS in 10 ailing units. Of these, nine were referred to the expert group, while the tenth — Cycle Corporation of India — was not referred and its revival was taken up separately.

More than 5,000 employees had opted for the VSS introduced earlier, helping the units to shed flab considerably.

Following the downsizing, the industry ministry had planned to take a second look at the possibility of reviving these sick units.

But officials also felt that while trimming the workforce was an important component of any revival package, these units also needed additional capital infusion.

This, industry ministry mandarins had felt, could be done by inducting a new joint venture partner.

■ See also Business Telegraph

THE TELEGRAPH

21 JUN 2000

Cabinet to discuss divestment

VINAY JHA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 22. — Tomorrow's Cabinet meeting is likely to take up divestment in Indian Petrochemicals Limited, VSNL, MTNL and Maruti Udyog Limited.

The ministers are likely to focus on a collective decision on divestment of government equity in PSUs.

The Prime Minister and the finance minister are keen to finalise a roadmap for divestment and put an end to bickering among Cabinet members. Hence, the meeting may be attended by twice the number of ministers who came for earlier meetings.

Besides Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Yashwant Sinha,

WHITE PAPER DEMANDED

NEW DELHI, June 22. — The chairman of the Standing Committee of Public Enterprises (Scope), Dr Uddesh Kohli, today demanded a white paper on divestment. The present process of divestment in public enterprises was largely "unplanned" and lacked a clear policy on the part of the government, he argued.

The government should clearly state which sectors it would like to quit, a time-frame and a road-map for divestment. Calling for a national consensus on the issue, Dr Kohli said "there is no roadmap for divestment and there is no preparation before finalising a public sector enterprise for divestment". He added that oil, power, defence, space and heavy equipment sectors should be considered as "strategic" and divestment in these should not be government's priority. — SNS

the ministers for civil aviation, tourism, petroleum, heavy industries and communications may attend the meeting.

"It is obvious that no progress can be achieved unless the

administrative ministries agree on a clear roadmap for divestment," a senior official said.

Mr Sharad Yadav had differences with the department of

divestment on Air-India, though he reluctantly agreed to a "compromise formula".

Mr Ram Naik has queered the pitch for the proposed divestment of oil PSUs, saying they should be given the status of strategic utilities. These PSUs must be restructured before the divestment process begins.

Another issue that has to be settled by the Cabinet is divestment in ITDC. The Union tourism minister, Mr Ananth Kumar, is reportedly not enthusiastic about the proposal that the Centre shed its equity in all but a few prime property.

A PSU added to the divestment list later is Maruti Udyog Limited. The move has been opposed by the minister for heavy industries, Mr Manohar Joshi.

THE STATESMAN

23 JUN 2000

RSS to attack economic policy

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JUNE 22. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is getting ready for an all-out attack on the Government's economic policies. And the Bharatiya Janata Party, which expects the fuse to be ignited at a three-day convention of the RSS front organisation, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, beginning tomorrow in Agra, has more or less made up its mind that it will remain a silent spectator in the war of words that may be unleashed.

The convention is expected to discuss the policies announced recently by the Vajpayee Government — the expanding list of freely importable items, the 100 per cent foreign equity allowed in some sectors, the decision to go in for speedy disinvestment of government equity in the public sector, and the announcement that some sick units will be closed.

Senior BJP leaders who are in tune with what has been happening in the RSS on economic issues do not hesitate to say that the RSS and BJP positions are "virtually incompatible". The suggestion is that there is not much room for adjustments and understanding between the two.

The Agra meet will be attended by the senior RSS office-bearer, Mr. Madan Das Devi, while the BJP will be represented by Mr. K. N. Govindacharya, party

general secretary. Of course, the leading lights of the SJM, Mr. S. Gurumurthy and Mr. Muralidhar Rao will be present.

But even before the convention begins, some party leaders have said that while they did expect some harsh criticism of government policy at the meeting, the BJP will simply take note of it, and continue to "work unitedly with the government" for furthering the economic policies as unfolded by the government.

At the same time it is being freely admitted that within the party there are a number of people who are less than convinced with the arguments in favour of speedy globalisation and opening up of the economy put forward by the pro-reformers in the Government. But with the Prime Minister having made it more than clear that he, and not party leaders, will take all the decisions, there is hardly anyone in the BJP who is expected to challenge Government's policy even if it is incompatible with the much-touted ideal of swadeshi economics.

But any decision by the RSS to back a public campaign against the Government's policy by the SJM may have serious repercussions for the party whose leaders profess loyalty to the RSS first, and then to the BJP. This time the "double membership" issue may adversely affect the BJP itself.

THE HINDU

23 JUN 2000

Decisions expose Cabinet division on divestment

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 23. — That differences persist among members of the Union cabinet on the issue of disinvestment was apparent today as the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment (CCD) approved the roadmap only for this financial year instead of the next three years as expected. Acknowledging that there are differences, officials, however, said today's meeting was nevertheless a step forward.

A three-year roadmap could have put an end to bickering over the manner and scope of disinvestment. But, it can still be taken up at the next meeting, officials said.

Specific proposals, like those relating to the disinvestment of telecom and petroleum PSUs, also met with resistance from the ministers of communication and petroleum, who attended the meeting.

"At least this year's disinvestment plans have received the CCD's go-ahead," an official pointed out.

The presence of almost all ministers whose departments will be affected by the disinvestment exercise is also being cited as a success, though more than one minister is learnt to have talked tough during the meeting.

The minister for disinvestment, Mr Arun Jaitley, had been pressing for a full meeting of the CCD so that a collective decision could be taken on the disinvestment process. Under attack from sections of his own party, Mr Jaitley is believed to have been keen that all ministers come together to discuss the matter threadbare before the process was taken further.

"Though some differences are still there, the very fact that all the ministers involved in the process came together is a big first step," an official pointed out.

The meeting, presided over by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, was attended by the finance minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, Mr Arun Jaitley, the heavy industry minister, Mr Manohar Joshi, the petroleum minister, Mr Ram Naik, the civil aviation Minister, Mr Sharad Yadav, the deputy chairman of Planning Commission, Mr K C Pant, the planning and programme implementation minister, Mr Arun Shourie, the tourism minister, Mr Anant Kumar, the communication minister, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, the fertiliser and chemical minister, Mr Suresh Prabhu, and the steel minister, Mr Braja Kishore Tripathy.

THE STATESMAN

24 JUN 2000

'NO GOING BACK TO PRE-1953 STATUS'

BJP for devolution, against autonomy

By Neena Vyas

HD-1
29/6

NEW DELHI, JUNE 23. The BJP today made it clear that while it was for devolution of more powers to Jammu and Kashmir, it remains opposed to autonomy.

Even as it was reported from London that the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, on a visit there, had said that the Centre was not against full autonomy, the party spokesperson and general secretary, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, today insisted that Mr. Advani had not approved of autonomy, but only further devolution of powers.

As if to emphasise the party's deep distaste for the very idea of autonomy — if it means restoration of the pre-1953 status of the State — Mr. Naidu said: "The BJP will never, never, never, accept this."

He added that the party did believe in devolution of powers to the States, and that such an idea could be discussed. Both the BJP and the NDA Government headed by Mr. A.B. Vajpayee were "committed to devolution of more powers to the States".

The Constitution demarcates the subjects in the domain of the States and the Centre. However, this is open to discussion and interpretation. The Government has already taken steps to ensure a larger share of funds from taxes for the States. But while any discussion could be held on devolution of powers, the rider was that "the National Conference Government in Jammu and Kashmir would have to accept

the decision of the NDA Government at the Centre."

Mr. Naidu was firm that his party and the Vajpayee Government were both in favour of a federal structure, as it existed. But there was room for not only further devolution of powers, but also "decentralisation right down to the panchayat level".

"We have travelled a long way away from 1953. There is an elected Government in the State, and the task of the Government should be development. It is the duty of the State Government to take care of health and education of the people, build infrastructure." A truly federal structure of Government should have a strong Centre and equally strong States, Mr. Naidu said.

Strangely, the party said that the Centre had not yet studied the State Autonomy Committee report, although admittedly it had been submitted over six months ago, and has been widely reported in the press. As for the continuation of the NC as a partner in the NDA, the BJP view was that the NC had decided to support the Vajpayee Government and its singing a tune totally unacceptable to the BJP was not an issue.

The BJP view was that while the Congress(I), which supports the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar, also shared the responsibility for the spate of massacres in the State, the BJP was in no way responsible for what the NC was doing or saying in Jammu and Kashmir.

2011

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PASWAN TO HEAD GROUP OF MINISTERS

Cabinet panel to study telecom corporate setup

By P. Sunderarajan

NEW DELHI, JUNE 24. The Union Cabinet today formally constituted a Group of Ministers (GoM) to facilitate corporatisation of the Department of Telecom Services by October 1. The GoM would be headed by the Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan. Announcing this, the Government spokesperson said the panel would study all issues, including employees' pensionary benefits and payscales and submit its report by August 15.

The other members of the GoM would be: the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, the Commerce and Industry Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran, the HRD Minister, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, the Labour Minister, Mr. Satyanarain Jatiya, and the Minister of State for Personnel, Ms. Vasundhara Raje.

The Cabinet approved the introduction of a regulation for fishing in the lagoons and the sea around Lakshadweep to protect the interests of small fishermen from encroachments by operators of large vessels. The new regulations would be in the form of a promulgation by the President.

It cleared a proposal to accede to the 1998 protocol relating to the international convention for loadlines. This would harmonise the system of surveys and certification of Indian ships and facilitate operation of India's commercial fleet engaged in international trade.

Cooperation with Russian Federation

The Cabinet gave its *ex-post facto* approval to the joint document on development of trade, economic, industrial, financial, scientific and technological cooperation with the Russian Federation and approved the signing of an air service agreement with Lithuania.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved a scheme for upgradation of computing facilities in the five IITs at a cost of Rs. 89.85 crores, and a proposal to enhance the financial as-

sistance for both regular and special camping activities of the National Service Scheme.

For the plain areas, the programme fund per volunteer would be increased to Rs. 160 for regular activities and Rs. 300 for special camping activities. For the hill areas, the new rates would be Rs. 200 for regular activities and Rs. 400 for special campaign activities.

The CCEA approved the on-going Centrally-sponsored scheme on development of freshwater aquaculture with a total outlay of Rs. 300 crores for the Ninth Plan period.

Concession to fertilizer companies revised

The CCEA further revised the base rates of concessions for making on account payments to the fertilizer companies. While the rate has been decreased by Rs. 1,100 per tonne for indigenous Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP), and Rs. 100 for Single Super Phosphate (SSP), it has been increased by Rs. 105 per tonne for Mureate of Potash (MOP).

The new rates would consequently be: Rs. 2,800 per tonne for indigenous DAP, Rs. 700 per tonne for SSP and Rs. 2,800 per tonne for MOP. The rate for imported DAP would remain at Rs. 950 per tonne. The rate for complexes, in turn, would range from Rs. 1,577 to Rs. 2,800 per tonnes.

This is the second revision of the rates of concessions in four months. The new rates would be implemented immediately and would have retrospective effect from April 1.

The Cabinet panel decided to authorise the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) to further revise the rates of concession for MOP if the cost of imports go beyond \$ U.S. 122 per tonnes and that of imported DAP in case of large variations in the international price, so that there was no shortage of the two fertilizers. It decided not to make any further changes in the MRP of the fertilizers.

THE HINDU

25 JUN 2000

AD-12
MONDAY, JUNE 26, 2000

DISINVESTMENT REVISITED *2/1/0*

THE DECISIONS TAKEN by the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment (CCD) on Friday indicate a measured rather than sweeping response to the need for privatisation of central public sector units. Those familiar with the process since the early 1990s maintain that no other outcome was realistically possible at this juncture. Therefore while the considerable expectations and enormous build-up — bordering on hype — before Friday's meeting have been belied, a considered view of the decisions ought to be that the Government has done all that it can. Among the most contentious of the reform-era economic issues, the public sector sale programme still does not admit of easy solutions, no matter all governments placed it right on top of their economic agenda. It is not surprising therefore that while the fiscal rationale for disinvestment has always been compelling — governments have looked to public sector unit sales for meeting the budgetary deficit —, the actual realisations have been most disappointing. Even this year's target of Rs. 10,000 crores looks daunting at this stage.

On Friday the CCD decided to sell off 11 public sector units and asked for an annual action plan to be drawn up for another 33. There were many who were hoping that a larger number of public sector units would figure in the sale list. The bigger disappointment has been over the fact that important names such as the country's number one car-maker, Maruti Udyog, the telecom blue chips, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam and Videsh Sanchar Nigam, and leading oil companies do not figure in the list. There have been well-publicised dissenting notes on the privatisation drive from the Cabinet Ministers overseeing petroleum and heavy industries and earlier from the Civil Aviation Minister. Dissent and discord are to be expected in any political decision-making over so complex a matter as disinvestment. It will, however, be facile to con-

clude that the current phase of the divestment programme has shifted to low gear because of political differences and simply because some of India's top performing companies have not been considered for sale immediately.

Cabinet
It might be repeating a cliché, but the divestment strategy is really an art of the possible. The economic arguments against swift privatisation of companies such as Indian Oil and Maruti merit at least as much attention as those frequently touted in favour. A strong case exists for restructuring the oil industry before the key players are moved into private hands. Irrespective of the nature of their business, individual companies, however well performing, need to be further prepared to face the rigours of the market. The Government stands to get much more from improved valuations. The dilemma over Maruti illustrates how tough decision-making can be. Though faced with a steadily declining market share, Maruti still sells three times as many cars as its nearest competitor. However, even estimating what the Government would get by selling its 50 per cent stake can be an excruciatingly difficult task. One reason of course is that unlike, say, Indian Oil, Maruti is not listed on the stock exchanges.

In the final analysis, it would be prudent to defer a judgment on the current divestment strategy for at least two reasons. One, all evidence, both abroad and in India too, proves that the results of a privatisation drive can be assessed only over time. Second, the present "top-down" approach, Cabinet clearance followed by the nitty-gritty of the sale, is novel and probably has a better chance of succeeding than the earlier approaches had. However even Cabinet approvals indicate only the start of the process. The Government should simultaneously attempt to build a consensus on all troublesome aspects of the divestment programme.

THE HINDU

26 JUN 2000

(Continued from page 1)

"outstrip those in the industrialised world".

It was left to the Prime Minister, however, to adorn confidence with concrete proposals. The proposal for a new FDI facilitation group apart, Mr Vajpayee also offered European investors a "new guarantee structure for large transmission and power purchase systems".

So far, guarantees have only been given for power generation projects. The PM's proposal is significant in view of the fact that many European companies, for example, Britain's National Grid, have shown keen interest in power transmission projects.

Transmission losses in India, typically around 20 per cent, are however far higher than global norms, and Mr Vajpayee's proposal is a clear signal that the government is prepared to go the extra mile for attracting foreign investment in this sector.

But will the transmission guarantee structure carry the risks of cost-padding that turned private power generation projects into a regulatory nightmare?

Senior officials claimed it will not. Unlike the counter-guarantee given for the generation projects, which were promised

an assured rate of return, the transmission guarantee will fix a tariff ceiling, officials said.

Competitive bids will be invited after that and the lowest bidders will be given the guarantee.

This, claimed the officials, will prevent the abuse of the system.

Officials also said that they do not expect "a floodgate of FDI proposals" following the formalising of a transmission guarantee.

The power minister, officials said, had "certain projects in mind", and he had urged the PM to consider the new guarantee to expedite these cases.

New proposals apart, the PM's CII speech listed the usual catalogue of Indian "achievements". IT, high growth rate, attempts at administrative and legislative facilitation of infrastructure investment, disinvestment, etc.

There was also the by now mandatory note of caution on globalisation, though the Prime Minister did contend that India's long history of maritime trade — in which Portugal was an early participant — means that the country is not afraid of globalisation.

The task, it seems, is now to convince European industry that it need not be afraid of doing business in India.



Mr A B Vajpayee

Red tape ties foreign investment: Vajpayee

SAUBHIK CHAKRABARTI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LISBON, June 27. — Only the sixth country to have been invited by the European Union for a summit — the other five are the USA, Russia, Japan, China and Canada — the Lisbon event has considerable political and diplomatic significance for India. But the main business of the summit is business.

CII held a typically well-organised business summit — the venue is Lisbon's Dom Pedro Hotel — prior to the diplomatic event, and speeches by the Prime Minister and the Commerce and Industry Minister, Murasoli Maran, gave the 250-odd European business delegation something to look forward to.

Admitting that red tape has prevented actualisation of FDI proposals from European coun-

tries, the Prime Minister told the gathering that a joint government-business group will be set up to shorten the gestation period.

Mr Maran, too, admitted that FDI clearance has been a "poor show", and that India has an image problem among European businessmen.

"Projects are not taking off", Mr Vajpayee said, adding that the FDI realisation ratio was a "modest 25 per cent". He, however, gave no details of the modus operandi of the proposed government-business group.

Mr NK Singh, secretary to the Prime Minister, later said that both Indo-European joint ventures and 100 per cent foreign projects may come under the proposed group's remit. Mr Singh, however, clarified that the role of the business representatives in the new set up

will be restricted "only to implementation" and not clearance, which will remain in the province of the administrators.

Mr Maran sought to highlight India's "demand and supply side" attractions for foreign investors.

Giving a new spin on India's one billion population, the commerce minister said that in the "next couple of decades India will have a once-in-a-lifetime chance of having a population structure where the share of the working population will be the youngest and the largest."

This, he said, will give foreign investors the skilled labour pool they look for, as well as generating demand for their products.

Taking a confident line, the minister said profits from Indian venture of MNCs will

■ See SUMMIT: page 8

Centre will decide on autonomy proposal; Advani

By Bisheshwar Mishra
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Home minister L. K. Advani has virtually vetoed the Jammu and Kashmir assembly's greater autonomy proposal. Addressing a news conference here on Tuesday, he said parliament would decide what had to be done in the matter. This indicates that the proposal has little chance of acceptance, given that the overwhelming majority of parties in parliament—including the BJP and the Congress—is against autonomy.

"Everyone knows the composition of parliament and the views of those who constitute parliament," he said. Although the news conference was called to brief the media on the home minister's ten-day visit to Israel, France and the UK, the J&K resolution dominated the proceedings.

Mr Advani resisted calls to clarify the government's stand. Pressed to comment on his personal views, he declared that whatever he had to say would be in his capacity as the Union home minister. "For the present," he said, "it is an assembly resolution. I will not comment on it."

Mr Advani said he expected that the resolution would be addressed to the government of India and "it will naturally consider it. But whatever has to be done is to be done by parliament".

Later, when pressed for a comment on autonomy, Mr Advani said that the government's formal reaction would have to "wait for the arrival of the Prime Minister." The Prime Minister is away on a tour of Italy and Portugal.

When he was told that J&K chief minister Farooq Abdullah had claimed in the house that he

had already had discussions about the autonomy report with the PM, who was agreeable to it, Mr Advani responded, "I will not say anything on it. If there is anything, the PM will." Asked whether it was embarrassing to deal with an autonomy proposal made by the National Conference, a partner in the National Democratic Alliance, Mr Advani said, "Whether or not it is embarrassing is a matter of opinion." Could the NC remain a constituent of the NDA? "He (Farooq Abdullah) is part of the NDA government. He hasn't said that he is not," Mr Advani shot back.

Another signal that the home minister was cool to the proposal was the recantation of his comment in London recently that his government's mandate was for "devolution of power in favour of states".

CMs MEET TO DISCUSS INTERNAL SECURITY

'Parliament will decide on autonomy issue'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 27. Whatever needs to be done on the autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly will be done by Parliament, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, told a press conference here today.

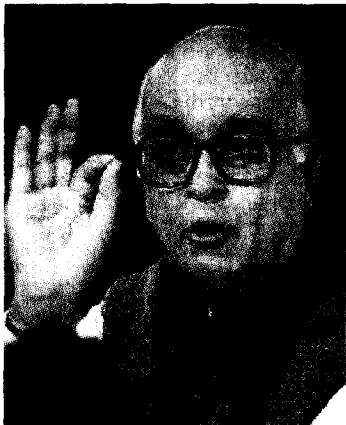
"Parliament's composition and views of those who constitute it are known to everyone," he said while replying to a query on the Central Government's reaction to the resolution seeking greater autonomy for the State.

"I presume, being a resolution of the State Assembly, it will be sent to the Central Government. The Government will then consider it. If I have something to say as the Home Minister, I will say it as part of the Government. Let the Government take a considered view," he said.

Asked if the Jammu and Kashmir resolution had come as an embarrassment to the Government, Mr. Advani shot back: "Embarrassment for whom?" Further queried on the possibility of the National Conference parting ways with the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Mr. Advani said: "The National Conference is a part of the NDA. Dr. Farooq Abdullah has not said he is not part of the NDA."

When pointed out that Dr. Abdullah had reportedly apprised the Prime Minister about the autonomy move during his recent meeting here, Mr. Advani said, "If at all anything has to be said on it, the Prime Minister will say it."

Mr. Advani said the Government's mandate was for devolution of powers in favour of the



The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, addressing a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday after his recent visit to Israel, France and the U.K. — Photo: V.Sudershan.

States. "How much has to be the quantum of devolution, is a matter to be decided by the Government and Parliament."

'Attacks not communal'

Answering queries on the attacks on Christians, Mr. Advani said the Centre had sought reports from the States concerned. "Preliminary reports and incidents do not indicate that these were communal clashes. Internal security is an issue about which our Government is very much concerned."

A meeting of the Chief Ministers, to be presided by the Prime Minister, would be held in August to deliberate on internal security. The Chief Secretaries, Home Secretaries and the State police chiefs would meet here tomorrow as a precursor to the Chief Ministers' meeting.

To a question if the Bajrang Dal would be banned in the wake of its reported threats to Christians, he said there was no justification for such a demand. It was the Government's responsibility to see that the minorities and their institutions were "fully safe and secure."

'Foreign visit fruitful'

Describing his maiden visit abroad after assuming the charge of the Home Ministry as "very satisfactory and fruitful", Mr. Advani said that Israel, France and the U.K. shared India's concern on international terrorism as well as realised the importance of dealing with it in a coordinated and concerted manner.

Brushing aside suggestions that his Israel visit was a "turning point or a breakthrough", he described it as a "step forward" after full-fledged diplomatic relations with that country were established in 1992.

J and K Council adopts resolution

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, JUNE 27. Following the acceptance of State Autonomy Committee (SAC) report by the J & K Assembly on Monday, the Legislative Council also adopted a resolution on similar lines today.

The resolution was moved by the Law Minister, Mr. Piyaray Lal Handoo, in the House. The Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, reiterating his party's stand on the issue said that the NC would not give up the demand.

Centre downplays issue: Page 13

Centre's doublespeak: Page 17

THE HINDU

2 JUN 2000

RSS meet likely to review Centre's economic policies

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 28. — The RSS is likely to review the government's economic policies at its central council meeting in Ahmedabad starting tomorrow. Also expected to be discussed is the RSS stand on the autonomy demand by the National Conference.

The autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly has agitated the RSS's rank and file who have been advocating removal of Article 370 for the state's full integration with the country.

The organisation has been very sensitive about the Kashmir issue and it would like to clarify where it stands. Its affiliates, like the VHP, have already demanded expulsion of the National Conference from NDA.

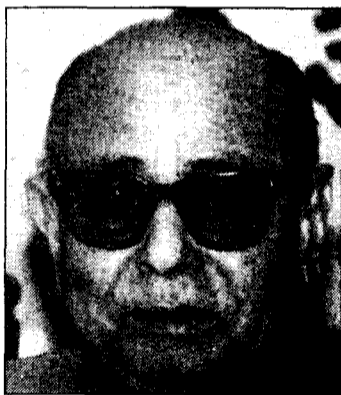
Though the week-long meeting is a regular feature of the RSS, this time it has assumed added significance as it is being held in the backdrop of severe criticism of the government's economic policies by its affiliate, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch.

There is a general feeling among SJM leaders that they would get the full backing of the RSS's executive council so that the swadeshi agenda gets the support of the various RSS affiliates to carry forward its anti-government campaign from 15 July. The SJM organisation secretary, Mr Murlidhar

29/6
Rao, is slated to attend the executive council meeting.

The SJM is not a cadre-based organisation and depends on the RSS affiliates for organisational action. The SJM was founded by senior RSS leader Mr Dattopant Thengdi and it has the full backing of the RSS chief, Mr KS Sudarshan, and the joint general secretary, Mr Madan Das Devi.

The meeting could decide if the pro-Vajpayee element in



Mr Kushabhau Thakre

the executive council would prevail over the anti-government crusaders on the economic front. If that happens, the meeting could once again adopt a conciliatory note by blaming a few bureaucrats for the pro-foreign MNC policies of the government.

The BJP president, Mr Kushabhau Thakre, and the party general secretary, Mr KN Govindacharya, will represent the BJP. Both have been trying

hard to soften the criticism of the SJM and taking pains to ensure they are on the right side of the Prime Minister.

While Mr Thakre may need Mr Vajpayee's blessings for continuing as party president for a second term, Mr Govindacharya would not risk further isolation by speaking against the Prime Minister. It remains to be seen how they face the RSS leadership.

One way to wriggle out of the situation would be to persuade the council to not to pass any resolution about the government's policies and to limit itself to focussing on organisational expansion. A RSS leader hinted that there was a possibility of the council not passing any resolution at all. But he also agreed that this would be against the normal trend.

Some SJM leaders, however, thought otherwise. Mr Thengdi, who openly came out against Mr Vajpayee on the insurance privatisation issue, during his earlier term as Prime Minister, has indicated he would no longer remain silent.

To some leaders of the Swadeshi ilk, he has clarified that his silence in the recent days was more to do with the Kargil war rather than his agreement with the government's economic policies. RSS leaders did not want to embarrass the government when it was involved in the war, he has clarified, a SJM leader said.

THE STATESMAN

29 JUN 2000

Techie Vajpayee rules out Sankhya Vahini review

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 2 MAY

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee has become the chief defender of the gigabyte and ruled out any review of the Sankhya Vahini project.

Brushing aside criticism from the Sangh Parivar, his party and the Opposition about the Sankhya Vahini project being a "sweet-heart" deal, Mr Vajpayee pulled rank and showed who's the boss.

At the BJP parliamentary party meeting on Tuesday, Mr Vajpayee expounded on the project saying it was designed to strengthen the technological capability of the country.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO), giving a point-by-point rebuttal of the criticism levelled against the project, undertook a spirited defence, presenting an exhaustive 30-page report on it.

The bottomline of the meeting was a firm signal that the Prime Minister would brook no interference in the matter of governance.

It was an assertive leader who took the floor on Tuesday, silencing critics about the state of his health.

The PMO, which has put its collective energy in defending



A.B. Vajpayee: Chief defender of the gigabyte mantra

the joint venture with IUNet — a 49 per cent partner in Sankhya Vahini — without investing any cash, said the deal was executed after detailed deliberations. "The project will deploy the latest technology and networking in the field of high speed data communication.

Considering the pace of development of the IT sector all over the world and India's commitment to give a boost to the IT sector, the decision to set up the joint venture is in national interest." Defending the MoU route against the established tender procedure, the paper said it could not be compared with the VSNI-BT proposal. "The VSNI-BT project was objected to in the context of the apprehension that facilities sought to be developed might be used for voice telephony for long distance bypass, which is not permitted."

Disorganised Oppn gifts BJP winning points in debate duel

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 2 MAY

IT WAS virtually a situation when they gave away a battle and the army was absent. On a crucial day when the Lok Sabha was scheduled to decide on the merit of cut motions on the budgetary proposals, the political rivals to the BJP failed to put up even a semblance of a fight in the House.

Ironically, this was notwithstanding the urgent preparations of the ruling party prior to the day's session for a concerted attack from the Opposition on a spate of pre-identified issues.

The BJP's parliamentary party meeting, which lasted for a full two hours this morning, with the Prime Minister taking charge of preparing the party's flock in anticipation of a frontal slam by the Opposition, on issues that held the potential of eliciting support from members of the ruling alliance such as the TDP and the DMK.

Following an introduction by parliamentary affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan, the meeting, in fact, was a clear indication of the gravity with which the ruling BJP took the possibility of a combined attack on select issues by the Opposition.

Significantly, the BJP took the risk of fielding Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at that forum to defend the controversial commercial deal of Sankhya Vahini, for expressing Opposition to which party vice-president Madanlal Khurana was sacked from

his post only last week. The issue merited a 30-page detail on the reasons why the government chose to okay the deal notwithstanding the strong objections raised by the RSS.

That the BJP expected stringent criticism from the Opposition on the nodal PDS subsidy issue was also apparent when both finance minister Yashwant Sinha and food minister Shanta Kumar last week dwelt extensively on the snowballing subsidy Bill and the urgent need to trim it as well as the additional burden imposed on the government by the severe drought prevailing in several states.

Even a prolonged controversial issue such as those concerning the Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), which dominated the political discourse some weeks ago, was honed in on as a possible subject on which the government could expect a no-holds-barred assault.

Mr Joshi, consequently, made a 25-minute presentation on the ICHR, emphasising the government's defence on the subject.

The hectic preparations for war, however, came to naught in the House when the Opposition failed to make even a marginal presence felt on the issues.

The leader of the Opposition was absent from the House leaving the sole burden of the Congress' song to be hummed by smaller chieftains such as Priyaranjan Das Munshi.

Vajpayee rules out sending arms to Sri Lanka

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 4 MAY

IN FIRMLY ruling out "sending or selling arms to Sri Lanka," for the second time in 24 hours, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee has stuck to a considered national policy coined in the post-IPKF period of working for a resolution of the ethnic Tamil problem in the neighbouring country strictly within the parameters of its unity and integrity and full respect for the minority.

The soundness of the decision to limit any offer of intervention strictly to "humanitarian aid," including food and medicines, should the need arise, is perceived in political circles as the sole viable

option left to India at the current juncture, particularly given the fiasco involving Indian soldiers in 1989. The response to the help sought by Sri Lanka, whose minister Lakshman Kadirgamar also met the PM here on Wednesday, was also shaped keeping political realities at home in mind. Allies of the BJP from Tamil Nadu, who were consulted by the Mr Vajpayee this evening, had made it clear on Wednesday itself that they were against the idea of extending any logistical assistance to Sri Lanka.

The DMK, MDMK and the PMK, as well as the leaders of BJP, have been emphatic that the legitimate interests of

various ethnic groups would have to be uppermost while India formulated its position. Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi, who has been invited to the capital for consultations, was to reach on Thursday night. The categorical assertion of its position by the government on Thursday was also clearly aimed at smoothing the ruffled feathers of allied parties from Tamil Nadu who had protested over not being consulted on the crucial issue. To questions relating to complaints by the DMK on this, Mr Vajpayee said after his meeting: "The events moved so swiftly. We got the entire picture only after the Sri Lankan foreign minister met me

yesterday (Wednesday). There was no prior information." The government, at the same time, attempted to strike a careful balance to ensure that its relations with Sri Lanka remained friendly. "Our policy has been that we favour a united Sri Lanka," Mr Vajpayee said.

An elaborate articulation further was made during the day in Parliament by foreign minister Jaswant Singh, who said the situation in Sri Lanka was of serious concern for New Delhi. Asserting that the government had received some requests from Sri Lanka in the context of the present situation, he said New Delhi was accord-
ing them urgent consideration.

The Economic Times

5 MAY 2000

BJP jittery on Sri Lanka spillover, Atal calls meet

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 6: The BJP is worried about the fallout of the Sri Lanka crisis in case the Tamil Tigers continue with their marauding march, notwithstanding the government's assurance to its southern allies that it will not send military help to the island.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has called an all-party meeting on Monday to voice the BJP's fears that if the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) gains more ground, it could have serious implications for India.

The government, sources said, also wants to get an endorsement from the parties on offering humanitarian assistance to Lanka, if the island's government asks for it.

The BJP is not overly concerned about having to take a strategic decision immediately because the feedback is that the situation could soon ease. However, the Tigers' advance towards Jaffna has forced the government to think about a contingency plan in case the brimming crisis snowballs in the northern peninsula.

The BJP also dismissed sug-

gestions that by refusing military help to Lanka, it could spark a diplomatic cold war with Colombo, especially if other countries offer assistance.

The party feels that even Israel, which Lanka is eyeing for possible military aid, will find it logistically difficult to fight in the unfriendly terrain of Jaffna.

Spelling out the government's worries, a BJP leader said the party is keen on a "united Sri Lanka" as it apprehends that too much leeway to its Tamil Nadu allies — and, indirectly, to the LTTE — would encourage the Tigers to stoke separatist sentiments in the state.

The LTTE has gained in strength over the years and is believed to have acquired more sophisticated weapons than the Lankan army.

Sources said that Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi, while giving a free hand to Vajpayee on the Lanka question yesterday, also cautioned him that any action to weaken the LTTE could have its fallout in the state as a large number of Tamils would flee the island to take refuge.

Among the refugees will be hordes of Tiger guerrillas in disguise, Karunanidhi is learnt to

have told the Prime Minister. In the aftermath of the IPKF fiasco, thousands of rebels had sneaked into Tamil Nadu and created a law and order problem.

The state has already taken steps to beef up security for its fishermen. A fast-moving boat will be attached to the naval detachment and efforts are on to get a naval ship to patrol the coastal belt of Nagapattinam district.

The BJP is treading on tiptoes as it wants to avert any crisis for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. Apart from Karunanidhi, both MDMK leader Vaiko — a vocal supporter of the LTTE — and PMK chief S. Ramadoss are averse to the idea of the government participating in any form of military exercise on the island.

The BJP's fears were echoed by Tamil Maanila Congress leader P. Chidambaram, who said all parties should welcome any decision taken by the Centre which did not affect regional security. Chidambaram, however, regretted that Opposition parties in the state were not consulted.

ADMK chief Jayalalitha welcomed the move not to send military aid and asked India to try for a negotiated settlement of the ethnic strife.

■ Another report on Page 4

THE TELEGRAPH

- 7 MAY 2008

CHATTISGARH BILL THIS SESSION: ADVANI

Vested interests at work, says PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 9. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today accused "vested interests" of blowing out of proportion insignificant incidents involving minorities in some parts of the country and giving them a communal colour for partisan reasons.

Speaking at the BJP Parliamentary Party meeting here, Mr. Vajpayee maintained that social tensions had substantially declined in the past two years and "yet some vested interests" were hell bent on blowing out of proportion certain incidents involving minorities.

In an obvious reference to the recent incidents in Uttar Pradesh and the report of the National Minorities Commission ruling out any communal angle in the incidents, the Prime Minister said it was unfortunate that motives were being attributed to the report of the Commission. He urged the members to reach out to the people and counter the campaign from vested quarters.

Responding to queries from the members, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, categorically stated that Bills for the creation of new States of Uttaranchal and Chattisgarh, to be carved out of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, would be introduced in the Lok Sabha during the current session of Parliament.

He also explained that since the Bihar Assembly had suggested 59 amendments to the proposed Bill for the creation of Jharkhand, there could be some delay in finalising that Bill. This, however, would not be allowed to come in the way of introducing legisla-

tion to create the two other States. Apart from this, the meeting focussed mainly on the Sri Lankan crisis with the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, giving an account of the situation in Sri Lanka and the consensus arrived at during the all-party meeting convened by the Prime Minister on Monday.

Mr. Singh reiterated that the Government was committed to its stand that any resolution to the crisis must be found within the framework of unity and territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. There was no question of any military intervention, he said and added that while the developments were being closely watched, India would do its best to ensure early peace.

It was emphasised that India was in touch "with all concerned". This was taken to mean that it was in touch with the United States as well as Norway which would send a delegation to Sri Lanka shortly. Mr. Singh also reiterated that "past experience" would be kept in mind while formulating any policy and taking decisions. This was more than a hint that the mistake of sending the IPKF would not be repeated.

The meeting became an occasion for MPs to congratulate the Prime Minister and Mr. Singh for the "excellent" handling of foreign affairs. The BJP virtually congratulated itself while congratulating Mr. Vajpayee on the recent positive outcomes in this area — vindication of India's role in the Non-Aligned Movement, signs of growing support for a permanent seat for India in the Security Council, the successful Clinton visit, and the better appreciation the world over of India's difficulties with Pakistan.

THE HINDU

10 MAY 2000

TALKS MUST BE WITHIN CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Govt ready to hold dialogue with Hurriyat, says Advani

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 10 MAY

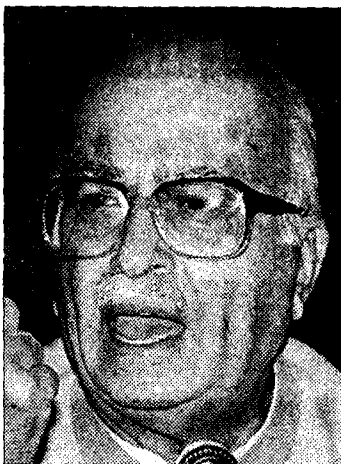
UNION HOME minister L.K. Advani on Wednesday said the government would soon initiate a dialogue with Hurriyat Conference and other separatist groups in Kashmir. The minister proposed an all-party meeting to discuss the parameters of the proposed talks.

He said that the talks would be held within the confines of the Constitution. However, the Hurriyat leadership feels that this should not be made a precondition for initiating a dialogue.

In his reply to a calling attention motion in the Rajya Sabha on the Jammu and Kashmir situation, Mr Advani said the government's olive branch was part of three-pronged strategy to restore normalcy in the militancy-hit state.

The strategy, he elaborated, included adoption of a proactive approach towards cross-border terrorism, accelerating economic development and redressal of genuine grievances of the local people through meaningful dialogue.

"We are not talking to them (Hurriyat) yet. If they want to talks, they are welcome," he said, even as the Centre is



Advani: Dictating terms

believed to be in touch with the outfit's leadership, holding informal parleys to prepare the ground for a formal dialogue.

Earlier, moving the calling attention motion, Congress MP Ghulam Nabi Azad criticised the government for failing to contain the strife in the valley state despite its 'pro-active' policy.

Mr Advani countered the attack by claiming that the nation was near defeating more than a decade-long proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir and that normalcy was on the return. Stating that Pakistan had stepped up cross-border terrorism following its defeat in the

Kargil war, the home minister informed the House that the government had responded by strengthening the counter-insurgency grid, modernising the state police, and launching a pin-pointed anti-militancy operation that led to the elimination of around 950 terrorists between August 1999 and April 2000.

He said an inter-ministerial group had also been constituted recently to "review, revise and supplement" the 1998 action-plan for tackling militancy.

Rejecting a demand made by nominated member Kuldip Nayyar for dissolution of the state Assembly and holding of fresh polls as "no election had been fair except the one in 1977," Mr Advani cited the increasing turnout in successive elections since 1991 to insist that the Farooq Abdullah government was a democratically-elected one.

Responding to the demands made by several members for effective steps to block infiltration of mercenaries from across the Line of Control, the Union home minister assured the Rajya Sabha that the government would act in all toughness to prevent the Pakistan-sponsored militants from stepping on Indian soil.

The Economic Times

11 MAY 2000

'Minimum deterrent vital'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 12. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has emphasised that even as India is determined to retain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent, it will continue to strive vigorously for complete global nuclear disarmament.

At a dinner he hosted for National Democratic Alliance leaders and MPs at his residence last night, — it was also the second anniversary of the Pokhran-II nuclear tests — the Prime Minister noted that despite numerous conferences and discussions between the recognised nuclear powers, there were no tangible results to show the world was moving towards disarmament.

India's nuclear tests were "purely defensive in nature," Mr. Vajpayee told the allies, who had earlier congratulated him through a resolution which said that over the last two years since Pokhran, India emerged stronger than ever before and attained many suc-

cesses in the areas of defence, diplomacy and development.

He reiterated that his Government took the decision and gave the green signal for the Pokhran tests with the "full knowledge" that if it did not go ahead, "our neighbour" would have gone ahead with its tests.

Pokhran had given India a new sense of confidence and pride in its achievements. And in the world there was greater recognition of India's importance.

If the allies earlier complimented the Prime Minister for the leadership he had provided, Mr. Vajpayee did not fail to return the compliment, praising the functioning of the External Affairs Ministry, the Home Ministry, the Defence Ministry, the Commerce Ministry and so on. (He took care to mention the Ministries held by the major allies of the BJP).

"The main agenda was to have been 'eating', but after the resolution adopted by the allies, and the Prime Minister's remarks, it became more like a meeting," the party spokesperson, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, said.

THE HINDU

13 MAY 2000

Cabinet okays three new states, IT Bill

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 13. — Putting its seal of approval on the creation of three new states, the Union Cabinet today agreed to go by the name Jharkhand instead of the earlier proposed Vananchal for the new state to be carved out of the tribal areas of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Parganas in Bihar. The Cabinet also paved the way for the Information Technology Bill.

The other two State Reorganisation Bills for the creation of Uttaranchal — out of Uttar Pradesh's hill region of Kumaon and Garhwal — and Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh, are likely to be tabled on 17 May, the last working day of the current Budget session, said the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr Pramod Mahajan.

The Assemblies of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, while ratifying the proposed Bills sent by the President, incorporated certain amendments to the draft Bills of the Union Cabinet. But the Centre, in the case of Bihar, rejected most amendments except the name of the new state.

The Centre also turned down the Uttar Pradesh government's proposal to exclude Hardwar from the proposed Uttaranchal state.

There was no controversy over the creation of Chhattisgarh, on which a few suggestions made by the Madhya Pradesh government have been accepted by the Centre.

Even if the State Reorganisation Bills are introduced in Parliament next week, the Bills can be taken up for voting only during the monsoon session of Parliament. Since the government does not enjoy a majority in the Rajya Sabha, it would

have to depend on Congress support to get the Bills passed.

Sources said since the Congress is committed to support the creation of Jharkhand — a condition of joining the RJD government in Bihar — and since there is hardly any controversy over Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal, the new Bills are expected to be cleared by

CYCLONE FORECASTS

NEW DELHI, May 13. — A Rs 72.15-crore project to instal more advanced cyclone warning capability system on the east coast was cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.

While the Indian Meteorological Department will implement the project, it will receive World Bank assistance of Rs 51.27 crore. The Centre will contribute the rest.

The project proposes to instal three doppler weather radars at Paradip in Orissa and Visakhapatnam and Machilipatnam in Andhra Pradesh. These radars use an advanced technology to provide information about the velocity structure of cyclones. With them, the department will be able to estimate the intensity of a storm and predict its location more accurately. — SNS

both Houses of Parliament in the next session.

IT Bill

Paving the way for passage of the Information Technology Bill, the Centre today approved changes based on the recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee which studied the Bill. The changes approved include punitive measures to tackle cyber crime.

The Bill, which seeks to provide a framework for e-commerce and provide recognition to electronic contracts, was introduced in Parliament in December. It is expected to come up for consideration in the ongoing Budget session. The much-awaited Bill will provide a regulatory regime to supervise the digital signature system needed to carry out financial transactions through Internet and other electronic modes.

The standing committee had recommended a new clause in the Bill to include hacking and stipulate punitive measures like a three-year imprisonment or a fine up to Rs 2 lakh or both for cyber crimes.

Another clause makes it mandatory for persons hosting websites and portals on servers located in India to furnish complete information about themselves. Failure to do so could lead to imprisonment up to one year or a fine up to Rs 5 lakh.

Other Bills

The Cabinet also approved the Freedom of Information and Amendment to Related Acts and Rules Bill. The Bill is likely to be introduced in Parliament on 17 May. It was also decided that the State Financial Corporation Act, 1951, would be amended and the Forfeiture Act, 1859, repealed.

Rabi crops: The Cabinet decided to change the marketing year for rabi crops from April-March to March-February. The move comes as farmers opting for early rabi crops did not receive the benefits of revised and minimum support prices since these were marketed earlier than the April crops, when the revised prices became effective.

■ Another report on page 13

THE STATESMAN

14 MAY 2000

Vajpayee wants State Govts to slash subsidies

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 20

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee today made out a strong case for the State Governments to reduce the growing subsidies in power, transport and other service sectors to improve their financial condition and help the country tide over the widening fiscal deficit.

"The growing subsidy burden is one area we must tackle jointly. The Union Government has taken some difficult decisions to contain subsidies at the Centre. The States would be well-advised to do the same," he emphasised in his address to the sixth meeting of the Inter-State Council at the Vigyan Bhawan here.

Expressing concern over the fact that the Centre and the States were going through a period of severe financial crisis, Mr Vajpayee called for joint efforts to contain and curtail the high fiscal deficit.

"The Union Government, on its part, is making concerted efforts to improve tax buoyancy, prune unproductive expenditure, rationalise the scale and structure of Central subsidies and push ahead the public sector reforms," he claimed at the gathering of the States' Chief Ministers and heads of Union Territories.

The internal resources of the Centre and the States were proving inadequate to meet the essential development needs, resulting in excessive borrowing, the Prime Minister observed.

Their combined fiscal deficit had been estimated at nine per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1999-2000.

This was higher than the 1990 level when the country faced a severe balance of payment crisis, he said.

"What is of even greater concern is that the high deficits are not being used to finance

investments. They are being increasingly used to finance the rising level of non-Plan expenditure," Mr Vajpayee noted.

The Prime Minister said many States felt that the solution lay in higher fund allocation by the Centre.

"However, I would urge you to realise that additional Central funds cannot solve the problem. The financial position of the Centre itself is strained," he stated.

Suggesting a five-point action plan for the States to improve their financial position, he said that the efficiency of electricity boards

needed to be improved as they alone accounted for more than half of the total revenue deficits of States. The cases of transport and service sectors were similar, he said. Mr Vajpayee stressed that power tariffs must be rationalised and cross-subsidy cut. He also called for steps to improve operational efficiency in transmission and distribution in the interest of consumers. The user charges on utilities and services also had to be rationalised as more often than not they covered only a fraction of the operation cost.

Mr Vajpayee also suggested downsizing of the State Governments as they had shown a much greater inclination to hiring employees than the Centre.

There was also a need to evolve a more rational policy in respect of the State public sector undertakings, he stated. While the viable undertakings should be strengthened, the ones making losses and beyond rehabilitation needed a more realistic approach.

Reiterating the Government's resolve to bring about wholesome decentralisation up to the grass roots level, Mr Vajpayee urged the Inter-State Council to examine ways and means for devolving powers to the panchayati raj institutions and municipal bodies.

Inter-State Council to review Centre's power under Article 356: Page 10



CMs meet convened to discuss terrorism

IN VIEW of increasing incidence of terrorist activities in different parts of the country, Prime Minister A B Vajpayee has convened a meeting of the CMs of all States on August 7.

Disclosing this at the conclusion of the Inter-State Council meeting on Saturday, Home Minister L K Advani said terrorist threat had assumed "really serious" proportions and many States felt that they were unable to cope with the menace on their own. **HTC, New Delhi**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 MAY 2000

Opp stalls statehood Bills in LS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

18/5 9-10/9/14 517
NEW DELHI, May 17. — A determined group of Samajwadi-RJD-Samata MPs prevented the government from tabling the three statehood Bills in the Lok Sabha on the last day of Parliament's budget session.

The Congress did a volte face on its stand for the three new states, lending tacit support to the opponents who stormed the well.

The Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, ordered an hour's adjournment, at the end of which he told the government to withhold presentation of the Bill till the next session because of the unfavourable atmosphere inside the House.

As soon as the home minister, Mr LK Advani, rose to table the Uttaranchal Bill, a group of slogan-shouting MPs rushed to the well. There was chaos, and Mr Balayogi, after speaking with the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, in his chamber, ruled that the Bill be deemed as "not presented".

It was a clear case of poor floor management by the ruling coalition. Its embarrassment today resulted from Mr Mahajan's failure to take MPs into confidence before including the Bills in the House's supplementary agenda at the last minute.

On the day the Cabinet cleared the Bills last week, Mr Mahajan had announced they would be tabled today. But introduction of the Bills was not listed in the day's legislative business. And the Bihar-UP group opposed to Jharkhand and Uttaranchal would not have it when the government tried to add the Bills to the supplementary agenda in the afternoon.

(Mr Mahajan later told reporters that introduction of the Bills could not be listed in the legislative business due to

procedural delays, including delay in their printing.)

Mr Chandra Shekhar appeared briefly in the House to add fuel to the fire. He made a statement urging the Chair not to allow the government to add anything to the supplementary agenda on the last day of the session, and walked out.

Mr Prabhunath Singh, Samata, was seen joining hands with Mr Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, Independent, in opposing the creation of Jharkhand.

Mr Balayogi's assessment of the "atmosphere" in the House was contested by the Treasury benches. Almost all members from the Jharkhand and Uttaranchal regions were up on their feet protesting.

Price hike: In his concluding statement, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee accused the Congress of making price rollback a political tool to gain "popularity". The country was passing through a severe financial crisis, and it gave the government no pleasure to take harsh measures, he said.

To Mr Yerran Naidu, TDP, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, Trinamul, and Mr DP Yadav, Samata, the Prime Minister said: "I would just like to assure my alliance partners that some way will be found to remove their grievances."

Mr Vajpayee rejected Mrs Sonia Gandhi's charge that the government was being rigid about the price hike.

PTI adds: Samajwadi members walked out of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly today to protest the Cabinet's decision to include Hardwar in the proposed Uttaranchal state.

Mr Ram Ashray Vishwakarma, Mr Balram Yadav and Mr Ram Saran Das alleged even the ruling alliance was split over the status of Hardwar. Mr Ram Sumer Yadav, CPI-M, pleaded for the wishes of the people of Hardwar to be taken into account.

THE STATESMAN

8 MAY 2000

Vajpayee convenes all-party meet to discuss drought

New Delhi, April 24 *ग्र-व-म-अ-1*

PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee has convened an all-party meeting tomorrow to discuss the grave situation of drought in five States specially in Gujarat and Rajasthan. A PMO spokesman said the meeting would be held at 1700 hrs in the Prime Minister's office at Parliament House.

According to official estimates more than 50 million people in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa and two other States were facing virtual famine conditions with crops having withered and water resources dried up.

The Government has announced release of additional foodgrains in the drought-prone areas. Each family in there will be given 20 kg of foodgrains at BPL rates, besides carrying out food for work programme. Under this, each man would be given 2 kg foodgrains at Below Poverty Level rates. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 APR 2000

No differences with President: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 24. The Prime Minister has denied any differences with the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, over the latter's banquet speech in honour of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, on March 21. A statement, issued by Mr. H. K. Dua, Press Adviser to Prime Minister, reads:

"The Prime Minister has seen several news reports criticising the President's speech at his banquet in honour of President Clinton.

The reports have drawn the unwarranted, indeed, tendentious conclusion that there are differences of policy between the Government and the President. While the articulation may vary, the substance of the statements made by the President and the Prime Minister is the same."

Referring to the controversy over the invocation by the President of the theme of "non-alignment," Mr. Dua's statement reads: "So far as Non-Alignment is concerned, the Government's policy has been clearly enunciat-

ed in President's Address to the Joint Session of Parliament on February 23 last.

It read: India's foreign policy of Non-Alignment and peaceful co-existence is relevant to the multipolar world today. This is based on the principle of protecting our vital interests and promoting our national ideals."

In the end the statement notes that "the Prime Minister has urged the media to desist from publicising controversies where none exist."

THE HINDU
25 MAR 2000

Naidu turns down PM offer to join govt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 25. — The TDP has turned down the Prime Minister's offer to join the Centre but has assured unstinted support to the Centre's policies.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee had requested the Andhra Pradesh chief minister, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, in Tirupati to join the government.

Saturday's proposed Union ministry expansion is thus likely to be filling up of three vacancies — two Cabinet posts and one minister of state post — and induction of Mrs

Sushma Swaraj and a few ministers of state. Mr Vajpayee has spoken about his intention to upgrade the health ministry by inducting a Cabinet minister.

Any major expansion is unlikely as the NDA government is oversized and Mr Vajpayee will like to keep some room for manoeuvring in case of an emergency. The ministry comprises 73 ministers — 29 Cabinet ministers, six ministers of state (independent charge) and 38 ministers of state.

Mr Nitish Kumar and Mr Navin Patnaik's nominee are likely to be inducted this time. Mr Patnaik has reportedly nominated BJD MP from

Sambalpur, Mr Prasanna Acharya. Portfolios of some of the ministers may be changed keeping in tune with Mr Vajpayee's desire to reward efficiency.

BJP leaders said upgradation of the health ministry will be done to accommodate the party's demand that PMK's Mr NT Shanmugam be shifted from the health ministry. Some BJP leaders consider him to be very inefficient and Mr Kushabhau Thakre has requested Mr Vajpayee to do something on this score.

Mr Vajpayee told India Today online: "I am thinking of reshuffling the Cabinet, vacancies will be filled. Some new

faces will also be there." He said the exercise would also involve changes in some existing departments.

Mr Vajpayee spoke about the expansion after his one-to-one talk with Mr Patnaik in Orissa and Mr Chandrababu Naidu in Hyderabad on Wednesday. He is understood to have spoken to Mr George Fernandes as well.

Some BJP leaders said the party MP from Bhopal, Ms Uma Bharati, is keen to return to tourism ministry.

There were talks in BJP circles that the Union civil aviation minister, Mr Sharad Yadav, will be shifted, but none spoke of his being dropped due to political reasons

THE STATESMAN

26 MAY 2000

Vajpayee plans to expand Cabinet

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MAY 25. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today indicated that he would expand his ministry and probably reshuffle the portfolios, and that this exercise could take place before the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, leaves for Beijing on May 28. Mr. Vajpayee gave this indication during an online chat.

The exercise would be a limited one, and was intended to fill vacancies caused by the departure of a number of cabinet members such as Mr. Nitish Kumar, who had exchanged his place in the Union Cabinet with a short-lived tenure as the Chief Minister of Bihar, and Mr. Naveen Patnaik, who left to become the Orissa Chief Minister.

The decision to undertake the expansion/reshuffle exercise was taken last night, after resisting the idea for months. Mr. Vajpayee observed during the chat that "the expansion may involve some economic ministries but it may not affect all the political parties in the National Democratic Alliance."

While it is said that Mr. Nitish Kumar could make a come back to the Vajpayee Cabinet, the chances of two women contenders from the BJP ranks — Ms. Uma Bharti and Ms. Sushma Swa-

raj — are not rated very high. Ms. Bharti has acted against the grain of the Vajpayee preference for "no confrontation" with the non-BJP State Governments. She left the Cabinet to engage in agitational activities against the Digvijay Singh government, and came a cropper.

It is also said that serious thought is being given to divesting Mr. Sharad Yadav of his portfolio of Civil Aviation. Allegations against Mr. Yadav's erratic handling of his ministry abound, and the argument is that he must be put in place.

Two serious contenders for the ministerial slots are two ex-Congressmen, Mr. Rajshekhar Murthy and Mr. S. S. Ahluwalia, both of whom were accommodated in the Rajya Sabha in the recent round of biennial elections. Both expect to be further rewarded with Ministerial berths as a price for deserting the Congress(I). However, now with the Congress (I)'s fortunes plummeting, the BJP establishment may feel itself under that much pressure.

PTI reports:

Asked about the possibility of resuming a dialogue with Pakistan, the Prime Minister said India was prepared for talks but asserted that Islamabad had to create the "appropriate climate".

THE HINDU

25 MAY 2004

H/D HEALTH GIVEN TO C.P. THAKUR

Nitish back in Cabinet, BJD gets two berths

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MAY 27. The Atal Behari Vajpayee Council of Ministers was both mini-expanded and minor-reshuffled today when three new faces were inducted and portfolios of a few incumbents got swapped. Also, Mr. Dilip Ray, Minister of State for Steel (with independent charge) has resigned. With today's arrivals and departure, the membership of the Vajpayee Council of Ministers adds up to 73.

While Mr. Nitish Kumar of the Samata Party makes a comeback, Mr. Arun Sethi and Mr. Brij K. Tripathi of the Biju Janata Dal make their debut. Mr. Nitish Kumar and Mr. Sethi have Cabinet rank, while Mr. Tripathi will be a Minister of State with independent charge. The induction of Mr. Sethi and Mr. Tripathi as well as the departure of Mr. Dilip Ray took place at the insistence of Mr. Naveen Patnaik, Orissa Chief Minis-

ter and boss of the Biju Janata Dal.

Mr. Nitish Kumar not only gets his Cabinet post back, he also gets his old portfolio — Ministry of Agriculture — back. Mr. Kumar had left the Cabinet in March to take up the Chief Ministership of Bihar, but was voted out within days.

The other Cabinet Minister, Mr. Sethi gets the Ministry of Water Resources, while Mr. Tripathi will be Minister of State for Steel.

The other "portfolio reshuffle" saw the Minister for Culture, Mr. Ananth Kumar, getting charge of the now merged Ministry of Tourism and Culture; Mr. Jagmohan, who has been in the eye of a storm in the capital because of his slums clearance drive, got a vote of confidence from the Prime Minister when he was given additional charge of "Poverty Alleviation".

Mr. S. S. Dhindsa, Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports, gets ad-

ditional charge of the Ministry of Mines, while Mr. C. P. Thakur will be the new Minister for Health and Family Welfare. Mr. N.T. Shanmugam, who had to vacate the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for Mr. Thakur, gets independent charge of the Coal Ministry.

The Prime Minister also effected minor changes in the portfolios of six Ministers of State; in the revised arrangement, Mrs. Rita Verma will be at the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Syed Shahnawaz Hussein at the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Mr. Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav gets to be Minister of State in the Ministry of Surface Transport, Dr. Debendra Pradhan at the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Jaising Rao Gaekwad Patil is the new Minister of State in the Ministry of Mines while Mr. Chaoba Singh gets the Department of Food Processing in the Agriculture Ministry. The rationale for shifting these Ministers was not all that obvious.

The new Ministers were administered oath of office and secrecy by the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, at a brief ceremony in the Rashtrapati Bhavan this morning. The Prime Minister, his senior colleagues, the Vice-President, Mr. Krishan Kant, and the former Prime Minister, Mr. I. K. Gujral, were among those present.

The "expansion" fell far short of the expectations and excitement Mr. Vajpayee had invoked when he announced his intention a few days ago to undertake the exercise. Talking to reporters after the swearing-in ceremony, the Prime Minister indicated that there would be no further expansion of the Cabinet in the near future. Mr. Vajpayee has not given even the fig leaf of "another expansion" to the large number of BJP aspirants.

Dissent in Samata: Page 11

28 MAY 2008

Bureaucratic shuffle sees 24 changes

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 28

IN A major bureaucratic reshuffle involving 24 senior IAS officers, the Government tonight announced appointments of new secretaries in several key ministries and departments, including commerce, power, civil aviation and telecom services.

Prabir Sengupta is the new commerce secretary. The coveted slot in the power ministry, which is at the core of the Government's reforms programme, has gone to Ashok K Basu, now posted in the steel ministry.

A H Jung will replace Ravindra Gupta in the civil aviation ministry, following his transfer to the department of defence production and supplies. The crucial changes in some of the key economic ministries follow close on the heels of Saturday's mini-Cabinet expansion and changes in several portfolios.

In another significant move, senior IAS officer, Vinod Vaish, who had earlier last year been in the eye of a storm following his appointment as secretary, telecom services, has been re-appointed to the communications ministry to fill the crucial slot replacing P S Saran of the Indian Telecom Services (ITS), who retires on Wednesday.

Vaish's earlier appointment had to be cancelled in the wake of considerable pressure from non-IAS officers of the ITS.

However, even as the IAS lobby was manipulating to capture other specialised assignments in the communications ministry's department of post, the Government has cleared the appointment of B N Som as secretary, department of

post, well in advance.

The incumbent in the department of post, R U S Prasad, retires later next month. The move, is apparently aimed at softening the "heartburns" among non-IAS technocrats in the communications ministry. Other noteworthy changes relate to the appointment of Bhure Lal, secretary, ministry of tribal affairs, as chairman of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). He will take over from P R Dasgupta, who retires on May 31.

Under the changes approved by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), secretary, coordination and public grievances, A K Aggarwal, has been appointed secretary, steel, replacing Basu who has now been made power secretary.

The new secretary in the ministry of coal would be V N Kaul, a senior Madhya Pradesh cadre officer. He will replace S S Boparai who has been repatriated to his cadre in Punjab.

The ACC has cleared the transfer of M D Asthana, secretary, department of public distribution, to the Planning Commission as principal adviser in the rank of a secretary. P Shankar is tipped to replace Asthana.

Among other important changes announced tonight include the appointment of Achala Moulik as secretary in the department of elementary education and literacy (HRD ministry) and that of Dipankar Basu as secretary, coordination and public grievances.

In the new scheme of things, special secretary, insurance, B K Chaturvedi, has been shifted to the department of women and child development as secretary. He replaces Kiran Aggarwal, who is slated to proceed on leave.

Key changes

P. Sengupta: Commerce.
A.H. Jung: Civil Aviation
A.K. Basu: Power.
R. Gupta: Defence Prod.
A. K. Agarwal: Steel.
V. N. Kaul: Coal
P. Shankar: Food.
V. Vaish: Telecom Services.
Achala Moulik: Elementary Education and Literacy.
Dipankar Basu: Coordination, Public Grievances.
B.K. Chaturvedi: Women and Child Development.
Bhure Lal: Chairman, FCI.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAY 2000

Advani sets terms for talks with Kashmiri militants

By Bisheshwar Mishra

AHMEDABAD: Union home minister L.K. Advani has said that the government is ready to talk with any militant group provided it is prepared to accept the parameters of the constitution.

However, with regard to dialogue with Pakistan, Mr Advani said, "After the Kargil war, the whole perspective has changed. There cannot be any talks with Pakistan unless they stop the proxy war and cross-border terrorism." Mr Advani was speaking to the press on board a Border Security Force (BSF) aircraft on Wednesday.

U.S. President Bill Clinton had endorsed the Indian stand when he told the Pakistan government that it was for the latter to create proper

conditions for peaceful talks between India and Pakistan, Mr Advani said. The home minister said that prior to the Kargil war, India had been prepared to talk with Pakistan anywhere at any time, even on Kashmir. "That is why we on our own went up to Lahore. And I personally visited the Wagah border and distributed fruits to the people on the other side as a gesture." But things had changed now.

Asked, if he foresaw any possibility of a war with Pakistan in the near future, the home minister said, "I do not see any possibility of any war in the near future. However, we need to remain vigilant and ensure that there is no cross-border terrorism."

About the government initiating talks with the ultras, Mr Advani said, "We are prepared to

talk with any terrorist outfit on anything that they want, even if their demands are perverted in nature. Let them come and talk on autonomy, on anything, but so long as they accept the parameters of the constitution and so long as the talks are purposeful in terms of creating congenial conditions, like refraining from use of arms."

However, Mr Advani clarified that the government was not prepared to hold talks with ultras outside the country. "All talks must be held here only." He said the only exception the government had made was with regard to the Nagas. "This is because the decision to hold talks outside India with the Naga National Council (NNC) had been taken before this government was formed," Mr Advani said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

6 APR 2000

Vajpayee rules out rollback of prices

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

NEW DELHI, APRIL 6. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today ruled out a rollback of the recent price hikes on the plea that they were dictated by the state of the economy, and appealed for national consensus on all major issues confronting the country.

At a rally organised by the Delhi unit of the party to coincide with the 20th founding day of the party, Mr. Vajpayee accused the Opposition parties of trying to create a rift among the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners on the price hikes and maintained that the allies of the BJP had begun to appreciate the compulsions of the Government in resorting to the move.

"No doubt the allies of the BJP are not happy about the price hikes. But when we presented them with facts and figures of the state of the economy, there was a change in their attitude. I am confident that in the coming days our allies will come round. If we were only worried about continuing in power, we would not have taken

Three-fourths of the Indira Gandhi Stadium, where the rally was held, was filled before the Prime Minister arrived but people began to leave as soon as Mr. Thakre began his address. Much to the embarrassment of the organisers when the party president got up to release a book on 20 years of the BJP, written by the party vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, there was repeated clapping from the audience signalling that he leave the mike to the Prime Minister.

In his brief speech, Mr. Advani traced the ups and downs of the party in the last 20 years and in its previous incarnation as the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, and said the decision to seek the cooperation of other parties for electoral purposes was taken after the failure of the party to garner support from others after the 1996 election.

On the nuclear tests, Mr. Vajpayee said India went ahead with them after receiving information that Pakistan was about to test its own weapons.

"All kinds of allegations were



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, at a BJP rally in New Delhi on Thursday. — Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

these unpopular decisions. These measures were the need of the hour," Mr. Vajpayee told the gathering.

Right from the word go it was an aggressive Prime Minister who defended the actions of his Government on a number of counts. His 30-minute speech was punctuated by barbs aimed against the opposition. Among those present on the dais included the Union Home Minister, Mr. Lal Krishna Advani, and the BJP president, Mr. Kushabhau Thakre.

Mr. Vajpayee defended the decision on the 1998 nuclear tests and attacked the Opposition for "mischievous and malicious propaganda" on the Constitution review commission. He also defended the Uttar Pradesh bill on religious places, and said similar laws existed in other states.

levelled against us. We were told we had forced Pakistan to go nuclear with our tests as if Pakistan was waiting for us to give it an excuse. Can any one deny we are more secure today than before?"

The Prime Minister said that before the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, came to India there was motivated propaganda that India would sign the CTBT and declared that India would not sign the Treaty without a consensus. The Government would never compromise on national interests. Criticising the Opposition for attacking the proposal to review the Constitution, Mr. Vajpayee said no sensible person could indulge in such loose talk and said it would be foolhardy to believe that eminent persons on the Commission could become "agents of hidden agenda".

57 APR 2000

BJP stands by Govt. on price hikes, subsidy cuts

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 15. The BJP today came out in defence of the recent decisions of the Vajpayee Government to cut food and fertilizer subsidies and hike the prices of kerosene and cooking gas.

In his inaugural address to the national executive of the BJP, the party president, Mr. Kushabhau Thakre, said the tough economic measures of the Government in recent weeks and months have to be looked at in the context of the overall economic situation.

Staunch defence of the price hikes and subsidy cuts by the BJP chief assume significance as several constituents of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) have not only dubbed them as "anti-poor" but have taken a vow to pressure the Government to roll back the hikes during the budget session of Parliament that resumes on Monday.

Rumblings in the ranks of the NDA had caused unease in the BJP. At a meeting of the BJP Parliamentary Party immediately after the presentation of the Budget, there were anxious queries from party MPs as to how they were expected to explain the harsh measures to people when constituents of the NDA were critical of the same.

The party president's defence of the price hikes comes a week after the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, at a rally organised by BJP, had categorically ruled out a rollback. Mr. Vajpayee had claimed that the NDA constituents are veering round to appreciate the compulsions of the Government in resorting to the price hikes and hoped that as the budget session approaches they will support the Government.

A resolution on the economic situation was the main item on the agenda of the national executive on the opening day. The External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, who intervened in the discussion on the resolution, said the Kargil conflict, the Orissa cyclone and the growing fiscal deficit had forced the Government to adopt tough measures on the economic front.

In his address, Mr. Thakre said carrying the burden of subsidies beyond a point is virtually



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, flanked (right) by the BJP president, Mr. Kushabhau Thakre, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and (left) the Delhi Pradesh unit chief, Mr. Mange Ram Garg, and the party general secretary, Mr. Venkalah Naidu, at the national executive of the party in New Delhi on Saturday.

impossible for any Government and what is called for is focussed spending on the poor. "There are other aspects, too, that influence Government policy and over which the country has no control. For instance, if world oil prices rise, then our oil bill automatically shoots up. It would be unfair to expect the Government to pick up this bill."

Cross-voting decried

Mr. Thakre criticised the cross-voting in the recent Rajya Sabha elections describing it as a perversion of democracy. "Cross-voting, irrespective of which party stands to lose from it, is a blot on our polity as it is nothing short of abusing the system of secret ballot for personal gains. This is a perversion of democracy," he said, and added that there was a need to look into such a debasement of the system and consider means of tackling the problem.

Referring to the recent Assembly elections,

he said the BJP had fared well in Orissa, Bihar and Manipur while admitting that it had done "poorly" in Haryana and there was need to look into the reasons for this performance. On Bihar, where the NDA was unable to get a clear majority, he said: "Our battle against the corrupt, criminal and casteist Laloo-Rabri regime is far from over. We shall continue our struggle to free the people from the jungle raj."

TDP for phased cut

PTI reports:

The TDP said the Government should cut subsidies in a phased manner and not at once. Reacting to Mr. Thakre's defence of the subsidy cut, the TDP parliamentary party leader Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, told Star News, "our aim and objective is that subsidies should be cut only in a phased manner".

Sinha may stick to his guns: Page 8

THE HINDU

16 APR 2001

PM wins party over, seeks allies' support

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, April 16

ARMED WITH the BJP's backing for raising of issue prices under the PDS and hike in prices of fertilisers, kerosene and cooking gas, Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee sought support from allies to thwart the Congress' move to introduce cut motions to stall Parliament's approval for the controversial steps in the Budget.

The allies, particularly the TDP, Trinamool Congress, Akali Dal and the INLD, however pressed on for a staggered approach to prevent the Congress and other Opposition parties from damaging their support base.

The Prime Minister, however, won complete support from NDA partners for the move to review the Constitution and turn the tables on the Congress for its campaign on this issue to paint the Government as "anti-Dalit."

A statement issued by NDA leaders ruled out the Government going back on the Constitution review issue and described the campaign headed by Mrs Sonia Gandhi as "irresponsible and highly mischievous criticism of the review committee and total lack of understanding of the issues

involved."

Mr Vajpayee's 90-minute confabulation with the NDA leaders centred on the need for better floor coordination in handling the Opposition during Parliament's Budget Session which resumes from tomorrow.

The allies were advised not to air differences outside the NDA forum but seek resolution through discussion with the Prime Minister and other BJP leaders.

On the eve of the Session, Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Madhavrao Scindia announced plans for cut motions

Economic Reforms

on controversial moves because the "great burden" put on those below the poverty line, middle class and lower middle class was "unacceptable" to the Congress.

Hours before Mr Vajpayee's meeting with NDA leaders, the BJP National Executive, before its conclusion, had resolved to extend full support to the Government's initiative to straighten the economy by declaring there was no other option except to rationalise subsidy expenditure when revenue collections could not even service the Government's debts.

At the conclave which hailed the BJP's completion of 20 years as a political party, the Prime Minister listed quality governance as the next priority. "We have entered a crucial stage of our journey. Our acceptability has improved - it will improve further. We must maintain our distinctiveness as a party. We have to concentrate on improving the quality of governance."

The PM urged his ministers and functionaries to be careful and sensitive while speaking on issues relating to the minorities while cautioning the BJP against the Congress' "politically negative approach." Heaping praise on Mr Vajpayee's leadership, Union Home Minister L. K. Advani reiterated the BJP's commitment to the NDA to keep out contentious issues to subscribe to the common ideals of good governance.

In a return to the old practice of according equal honour to Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani, the BJP National Executive's political resolution recorded that the growth of the party had been made possible by their "visionary leadership." It said "Under their guidance, tens of thousands of our party's activists have been working with exemplary zeal and dedication."

Flutter over Women's Bill: Page 19

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 APR 2000

SINHA TO BRIEF BJP MPS TODAY

R. Vajpayee

Allies insist on rollback of prices

HD-1 20/4

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 19. Categorical assertions by the Government that it cannot afford to roll back the recent price hikes, given the state of the economy, did not have the desired impact on the allies of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) who continued to press for reconsideration of the hike in prices of foodgrains distributed through the Public Distribution System and of the petroleum products.

Even as the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, Mr. Shanta Kumar, rejected the demand for a rollback in the Rajya Sabha, the allies of the NDA have decided to have an informal meeting tomorrow to consider their strategy to pressure the Government to respond to their concerns on the issue.

On Tuesday, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, while replying to clarifications of members to his statement on petroleum products price hike, had ruled out reconsideration of the hikes.

However, the only consolation for the Government is that the allies are not willing to go all out to force the Government accept their demand. A senior leader of a key constituent of the BJP conceded that they are not in a position to vote on the cut motions proposed to be moved by the Congress(I) on the Finance Bill.

"You cannot expect us to vote with the Opposition and create a situation that could lead to the fall of the Government. We are no doubt unhappy, but we have our limitations. We can only hope that the Government listens to us," remarked the NDA leader.

Despite the hard-hitting speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, in defence of the price

PM indisposed, reply put off

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has taken ill and has been advised rest, the Lok Sabha was informed today shortly before he was to have replied to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address.

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said Mr. Vajpayee had infection in his respiratory system, besides a sore throat, and requested that his reply be put off till next week. He suggested April 24, but the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, preferred April 25 to which the House agreed. The Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi's speech which was to have preceded the Prime Minister's reply was also put off till April 25. The debate on the motion of thanks was completed on Tuesday and Ms. Sonia Gandhi's speech was awaited in political circles with a sense of anticipation.

hikes at a rally organised by the Delhi BJP in the first week of April, and the party national executive resolution on the eve of the second half of the budget session of Parliament, there is disquiet on this front even in the BJP circles.

The Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, who returned from Washington this morning will meet the BJP MPs tomorrow in a bid to explain them the compulsions of the Government in resorting to price hikes.

Former Union Minister and Janata Dal (United) leader, Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav, who has been in the forefront among the allies, is holding a press conference tomorrow to reiterate the demand of the allies on the price hike issue.

'No obligation to subsidise'

Replying to the short-duration discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the price hikes, Mr. Shanta Kumar asserted that the Government was under no obligation to provide food subsidy to those above the poverty line and justified the hike

in prices of foodgrains as a follow-up to the policy decision taken during the United Front regime that enjoyed the support of the Congress(I).

"We are under no obligation to provide food subsidy to those above the poverty line (APL). The Planning Commission had recommended doing away with subsidies for the people above the poverty line and to provide subsidies only to those below the poverty line (BPL)."

The Minister's response came after the Opposition made a passionate plea for a rollback of the foodgrain price hikes. The Government faced embarrassing moments when Telugu Desam Party MP, Mr. C. Ramachandraiah, made a scathing attack on the Government's approach towards subsidy on foodgrains.

Mr. Shanta Kumar, whose reply was interrupted by Left party and Congress(I) members, said the Government had provided an additional subsidy of Rs. 2,270 crores which worked out to Rs. 30 per BPL family.

THE HINDU

20 APR 2000

Tug-of-war over rollback continues

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 20. There was no sign today of the Government being ready to soften the blow it has already delivered in the matter of cut in food and fertilizer subsidies, the hike in prices of cooking gas and kerosene, and the more recent cuts in interest rates on public provident fund. Despite persistent questioning by nearly 80 Bharatiya Janata Party MPs for over four hours this evening, there was no assurance from the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha. All that Mr. Sinha was able to say by way of comforting the MPs was that he would convey their strong views to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee.

Even as this drama unfolded, the allies and supporting parties of the BJP watched, waited and preferred to postpone a meeting on the subject. It seemed that there was lack of unity among them on how far they should go to press their demand for at least a partial rollback. Both Mr. Sinha and Mr. Shanta Kumar, Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, faced a volley of questions from the BJP MPs.

As many as 23 MPs spoke during the informal meeting. Party

MPs were also of the view that if the Government was indeed thinking of making some small gesture on the prices and subsidies issue, the "political credit" should also go to the BJP rather than to the allies alone, who have lobbied hard with the Prime Minister.

Party MPs drawn from both the Houses wanted to be briefed on what the Government plans to do on the disinvestment front and interest cuts on savings schemes which would hit the small investors. Partners and supporting parties of the BJP are divided on strategy to pressure the Government to reconsider the recent price hikes and slash in the food and fertilizer subsidies. An informal meeting of their leaders planned for today was deferred.

Officially, it was explained that the meeting has been put off as leaders of some of the parties had left for their respective States in view of the three-day Parliament recess beginning tomorrow. But it appears the real reason is the allies wanted to wait for some more time before deciding their next move. The NDA leaders felt that a clear picture about the thinking of the Government on the price hikes would be available after to-

day's meeting between Mr. Sinha and BJP MPs.

Division in the ranks of the allies and the supporting parties on the future course of action was evident in the contradictory statements made by the former Union Minister and Janata Dal (United) leader, Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav, and the Telugu Desam Parliamentary Party Leader, Mr. K. Yerran Naidu.

Addressing a news conference in his capacity as the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Food and Civil Supplies, Mr. Yadav asserted that the allies could go to any extent in support of their demand for a review of the price hikes. He was responding to a question if the allies could support the cut motion proposed to be moved by the Congress(I) on the Finance Bill.

On the other hand, Mr. Yerran Naidu categorically ruled out support to an Opposition cut motion. "Cut motion is a weapon of the Opposition parties... there is no way we could support them," he said.

Mr. Naidu argued that the allies and supporting parties have reflected the sentiments of the common people in support of a rollback of prices when they gave

a memorandum in March to the Prime Minister. "In the Lok Sabha, the Finance Minister has assured that he will keep the sentiments of the members in mind while responding to the debate on the Finance Bill. Let us wait and see," he said.

Panel for rollback: Page 13

PM back to work

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 20. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is reasonably well and attended to his office work today.

On Wednesday, Mr. Vajpayee could not take part in the debate in the Lok Sabha as he was feeling unwell; and, predictably, the officials were keen on downplaying his illness. Today, the same officials were keen on playing up "the PM is back to work" theme.

Mr. Vajpayee today attended a meeting in the Ministry of Defence, received foreign visitors and his Cabinet colleagues, and cleared a small portion of the never diminishing pile of files; and, he is reported to be looking forward to presiding over the Cabinet meeting on Saturday.

11 DU

APR 2000

21 APR 2000

No rollback, perhaps some cuts

HD-13
22/4
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21. Senior Bharatiya Janata Party leaders today hinted today that though no "rollback" of the cuts in subsidies and the increase in prices was expected from the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, some small gestures could be made to pacify the agitated party MPs, allies and supporting parties.

"I have not yet talked to Mr. Yashwant Sinha," a senior BJP leader said, adding, "I do not know his mind." But at the same time there were hints that some small reductions to ease the recently-imposed financial burdens on the man on the street could not be ruled out.

The party expected that from Monday, the allies would also marshal their forces to put renewed pressure on the Government.

And official sources indicated that before the Finance Bill came up for voting, an informal meeting of the floor leaders of the allies and supporting parties would be called. "This meeting may be called anytime after Monday," an official said.

Party sources admitted that the frustration and anxiety displayed by party MPs at yesterday's meeting with the Finance Minister were the result of "definite feedback" from the constituencies that the cuts in food and fertilizer subsidies had an adverse impact.

A number of decisions taken simultaneously have sent the signal that the government was more receptive to the problems of rich industrialists than those of the poorest segments. Something had to be done to correct this impression.

At the same time it is being admitted that given the grim realities of a large fiscal deficit, the Government did not have much room for manoeuvre. But the political message must be right — that the government was going after the rich, not the poor. Unfortunately, yester-

day's questioning of the Finance Minister by the MPs definitely indicated that the party was not at all sure that the Government had not got its message mixed up.

The feeling in the party is that some innovative methods were needed to overcome the blackmarket aspect of the public distribution system. The benefit of subsidies should go to those who need it the most, the illicit gains in the blackmarket made by the fair price shop owners should be eliminated, and overall the Government should be able to save some amount spent on subsidies.

A ruthless assault: CPI

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21. The CPI today demanded a rollback of the recent price hike, saying some of the allies of the Vajpayee Government had come out strongly against it.

The national council, which began a three-day meeting here, adopted a resolution condemning the cut in subsidy on foodgrains and fertilizers and the hike in the prices of essential commodities sold through the public distribution system. "It is a ruthless assault on the livelihood of the common people", the resolution said complaining that ever since the BJP-led Government came to power it had been pursuing "anti-people" policies.

Instead of taking effective steps to curb tax evasion and unearth black money, the Government was trying to do away with subsidies. "This is unreasonable and unjustified", the resolution said.

It called upon all Left parties to step up their campaign against the Government's economic agenda.

THE HINDU

22 APR 2000

Funds no constraint: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 25. The Government today made it clear that it was reluctant to declare the present drought affecting 10 or 11 States in varying degrees of severity as a national calamity, although at an all-party meeting here there was a general consensus that this should be done.

Some Opposition leaders — Mr. Anant Geete (Shiv Sena) and Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad (Rashtriya Janata Dal) — were openly critical of the Centre saying the Government did not respond positively to the many suggestions made by the Opposition at the meeting which lasted nearly two hours.

Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, who briefed mediapersons later, began by saying there was a consensus that the drought should be seen as a national calamity and all parties should rise above party politics to fight it. However, when asked whether the Government was about to declare the drought as a national calamity, he said "there was no need to go into legalities, everyone knows it is a calamity."

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who presided, assured all parties that lack of funds would not be allowed to hamper relief work.

Leaders of 21 political parties spoke at the meeting which lasted nearly two hours, and these included the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterji, Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD), Mr. Sharad Pawar (NCP), Mr. Naveen Patnaik (BJD), Mr. Yerran Naidu (TDP) and Ms. Mamata Banerjee (Trinamool Congress).

Mr. Shanta Kumar, Minister for Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, announced that the Government had already released over 5 lakh tonnes of foodgrains to Rajasthan at the Below Poverty Line

prices to urgent distribution to the drought affected, while for Gujarat 1.37 lakh tons of rice and 2.21 lakh tonnes of wheat had been released in response to specific requests from these State Governments.

At the suggestion of the Opposition, it was agreed that all MPs would contribute one month's salary to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund from where recently Rajasthan had been given Rs. 20 crores and Gujarat Rs. 10 crores.

The meeting, Mr. Mahajan said, was held in an atmosphere devoid of politics. There were only two "passing critical remarks" by the Opposition — Mr. Somnath Chatterji felt the Government should have come out with a suo motu statement on the situation instead of waiting to reply to a debate on the subject, and Ms. Sonia Gandhi referred to the travails of Orissa and lack of enough timely funds from the Centre when Orissa faced the super cyclone last year.

Rs. 954 cr. released

NEW DELHI, APRIL 25. The Centre today said it has released Rs. 954.43 crores as assistance to Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh to tide over the severe drought, even as Railways announced free transportation of fodder and water to Gujarat and Rajasthan.

While Gujarat has been given Rs. 208.47 crores under Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) and Rs. 54.58 crores under National Fund for Calamity Relief (NFCR), the share of Rajasthan under CRF is Rs. 267.37 crores and Rs. 102.93 crores under NFCR. Andhra Pradesh has been provided Rs. 146.58 crores under CRF and Rs. 75.36 crores under NFCR while Madhya Pradesh has been given Rs. 60.28 crores under CRF and Rs. 38.86 crores under NFCR. — PTI

Status report on Page 13

THE HINDU

26 APR 2000

NO SUPPORT TO CUT MOTIONS

Allies to keep up pressure for rollback

By Our Special Correspondent

g. w. g. m.
HO-1 27/A

NEW DELHI, APRIL 26. The allies and supporting parties of the BJP are willing to strike but afraid to wound on the price hike issue. A meeting of the representatives of the allies and supporting parties here today decided to continue to pressure the Government to reconsider the recent price hikes but at the same time categorically ruled out backing the proposed cut motions on the Finance Bill by Opposition parties.

It was decided that they should continue to raise the demand for reconsideration of the price hikes inside and outside Parliament. The day-long debate in the Lok Sabha on the price rise, scheduled for tomorrow, would provide an opportunity to the allies to ventilate their grievances.

The allies and supporting parties have been engaged in a tug-of-war ever since the Government decided to hike the prices of foodgrains distributed through the public distribution system (PDS) and subsequently enhance the price of petroleum prod-

ucts. Immediately after the price hikes were announced they submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, protesting the hikes and urging him to direct a rollback.

Despite the allies' demands, the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, have strongly defended the hikes and urged them to appreciate the compulsions of the Government in view of the delicate state of the economy.

The 40-minute meeting was attended by leaders of all the major allies of the BJP, including Mr. K. Yerran Naidu (TDP), Mr. Sudip Bandhopadhyaya (Trinamool Congress), Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U), Mr. Sushil Kumar Indora (INLD), Mr. Anant Gite (Shiv Sena) and Mr. Vaiko (MDMK).

"We will press for our demands inside and outside Parliament," Mr. Yadav told reporters after the meeting. He said the allies were hopeful that the Government will take the issue seriously as it concerned the poor and those below poverty line.

INDU

27 APR 2000

Jaswant offers a glimmer of hope on rollback

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. While there was no firm indication that the Government would give in to the mounting pressure from its allies and the Opposition to roll back the recent price hikes, the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, did raise hopes today when he promised in the Rajya Sabha to communicate the members' sentiments to the Union Cabinet.

As soon as Mr. Singh sat down after a 70-minute reply to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address (which was later passed by a voice vote), members from the Opposition and the treasury benches were on their feet urging him to "say something" on the price hikes issue. The Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, remarked that members expected a serious and positive response from the Government. A smiling External Affairs Minister observed that "positive or negative" was a matter of subjectivity.

He made a passionate appeal to members to appreciate the compulsions of the Government in resorting to price hikes and urged them to rise above party lines on economic issues. He said the NDA Government had inherited the policy on subsidies from the United Front Government, and had, in fact, improved on the policy vis-a-vis the supply of foodgrains to the poorer sections of society.

In the Lok Sabha, even as the BJP's allies joined the Opposition in demanding a rollback, they emphasised that they were "solidly" behind the Government. They argued that while they ac-

knowledged the Government's compulsions they could not remain passive spectators as fresh burdens were imposed on the people.

Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyaya of the Trinamool Congress sought to distance his party from the Opposition saying that it was not opposing the Government but simply demanding a review of the price hike. He reiterated his party's unswerving support to the Government and said he was raising the issue with a "heavy heart" as it concerned the common people. He was particularly critical of the decision to raise the price of essential commodities sold through the public distribution

system to those living below the poverty line (BPL).

From the Shiv Sena, Mr. Anandrao Vithoba Adsul assured the Vajpayee Government that his party would continue to be in the National Democratic Alliance and pointed out that by criticising the price hike he was merely reflecting the "people's sentiments". He said the BPL population had little purchasing power and the price rise would add to its woes.

The thrust of the nearly day-long discussion was that there was no justification for the hike at a time when the "common man" was already finding it difficult to make both ends meet. Members, cutting across party lines, high-

lighted the plight of the BPL sections and said that by making essential commodities more expensive the Government was adding insult to injury.

The Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, said while mobile phones and fancy cars were becoming cheaper, tractors and fertilizers were becoming more expensive. He accused the Government of acting under pressure from rich countries. Addressing the BJP's allies, he asked them to stand up and be counted. Ms. Mayawati (BJP) alleged a "conspiracy" between the BJP and the traders who, she said, financed the BJP's election campaigns.

The Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, defended the hike saying sometimes hard decisions had to be taken in the larger national interest. He denied the charge of "external pressures" contending that the Government had consistently stood up to outside pressures on many issues.

PM indisposed

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, is slightly indisposed with a recurring throat infection and has been advised not to make speeches for a couple of days.

"Accordingly, Mr. Vajpayee did not address the BJP parliamentary party meeting this morning," a press note issued by the Prime Minister's press adviser, Mr. H.K. Dua said.

However, the Prime Minister will continue to keep other scheduled engagements. — PTI

Jaswant stands in: Page 14

BJP MPs expect a gesture

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. There was no indication from the Government of a rollback in prices but there were hints that some small gesture could be made before the Finance Bill is put to vote in the Lok Sabha on May 4.

BJP MPs were today given a lesson on the merits of cuts in subsidies at the party's parliamentary party meeting by the Minister for Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, Mr. Shanta Kumar, who talked about the economic benefits to the poorest of doubling the foodgrain quota to 20 kg if at a higher cost.

However, neither party MPs

nor those of its allies are convinced. Most agree that in the remote and backward districts the people are rarely able to collect even 10 kg of grain per head for lack of cash, or, as is most often the case, ration shops simply say they are out of stock.

Mr. Yerran Naidu, TDP leader, today continued to express hope that the Government would reconsider its decision before the Finance Bill is moved. He agreed that the Government would have done better by not increasing the quota of subsidised grain to the targeted group and not increasing the price, rather than doing both.

BJP not to blame predecessor Govts.: Page 13

28 APR 2008

Allies' stand on RSS puts BJP in a spot

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: At a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Wednesday, the BJP's partners made it clear that if there was voting on the RSS issue in the Lok Sabha, it would be very difficult for them to support the Gujarat government's directive allowing government servants to join the RSS.

The TDP, the DMK, the MDMK, the Indian National Lok Dal and the Trinamul Congress were among those parties which expressed their reservations on the issue. In fact, the DMK and the MDMK even suggested a way out of the current impasse in Parliament—that the BJP leadership instruct its state governments in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh to withdraw the order.

With the opposition blocking all business, barring the presentation of the two budgets in the Lok Sabha, and demanding a substantive discussion on the RSS issue under Rule 184 which allows for voting, the BJP

has begun to feel cornered. The BJP had been trying to get its alliance partners to accept a discussion under Rule 184, allowing them to have their say on the RSS issue, but with the provision that they would all vote with the BJP. However, the alliance partners pointed out that it would be untenable, given the wording of the motion.

In fact, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan had spoken to the Congress and asked the party if the motion could be reworded. But Congress chief whip Priyaranjan Das Munshi pointed out that even if the wording was made milder, it would still be substantive if it was to be under Rule 184.

For instance, it was possible to change the wording from, 'The government has failed to give direction and discharge its constitutional duty..' to 'The government should give direction to the Gujarat government to withdraw its circular and discharge its constitutional duty.'

Centre can't interfere in Gujarat: Advani

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 2. — The Centre could not and, therefore, would not interfere with the Gujarat government's decision to lift the ban on its employees joining the RSS, the Home Minister, Mr L K Advani, told an agitated Rajya Sabha this evening. But there was no proposal to let Central government employees take part in activities of the organisation, he said.

Alleging double standards, and voicing fears that grounds were being readied to revoke the ban at the Central level as well, the Opposition staged an angry walk-out. It accused the Centre of hiding behind technicalities to gloss over its failure to protect secularism as enshrined in the Constitution. The political neutrality of the civil service was being put at grave risk, the Opposition argued.

Mr Advani counter-punched the

Opposition by accusing it of using secularism as a ploy to derive political mileage and create fissures within the ruling coalition. This ploy won't work, the NDA partners had come together on the basis of "idealism", putting aside ideological differences to ensure good governance on the basis of an agreed agenda, he said.

Like the debate itself, the Home Minister's reply meandered and soon lapsed into a virtual eulogy of what he considered the unsullied virtues of the RSS. In fact, the walk-out took place after Dr Manmohan Singh of the Congress asked the Home Minister to be specific, for his presentation, Dr Singh said, suggested that the Centre was thinking of taking a cue from Gujarat.

The Centre had found "no reason" to issue any directive to the Gujarat government, the Home Minister said, and after some prompting from the Law Minister,

added that it was not empowered under the Constitution to do so. Not a single provision of the Constitution, not a single law, had been violated, he said. "I can only leave it to the judgment of the state government". It was for the state government to decide, after taking into cognisance the objections to its order, Mr Advani said.

The Gujarat government had acted independently and the Home Ministry had merely responded to a communication from the state by informing it of the Tribunal's order that the RSS was not an unlawful organisation. It had asked the state to consult the Department of Personnel on lifting the ban, he explained.

Like other speakers from the Treasury Benches, Mr Advani rejected charges of the RSS being both political and communal. He quoted the report of the J L Kapur

■ See GUJARAT: page 6

GUJARAT:

(Continued from page 1)

Commission that had probed the conspiracy angle of Gandhi's death and said it had given the organisation a clean chit.

Earlier the Opposition not only criticised the role of the RSS down the years, but also mentioned the dangers implicit in civil servants associating with the organisation. What would be the government's response to a demand for lifting a similar ban on the Jamiat-e-Islami, the Opposition asked. These issues were not addressed by Mr Advani, the walk-out put paid to that prospect.

Lok Sabha adjourned: The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the sixth day in a row after a determined Opposition paralysed proceedings demanding discussion under Rule 184 on the decision of the Gujarat government to permit its employees to join the RSS.

No business could be transacted except for laying of papers and a statement by the Parliamentary Affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, on providing security to the family members of Shiv Sena supremo, Mr Bal Thackeray.

RSS may move in to save Vajpayee Govt.

By Harish Khare

HD-1
5/3

NEW DELHI, MARCH 4. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is reported to have impressed upon the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leadership to bail his Government out of the impasse in Parliament over the Keshubhai Patel Ministry's January 3 notification, permitting its employees to participate in the RSS activities.

It is said that Mr. Vajpayee has almost succeeded in persuading the RSS brass to provide a way out. The Race Course Road establishment and the Jhandewalan establishment are believed to have agreed upon a script: one of the senior RSS functionaries would make a public statement to the effect that the organisation had never asked the Gujarat Government to lift the ban, and that the organisation had the requisite spiritual perseverance to do without the participation of Government employees in its activities, and that there would be no objection from its side should the State Government choose to rescind its order. It is pointed out that the RSS leadership was very "helpful" in the wake of the controversy generated by the order, when there was widespread apprehension that even the Vajpayee Government could be contemplating a similar move.

That time too, the RSS leadership rather readily agreed to help Mr. Vajpayee defuse the crisis by issuing a statement that the organisation was not interested in the idea (of Central employees participating in RSS activities).

The usually reliable sources in the Prime Minister's Office suggest that a similar statement of helpfulness is imminent in the next few days; such a statement of intent would provide the Keshubhai Patel Ministry just the fig-leaf of an excuse to rescind its order. Ideally the RSS disclaimer should come

before the March 6 rally being planned by the Congress(I); though a section believes that the disclaimer could wait till after March 6 as the Congress(I) was in no position to stage a successful rally.

On its part the RSS leadership reportedly feels sufficiently propitiated by the Prime Minister's clean chit to the organisation as well as by the Union Home Minister, Mr. Advani's stout defence of the RSS in the Rajya Sabha two days ago. Mr. Advani also asserted that the Union Government was not com-

PM to meet allies

NEW DELHI, MARCH 4. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has convened a meeting of leaders of NDA constituents on Monday to discuss ways of sorting out the Opposition demand for a censure discussion on the RSS controversy to break the standoff in the Lok Sabha. — PTI

petent enough to issue any direction to a State Government. Having collected all these certificates of good conduct, the RSS leadership now feels it can afford to be reasonable and accommodating.

The Prime Minister is said to have pointed out to the RSS leadership that he and his Government were being blamed for the impasse in the Lok Sabha. In particular, Mr. Vajpayee has been faulted for not taking any initiative, in his capacity as the Leader of the House, to break the deadlock over the Opposition demand that the Gujarat order be discussed under Rule 184; most of the NDA allies appear reluctant to be seen endorsing the correctness of the Gujarat order. The Telugu Desam Party, a key ally, is believed to have told the Prime Minister that it could not be expected to vote with the Government should it come to counting heads in the Lok Sabha.

Roll back subsidy cuts in budget, allies tell PM

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: While the NDA government is still squirming after the onslaught of criticism which was unleashed over the RSS membership issue, serious problems from within the ruling combine arose on Monday. A delegation comprising leaders of the National Democratic Alliance constituents met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to demand a roll-back of the cuts in food and fertilizer subsidies in finance minister Yashwant Sinha's budget proposals.

This year's budget seeks a substantial reduction of about 12 per cent in food subsidies and a 4.5 per cent cut in the fertiliser subsidy.

The BJP's allies, who have been expressing their apprehensions over the subsidies' issue, submitted a joint memorandum to the PM asking for a reversal of this decision. The memorandum will be submitted to the finance minister on Tuesday.

The signatories to the memorandum include K. Yerran Naidu (TDP), Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U), Raghunath Jha (Samata Party), Vaiko (MDMK), C. Kuppusami (DMK), Trilochan Singh (Akali Dal), P.D. Elangovan (PMK), Sushil Indora (INLD) and S.Thirunavukarasu (MGR-ADMK).

The issue could snowball if some of the allies—notably the JD-U—

carry out their threat to move a cut motion during the vote on the budget. The memorandum said that if the proposed subsidy cuts were not reversed, it would have serious implications. "Needless to highlight that the poor and the farmers being adversely hit by these proposals, the same were not well-conceived," the memorandum said.

This formal request from the al-

Basu opposes CPM move to back Laloo

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: Going against the party line yet again, chief minister Jyoti Basu has opposed the CPM's decision to support the Laloo Prasad Yadav-led RJD in Bihar. Instead, he has supported the CPI's decision to fight the CPM-RJD combine, saying that "Laloo represents corruption in Bihar."

lies has come as a crucial test of the NDA government's unity.

The allies had virtually refused to bail out the BJP on the issue of the Gujarat government's order allowing its employees to participate actively in RSS activities, indicating their unwillingness to go along with the government if the matter came to a vote moved by a united opposition.

The memorandum said the allies'

main concern was the hike in the issue prices of foodgrains being distributed through the targeted public distribution system (TDPS) and an increase in fertilizer prices.

"Providing relief to the poor through the TDPS and to farmers through a fertilizer subsidy is one aspect on which there is wide political consensus," said the memorandum.

It further stated that while the reduction in the fertilizer subsidy would adversely affect farmers throughout the country, the hike in issue prices of foodgrains for the TDPS would place a huge burden on states with extensive TDPS commitments.

The fertilizer hike, it said, would in due course lead to an escalation in the prices of foodgrains, causing a further burden on the states.

Speaking to presspersons, one of the signatories of the letter, Mr Yerran Naidu of the TDP, said all the allies were united on the issue. He added that Trinamul Congress leader Sudip Bandopadhyay had conveyed his party's support, while the Shiv Sena had appended its signature to the memorandum later.

"In a coalition, the government should consult the allies before taking such major decisions. If such consultations are held, the government would not have to face such an embarrassing situation as the present one," he added.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 7 MAR 2000

BJP allies firm on RSS issue, want rollback of price hikes

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 6. Allies and supporting constituents of the parties of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) joined hands today to pressure the Vajpayee Government to roll back the Budget hikes in fertilizers and foodgrains prices even as they continued to show reluctance to a discussion on the RSS issue in the Lok Sabha under a rule which would entail voting.

A delegation of senior leaders of the NDA and its allies called on the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today and submitted a memorandum explaining their objections to the increase in the prices of foodgrains supplied under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and of fertilizers proposed by the Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, in the Budget for 2000-2001. The Government will have a difficult time ignoring the plea made by the allies, as all the important allies are signatories to the page-long memorandum.

The Prime Minister advised the delegation led by the Telugu Desam Parliamentary Party leader, Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, to meet the Finance Minister and explain their viewpoint. The allies have sought an appointment with Mr. Sinha.

The memorandum was blunt in its complaint that the hikes would have serious repercussions on the finances of the State Governments. It said that reduction of the food subsidy by 12 per cent and the 4.5 per

cent cut in fertilizer subsidy would hit the farmers and the poor.

"Providing relief to the poor through the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and for farmers through fertilizer subsidy is one aspect on which there is wider political consensus. While the reduction in fertilizer subsidy will adversely affect the farmers throughout the country in relation to the consumption in various States, the hike in the issue prices of foodgrains for the TPDS will particularly place an unbearable burden on the States with extensive TPDS commitments," the memorandum said.

In another development, at the second meeting of the partners of the NDA the unanimous view was that a discussion on the RSS issue in the Lok Sabha should take place under Rule 193 so that they do not have to vote.

The Telugu Desam, one of the supporting parties, clarified later that the municipal elections in Andhra Pradesh had nothing to do with its stand for a discussion under Rule 193.

In Bhubaneswar, the Orissa Chief Minister, Mr. Naveen Patnaik, belonging to the Biju Janata Dal, an NDA ally, indicated that his party would treat the RSS issue in a "secular and democratic manner," while in Chennai, Dr. S. Ramadoss, leader of the PMK, another BJP ally, was more direct, saying his party was opposed to the Gujarat Government's order.

Mr. Vaiko of the MDMK and Ms. Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamul Congress Party also strongly opposed the Gujarat order which is

being generally seen as an attempt to politicise the bureaucracy. The meeting convened this morning by the Prime Minister was attended by leaders of the allied and supporting parties. It lasted 15 minutes.

In any case, "hope" is being expressed by some BJP leaders and Ministers that the Gujarat Government would withdraw its controversial circular on allowing Government servants to participate in RSS activities. If that happens, then naturally the Opposition will have no reason to continue stalling the Lok Sabha proceedings or demanding a discussion on the issue under Rule 184.

The Bharatiya Janata Party is blaming the Congress(I) for stalling Parliament's work on a "non-issue." Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, BJP spokesperson, charged the Opposition party with continuing to dwell on this even after a categorical statement from the Centre that it had no role to play and would not given any direction to the Gujarat Government to withdraw the offending order.

Asked if the allies would bring a cut motion to the budgetary demands for grants, he said, "it can't be decided unilaterally. It is for all the allies to decide together."

Mr. Yadav and Mr. Yerran Naidu took strong exception to the BJP not taking the allies into confidence before drafting the Budget and said had the partners been consulted, such a situation would not have arisen.

Pressurise Gujarat Govt on RSS order, allies urge BJP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 7

AS Government-opposition standoff continued in Lok Sabha on the RSS issue, NDA constituents on Tuesday suggested that the BJP leadership should persuade the Gujarat Government at the "political level" to withdraw the controversial order on allowing its staff to join the RSS.

The allies, who have reservations about an Opposition-spon-

sored censure motion in the Lok Sabha on the Gujarat decision, are of the view that the matter can be resolved if the BJP takes it up at the party level, NDA sources said.

However, most of the allies, except TDP, have said that should there be voting on the issue in the House, the allies would support the Government as the matter did not concern the Central Government.

An all-party meeting convened on Tuesday by Lok Sabha Speaker G M C Balayogi, which followed a

meeting of NDA leaders with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, failed to find a resolution to the week-long deadlock. Congress leader Madhavrao Scindia told reporters that the Opposition stuck to the demand for discussion that allows voting under Rule 184 as it would expose the stand of the allies on the issue of secularism.

But the allies were not prepared for a censure motion as voting for or against the motion would create problems for them, he said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 8 MAR 2000

Sparks fly over Bihar, RSS

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9. Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned for the day today without any business being transacted following noisy exchanges on the Bihar developments. Unlike the last few days when there was no official transaction, the Opposition today allowed the introduction of two Bills in the Lok Sabha and a statutory resolution in the Rajya Sabha to protect the interests of farmers hit by sugar imports from Pakistan.

In the Rajya Sabha, the stalemate continued as the Opposition stuck to its demand for an immediate discussion on the Bihar issue under a rule which entails voting after the discussion. In the Lok Sabha, the twin subjects — Bihar and the withdrawn Gujarat Government order on the RSS — led to the adjournment.

The Lok Sabha witnessed heated exchanges as the ruling alliance members objected strongly to the Opposition's bid to raise the Bihar issue and shouted down the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, when he insisted that the Speaker announce a date for the proposed discussion on the RSS controversy.

The BJP leader, Mr. Madan Lal Khurana, was particularly upset and charged the Opposition with holding the House to 'ransom'.

Trouble began soon after the House met in the morning, with the Opposition protesting against the Bihar developments and demanding the Governor's recall. They were countered by the NDA members

who insisted that the question hour be allowed to continue. The Speaker's repeated appeal for restraint had no effect, and as noisy scenes continued he adjourned the House until noon.

When it resumed, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav was on his feet demanding when the discussion on the RSS issue would be held and his party member trooped into the well of the House. The treasury benches reacted sharply when the Speaker allowed Mr. Yadav to speak after the papers had been tabled. With tempers mounting, the Speaker adjourned the House again. There was more trouble when members re-assembled at 2 p.m. with Mr. Yerran Naidu in the Chair. His decision to allow Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav to speak sparked another row. Mr. Naidu had a difficult time trying to control the angry member and finally gave up, adjourning the House for the day.

Trouble in the Rajya Sabha started as soon as the members assembled in the morning with the Congress(I) and the RJD members demanding suspension of question hour and taking up the motion on Bihar.

The Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, rejected the demand. But sensing that the Opposition was in a mood to relent, he adjourned the House till lunch.

When it re-assembled for the post-lunch session the Deputy Chairperson, Mrs. Najma Heptulla, adjourned the House for the day after the passage of the statutory resolution approving the hike in customs duty on sugar from 40 to 60 per cent.

Bihar may cast its shadow on Vajpayee Govt.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 10. The loss of face for the National Democratic Alliance in Bihar today follows the forced retreat it made on the RSS issue on Wednesday, and together, these signal that all is not well with the Vajpayee Government and its allies and supporters.

Soon, the allies are expected to force the Government to do yet another about-turn on the issue of the proposed hike in the prices of fertilizers and the changed public distribution regime with a lowering of the subsidy on food-grains.

It is nobody's case, not even that of the Bharatiya Janata Party, that these developments have enhanced the image of the NDA Government led by it.

In fact, the reverses suffered by the NDA in quick succession have led some Opposition leaders to question the future of the Vajpayee Government. Congress(I) leader, Mr. Jitendra Prasad, has said that it is a "matter of time" before the repercussions of the reversal of the RSS order in Guj-

arat and the resignation of the Nitish Kumar Government are felt on the Vajpayee Government.

Some NDA constituents, such as the Telugu Desam Party and the Janata Dal (United) had earlier openly questioned the wisdom of inflicting a minority government on Bihar. Clearly, they had "expected" the outcome and perhaps did not think it was politically prudent for the NDA to be seen to be going against the arithmetic in the Bihar Assembly.

Some senior BJP leaders have privately begun questioning the continuance of the NDA alliance in Bihar, even suggesting that the former socialists cannot be expected to allow the smooth running of a coalition and it would be better for the BJP "to go it alone". However, this view is not shared by other party leaders who fear that the unravelling of the NDA in one State could have a major impact. Like a sweater with a small hole, all it would need is a gentle pull of one thread to undo the entire edifice that has been put together carefully by the BJP over the last four years.

Although the public posture of

the BJP is that it has "doubled the strength of its MLAs" in the recent Assembly elections, there is no doubt that its performance has been well below expectations given the number of alliances it had worked out. That will have its own repercussions on the relationship between the BJP and its allies and supporting parties.

After the results of the 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the NDA was beginning to look invincible. But as Mr. Amar Singh, general secretary of the Samajwadi Party, noted today, in Bihar the "secular forces stood together like a rock" and it should serve as a lesson for those in the NDA who think that there is no alternative to their style of politics.

The fallout of the RSS order reversal on the BJP-led Government's relationship with its mentor, the RSS, and its own internal dynamics remains to be seen. And if the leader of the NDA, the BJP, has come out a little battered, it will be no surprise if its allies make the most of it by pressing more and more demands on it. In politics, there is no room for mercy.

LS DEBATE UNDER VOTING RULE ALLOWED

Advani rejects demand for recall of Pande

By Our Special Correspondent

9-Cont *+10-1*
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today categorically rejected the Opposition demand for recall of the Bihar Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, on the plea that neither did he act in haste nor was his decision to invite Mr. Nitish Kumar to form the State Government unconstitutional.

Replying to a short-duration discussion on the subject in the Rajya Sabha, Mr. Advani said the evidence placed by the Governor before him clearly proved that there was neither haste or partisanship on Mr. Pande's part. The Home Minister argued that the NDA was ahead in the numbers game at that time.

In the Lok Sabha, the issue evoked strong reaction from the Opposition benches with the members making a strong demand for recall of the Governor and the Speaker, Mr. G. M. C. Balayogi, agreed to a debate on the issue under Rule 184 which entails voting.

The Rajya Sabha took up the discussion on the Bihar developments in the afternoon after the Opposition agreed to drop the earlier motion under Rule 170 which would have entailed voting at the end of the debate. Last week, the Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, had admitted the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, and insistence by the Opposition for an immediate discussion had led to the House being adjourned for the entire week.

In the Rajya Sabha, the Government faced some embarrassing moments in the course of the debate when the DMK member, Mr. C.P. Thirunavukkarasu, quoted the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, as saying that the Bihar Governor's decision was hasty and recalled instances in the past when the Governor had acted as a tool of the Central Government.

In the Lok Sabha, the Rashtriya Janata Dal leader, Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who had given the notice for the motion, maintained that the Governor's attempt to install the minority National Democratic Alliance Government in Bihar was an assault

on the Constitution. The Congress(I)'s Deputy Leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, said there had been "widespread" criticism of the Bihar Governor's action and the Opposition protest was legitimate. He justified stalling of Parliament by the Opposition on the RSS and Bihar-related controversies saying they had a bearing on basic Constitutional issues.

Denying the charge that the Opposition had unnecessarily disrupted Parliament, Mr. Scindia enumerated the occasions on which the BJP-led Opposition had, in the past, stalled Parliament's work. The CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, referring to Mr. Khurana's "pontification", said that Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee himself had sat on "dharana" and the BJP members had disrupted Parliament protesting imposition of President's rule in Uttar Pradesh.

Mr. Chatterjee said that in the case of the Bihar Governor's conduct as well as the RSS issue, the Opposition had been vindicated. In Bihar, the minority Government installed by the Governor had collapsed vindicating the Opposition argument that it should not have been invited in the first place. Similarly, the Gujarat Government had been forced to withdraw its controversial order allowing its staff to join the RSS.

The Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, was equally critical of the Bihar Governor charging that he had acted arbitrarily and in violation of the Constitution. He also attacked the Uttar Pradesh Government's order on construction of places of worship and said it was an attack on the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution.

Sharad denies report

PTI reports:

The Civil Aviation Minister, Mr. Sharad Yadav, today denied in the Lok Sabha that he had told reporters the Bihar Governor's decision in inviting the NDA to form the State Government was wrong. The Minister said he had not addressed any press conference as reported in a section of the media nor had he made any such remarks attributed to him.

BJP defends Pande's action: Page 9
Opposition demand: Page 15

*PM defends
fiscal policies
against RSS
chief's criticism*

The Times of India News Service
ON THE PM'S SPECIAL AIR-CRAFT: Returning home from a three-day trip to Mauritius, the Prime Minister said the process of globalisation was irreversible although "certain aspects" of it needed to be looked into.

He defended the government's economic policies against RSS criticism, saying that he would first verify the reports as there had been differences between what was said and what was written in newspapers.

The "good points of Gandhivad", he said, are in the party manifesto, but changes "are taking place in the economic situation the world over and India cannot isolate itself".

All this was in response to criticism of the country's economic policies by the new RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, who said the NDA government had moved away from Gandhivad. What about reports suggesting a strained relationship between the PM and the new RSS chief? The PM said, "The relationship between us is good and will be good."

Mr Vajpayee spoke on a host of issues. Excerpts:

SUBSIDY CUTS: "Wait for the appropriation bill."

GLOBALISATION: "Certain aspects" of it needed to be worked upon. But globalisation was "irreversible".

BILL CLINTON'S VISIT: All issues will be discussed with the American President. What were the specific issues? "Bilateral ties" and, of course, terrorism. Mr Clinton's stopover in Pakistan "makes no difference. When he (Clinton) informed me (about it), I told him it was a sovereign decision, but if you stop there, the military regime will take it as a legitimisation of its position."

Allies speak in one voice

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAR. 15. Allies of the BJP today stuck to their demand for review of the price hikes proposed by the Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, in the Budget 2000-2001 and resolved to speak in one voice on the subject in Parliament.

The allies, which have already submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and Mr. Sinha, making a strong case against the the budget hikes held an informal meeting this morning to consider their strategy inside and outside Parliament.

The impact of the meeting was felt in the Lok Sabha when the Telugu Desam Parliamentary Party leader, Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, par-

icipating in the general debate on the budget criticised the hikes and made it clear that the hike in the prices of foodgrains supplied through the Public Distribution System and the cut in fertilizer subsidy would not be acceptable to his party.

Representatives of the Trinamul Congress and the Janata Dal (United), who followed Mr. Naidu, echoed his feelings and said the budget hikes went against the ideology of the ruling National Democratic Alliance to protect the interests of the poor.

"We stand by the memorandum given to Prime Minister and the Finance Minister and there is no question of yielding," the JD (U) leader, Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav, said after the meeting. The allies would raise the issue in Par-

liament to pressure the Government to withdraw its decision.

Today's meeting was attended by leaders of the NDA constituents including the JD(U), the Trinamool Congress, the Telugu Desam Party, the Samata Party and the DMK.

Participating in a discussion on the general budget, in the Lok Sabha, NDA representatives said the cut in food and fertilizer subsidy would lead to an increase in the prices of essential commodities at a time when a large number of people would not be able to afford them.

"At this juncture it is necessary for providing the people with subsidised fertilizer and PDS", Mr. Yerran Naidu said.

Opposition criticism: Page 15

THE HINDU
16 MAR 2000

2 NDA parties join Opposition chorus

Govt's disinvestment policy invites criticism in Lok Sabha

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 14

THE OPPOSITION in the Lok Sabha today strongly opposed the Government's disinvestment policy, especially the sale of public sector units (PSUs) to private companies.

Two prominent constituents of the ruling NDA—the MDMK and Trinamool Congress—also lent support to the outcry of the Opposition members against what they described as Centre's "reckless resolve to sell off PSUs built over the years" with the toil and tears of the multitudes.

It all started with Mr T M Selvaganpathi of the ADMK questioning the Government's move to privatise the Salem steel plant on the basis of recommendations made by an American company, which, he alleged, had not charged its consultancy fee.

Charging that seven ministers in the Vajpayee Government from Tamil Nadu were a party to the move, the ADMK member stated that the Centre had floated global tenders in the absence of a policy decision over such a sell-off.

Alleging that the plant was being handed over to a private industrial house, Mr Selvaganpathi alleged that the move was part of an evil design to wind up the Durgapur steel plant.

"The privatisation at Salem would have a direct impact on the Durgapur plant that provided it with basic materials," he said.

Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar immediately extended support to ADMK member's plea by enlarging the ambit of the discussion.

Expressing concern over the Government's move, Mr Shekhar warned that the country might lose its political independence in the wake of endangering its economic freedom.

CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee said that the issue could be treated on partisan lines since it involved the very concept of India's

economic self-reliance.

While making reference to inbuilt contradictions within the NDA over the move, Mr Chatterjee called upon the BJP leaders to take note of the new RSS chief's views over the issue. He also demanded that the Government must take the opposition into confidence on such matters.

Mr P R Dasmunshi of the Congress wanted the Government to clarify its position on disinvestment.

"Even as the liberalisation of economy was initiated during the P V Narasimha Rao's rule, the Congress was ready to review its economic policy if it entailed the destruction of structures built over years by the people," he said.

Mr Munshi warned that the Congress would oppose all such moves that may shatter the dreams of its leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

Voicing the opposition of his party, Sudip Bandopadhyay of the Trinamool Congress stated that the target of the newly created Department of Disinvestment should not be to sell off the PSUs.

Expressing concern at the continuing dip in the generation of employment opportunities, the Trinamool Congress leader said the closure of PSUs would further complicate the problem of unemployment across the country.

Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav charged that the government is working under the influence of powerful foreign companies even as the privatisation conditionalities were being formulated at their bidding. "The Government may better improve upon the efficiency of the PSUs to make them profitable notwithstanding the fact that all such units were not created primarily to make money," he said while warning the Government against taking the nation in a wrong direction.

Congmen get nod to move cut motions on Budget — Page 12

PM stands by Sinha's move to cut subsidy on fertilisers

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 14

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee today hinted that the disagreement of alliance partners notwithstanding, the government may stand by Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's announcement of cuts in the subsidy on fertiliser. He told members of the BJP's Parliamentary Party here today that they should utilise the three-week recess of parliament to explain the "rationale" of the government's decision to the people.

He however admitted that he had taken note of the criticism of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners on this and a dialogue was on with all parties to discuss the steps to be taken. The hike in fertiliser and public distribution system prices was "unavoidable". He said his government had inherited a huge fiscal deficit and pleaded that no political motives should be attached to the issue.

Briefing reporters, the party spokesman, Mr M. Venkaiah Naidu, said the BJP's strength in the Upper House would go up from 43 to 48. In addition, it would utilise its surplus in Maharashtra to back the Union Law Minister, Mr Ram Jethmalani.

In all, 16 members will be elected in the forthcoming round of elections.

Mr Naidu had strong words for the Congress for its muted response to the burning alive of seven Dalits in Karnataka's Kolar district.

He said the BJP's state unit had sent a delegation to the scene of the incident under its president, Mr Yediyurappa, and reported that the tragedy could have been avoided if the government had heeded the warning signals arising out of a murder and desecration of a statue of B. R. Ambedkar.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAR 2000

Basic structure to be retained

Constitution review panel to be set up

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 1. — The Cabinet today cleared appointment of a national commission to review the Constitution and suggest changes, if any, "within the framework of parliamentary democracy". In going ahead with its one of its poll promises, the NDA government seems to have made light of the criticism the move has evoked.

The terms of reference for the commission are: "To examine the Constitution in the light of the past 50 years of experience as to how best it can respond to the changing needs of the efficient smooth, efficient system of governance and socio-economic development of modern India within the framework of parliamentary democracy."

It is expected to "recommend changes, if any, that are required in the provisions of the Constitution without interfering with the basic structure or its features".

The commission would be set up by a government resolution and comprise a chairperson, a member secretariat, and not more than nine members for a term of one year, parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, told reporters after the Cabinet meeting. Names of the members and chairman will be announced in a few days.

Though he refused to divulge the chairman's name, he confirmed that the former chief justice, Mr Justice M Venkatachaliah, had met the law minister, Mr Ram Jethmalani.

Mr Mahajan claimed the members would be eminent persons from different walks of life. Asked whether it would

include politicians, Mr Mahajan said there "is no bar on anyone". He pointed out that the commission would finally have to seek suggestions and talk to all parties.

While the terms of reference announced were not detailed, their stipulation that the recommendations be made "within the framework of a parliamentary democracy" would set at rest speculations about alleged moves in favour of a presidential form of government.

The mention to "socio-economic development" also appears to cater to the President's observation that the social content of the Constitution was one of its most significant qualities.

Among the issues on which the commission is expected to deliberate are remedies to instability at the Centre and states, the manner in which Article 356 has been used to impose President's rule and the method by which the majority status of a party in the legislature is to be determined.

NDA stand: The NDA members have by and large supported the government on setting up a commission to review the Constitution.

The Samata Party and the JD-U have categorically said there was nothing wrong in reviewing the Constitution. Others like the Trinamul and DMK have not come out openly on the subject though they are bound to support the government.

The TDP, too, seems to be in favour of review of the Constitution but the party wants the government to spell out the scope of changing the Constitution.

Govt okays civil aviation pacts with UK, Romania

G Ganapathy Subramaniam
NEW DELHI 5 FEBRUARY

AFTER A prolonged recess, the government has cleared bilateral civil aviation agreements with a number of countries including Austria, Uzbekistan, Romania and the UK.

Talks with Qatar, Thailand and the UAE will be taken up soon, official sources said.

The spate of bilaterals comes after a gap of about two years when no bilateral was taken up. The series of talks that have been wrapped up now follow civil aviation minister Sharad Yadav's decision to speed up negotiations, the sources said.

Taking into account the recent agreement with the US, five bilaterals have been cleared so far and three more are in the pipeline. Finalisation of these bilaterals will benefit passengers by increasing capacity deployed on these routes.

In the case of Austria, the recently-concluded bilateral pact allows Austrian Airlines to increase its frequency to India to five flights a week.

India's national carrier Air India will be allowed to similarly increase its capacity to Austria. The increase in frequency will be subject to a ceiling of 265 seats per aircraft.

Currently, Air India and Austrian Airlines are allowed to operate two flights a week between Vienna and New Delhi. The entitlement will increase to three each

by February 12 and move on to four by this summer before increasing to five next winter, sources said.

In the case of Romania, the code-sharing agreement between Air India and Tarom, the flag carrier of Romania, has been liberalised. The royalty payable to Air India by Tarom has been reduced to \$36 per passenger as compared to the earlier \$50 per passenger, sources said. The latest bilateral with the UK has resulted in Air India obtaining permission to operate to any point in Canada through the UK. Earlier, the national carrier was permitted to fly

only to Montreal and Toronto through the UK.

In addition, Air India can now operate its entire entitlement of 16 flights as compared to 10 earlier. The number of co-terminus points have been fixed at three.

British Airways will also benefit from reciprocal arrangements and the removal of the cap on the number of flights operated to Chennai. The co-terminus facility has been doubled to six and British Airways can terminate all its services in India. In view of the difficulties faced by Air India in obtaining slots at Heathrow, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic have agreed to provide assistance.

The agreement with Uzbekistan allows Uzbek Air to launch services to Thiruvananthapuram and Amritsar.

CLEARING THE AIR

The Economic Times

6 FEB 2000

Vajpayee, Advani to sound allies on RSS ban

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 10. Mr AB Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani are expected to hold informal talks with BJP allies who are apparently divided on the matter of lifting the ban on Central staff joining the RSS.

The Telugu Desam Party opposes lifting the ban. The DMK, whose chief has written to the Prime Minister on this, too has decided it wants the ban to stay. The Samata doesn't mind if the ban goes. The Janata Dal (United) is evasive and the Trinamul Congress has been tight-lipped.

A senior BJP leader said the Centre is not in a hurry to lift the ban. "Nothing will be done without taking the allies into confidence."

He said that since the RSS has faced "discrimination" from successive Central governments, the BJP had tried to "clear the misunderstanding that the RSS is a political organisation".

"Now that Gujarat and UP have lifted the ban, the Centre is seriously considering the matter."

Meanwhile, Mr Karunanidhi, who had initially toed the BJP line, has changed tack and shot off a letter to the Prime Minister, saying lifting the ban at the Central level would open up a "pandora's box".

The BJP vice president, Mr K Jana Krishnamurthy, however played this down. He said: "Mr Karunanidhi has merely expressed his views. Lots of

leaders write to the Prime Minister expressing their views. Mr Vajpayee will react accordingly."

The JD-U general secretary and spokesman, Mr Mohan Prakash, refused to comment when asked whether he considered RSS a social or political organisation. He, however, said: "The JD-U is committed to the NDA agenda and if any proposal comes up, the party will take a decision after consulting other allies."

The Trinamul Congress leader, Miss Mamata Banerjee, preferred silence on the controversy.

The TDP, even though opposed to government employees taking part in RSS activities, wouldn't comment on the nature of the organisation.

Mr Yerran Naidu said: "The Andhra Pradesh government will not allow its staff to join the RSS."

But it was learnt that if the government decides to lift the ban, the TDP would take a final decision on the issue at its politburo meeting.

RSS function: The Prime Minister, his I&B minister, and tourism and culture minister Mr Ananth Kumar will attend a function to honour journalists at RSS headquarters in Delhi tomorrow.

The Prime Minister will give away the Nachiketa Samman and cash prizes, awarded by the RSS mouthpiece. The journalists to be honoured include Sultan Shahi, Sandhya Jain and others.

THE STATESMAN

11 FEB 2000

PM wants Sangh Parivar to draw *Laxman rekha*

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 11

PRIME MINISTER A B Vajpayee today employed his characteristic oratory to convey to the top leaders of the RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal that they should not "push too far" in their efforts to propagate their views on controversial subjects, so as to avoid new problems in the country.

Mr Vajpayee was speaking at an award function here held by the RSS organ, *Panchajanya*. His remarks showed that although he was quite appreciative of the RSS in the context of Gujarat lifting a 14-year-old ban on government employees' participation in the Sangh, he was equally anxious not to ruffle the NDA feathers any further.

Without directly referring to any controversy, the Prime Minister struck a note of caution to send a clear message that he expected the Sangh not to complicate matters for the government by reasserting their role.

Mr Vajpayee said nothing should be done supposedly in the greater good of the country that made anybody feel discriminated on linguistic or ethnic grounds. "Our efforts to put forth our views should not cause new problems, compounding the existing ones. Things should not result in one section being set against the other," the Prime Minister said.

"Our country is beset with numerous problems," Mr Vajpayee reminded the audience, which included top RSS leaders Prof Rajendra Singh and K S Sudarshan, and VHP leaders Ashok Singhal and Acharya Giriraj Kishore, besides Ministers L K Advani, Ram Naik, Ananth Kumar and Arun Jaitley.

The Prime Minister said those who were pursuing emotive issues should set for themselves "a point beyond which they should not cross or exceed to prevent the country from plunging into fresh turmoil."

Mr Vajpayee was perhaps prompted to speak out after RSS leader Sudarshan, who spoke ahead of him, criticised the neglect of the Indian culture and lan-

guages and Nehru's approach to economic development, which involved setting up big industries to create mega cities, rejecting Gandhiji's advice to focus on villages.

The RSS leader lamented that the country was suffering on account of "disparities and differing visions" between two "Indias" right since Independence.

"One is the English-speaking elite India and other is the Hindi-speaking Bharat," said Mr Sudarshan, while arguing that 'India' believed it was a multi-lingual and multi-cultural entity but Bharat thought the country was an

said, had taken umbrage when a member from a Hindi-speaking State opposed his replies in English and demanded that he speak in Hindi since he had put the query in Hindi.

Mr Vajpayee said, "I was shocked and stunned when the Minister told the member that he considered Hindi as much an alien language as the member considered English to be one."

This incident, the Prime Minister said, was a harsh reminder that one could hurt the sentiments of the people in the name of a bigger cause. Mr Vajpayee said he believed that the problems could

Resist BJP's bid to smuggle in its agenda, NDA partners urged

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 11

CPI (M) GENERAL secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet has in a letter to the BJP's partners in the National Democratic Alliance asked them to "resist" the BJP's attempt "to smuggle in" its own agenda by allowing Government employees to join the RSS.

"While there may be your compulsions in being part of the NDA, it is difficult to understand your studied silence on the acts of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh Governments as well as the pronouncements of some Union Ministers including the Prime Minister," he wrote.

The Congress has also wondered whether the NDA partners had "decided" to maintain silence on the matter. Congress spokesman Anil Shastri wanted to know whether lifting of ban on government employees participating in the RSS was part of the NDA's common agenda or were the NDA partners ignoring the common agenda for the sake of power.

Accusing the NDA partners of toeing the BJP's communal line, Mr Shastri asked them to clarify their position on the hurdles created by the BJP-RSS combine in the shooting of a film in Varanasi.

Mr Surjeet said if the BJP was allowed to continue pursuing its agenda, it could lead to a dangerous situation threatening national unity. The CPI (M) leader said nobody could accept the Prime Minister's defence that the RSS was a cultural organisation. There were volumes of documented evidence including the writings of RSS stalwarts like Hedgewar, Golwalkar, Moonje, Balasaheb Deoras, Rajendra Singh and a host of others to prove that the RSS was a political organisation in the guise of a social outfit, he said.



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and RSS chief Rajendra Singh at a ceremony organised by RSS mouthpiece *Panchajanya* to give away the Nachiketa award, in the Capital on Friday. Photo: Prakash Singh

expression of unity in diversity but wedded to one culture.

Mr Sudarshan cited the example of Turkey where Kaman Attack changed the official language from Latin to Turkish after he became its ruler. Had Hindi been given the same treatment immediately after Independence, he said, there would have been no opposition.

Responding to Mr Sudarshan's emphasis on promoting Hindi — a pet theme of the Sangh in the cause of 'Indianness' — Mr Vajpayee recalled an episode in the Lok Sabha a few years ago.

A Union Minister from a non-Hindi speaking State, Mr Vajpayee

be solved only through dialogue, by adopting a harmonious approach to sort out differences and arrive at solutions to both pressing as well as long-standing problems.

The Prime Minister said divergent views and opinions were bound to exist in a democratic framework and solutions would have to be found within its parameters.

Favouring an "assimilative" approach, he said the country had a rich tradition of acceptance, harmony and respect for everyone.

Neither Mr Advani nor any other Minister spoke at the function.

SANGMA, C.R. IRANI INCLUDED, REPORT IN A YEAR

11-member panel announced

By Our Special Correspondent *vej qnt*

NEW DELHI, FEB. 13. The Government today announced the setting up of a 11-member Constitution review Commission to be chaired by Mr. Justice M. N. Venkatachalaiah. The Commission is expected to give its report 'within a year' and suggest changes, if any, within the framework of parliamentary democracy.

The other 10 members of the Commission are: Mr Justice B. P. Jeevan Reddy, Chairman of the Law Commission, and former Supreme Court judge, Mr. Justice R. S. Sarkaria, a former Supreme Court judge, who became well-known as Chairman of the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations, Mr. Justice Kondapalli Punniah, a former Supreme Court judge, Mr. Soli Sorabjee, Attorney-General, Mr. Parasaran, a former Attorney-General, Mr. P. A. Sangma, a former Speaker of the Lok Sabha and leader from the northeast, who is currently with the Nationalist Congress Party, Mr. Subhash Kashyap, a former Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha, Mr C. R. Irani, Editor-in-Chief of *The Statesman*, Mr. Abid Husain, who has served as India's Ambassador to the United States, and Mrs. Sumitra Kulkarni, a former MP.

Making the announcement here this evening, the Press Adviser to the Prime Minister, Mr. H.K. Dua, said the terms of reference of the Commission had earlier been approved by the Cabinet through a resolution. He also said that while all the members had now been appointed, a secretary to the Commission would be appointed "soon." The Commission would have no member-secretary, and the secretary would not be a member of the Commission.

The Cabinet resolution adopted on February 11 stated: "The Commission shall examine in the light of experience of the past 50 years as to how far the existing provisions of the

Constitution are capable of responding to the needs of efficient, smooth and effective system of governance and socio-economic development of modern India and to recommend changes, if any, that are required to be made in the Constitution within the framework of parliamentary democracy without interfering with the basic structure or basic features of the Constitution."

For over three weeks now, the political debate has been gathering momentum with parties speaking for and against a review of the Constitution. In fact, the "debate" began the day the Prime Minister announced his Government's decision to appoint a review Commission — January 27 in the Central Hall of Parliament at a function to mark the golden jubilee of India having become a Republic.

Immediately after the Prime Minister spoke, the President, Mr K.R. Narayanan, virtually countered the arguments given by the Prime Minister in favour of such a review. The President wondered whether it was the Constitution that had failed "us" or "we" who had failed the Constitution.

While the Prime Minister had justified the setting up of a review Commission on the grounds that there was need for political stability and there was the "pressing challenge" faced by modern India of increasing the pace of development, Mr. Narayanan had expressed his view against "inkering with" the basic structure of the Constitution by discarding the parliamentary system in favour of a presidential or any other form of government. He had also said that the recent political instability was not a sufficient ground for changing the parliamentary system. In fact, it could become a factor in helping stability as people know that an unpopular government need not last its full term.

The Government virtually accepted that

criticism for the Cabinet resolution approving the terms of reference has specified that the review would have to take place within the parliamentary democracy framework.

Mr. Dua said that Mr. Justice Venkatachalaiah had met the Prime Minister a couple of days ago. It could be presumed that the names of the members of the Commission have been finalised in consultation with him.

The Commission does not have on it a representative of any political party. Mr. Sangma is on it not as leader of the NCP but as a former Speaker, a tribal Christian and a leader from the northeast whose suggestions would be valuable. Mr. Dua emphasised that the invitation to him was sent directly, not through his party. The Government was at pains to emphasise that care had been taken to make the Commission representative of the entire country, including the minorities.

Earlier, it seemed the Government had decided to name the former President, Mr. R. Venkataraman, as the head of Constitution review panel. But opposition from one of the Government's partners, the DMK, led to the dropping of his name.

In a slight departure from the Cabinet decision of February 1, the number of panel members has been increased by one by appointing the former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, Mr. Subhash Kashyap, as member instead of member-secretary, as was the thinking earlier. The Government has opted for a 10-member panel and a Chairman, instead of a nine member committee, the chairman and a member-secretary to the Commission as decided earlier. "All the 10 members will be on an equal footing and the Secretary to the panel will be announced in due course," Mr. Dua said.

Sangma to raise foreigner issue: Page 15

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2000

RSS softens stance on ban controversy

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 13

IN AN apparent response to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's plea to the Sangh Parivar leaders not to cross the "Laxman rekha" while pursuing contentious issues, the RSS today softened its stance on the ongoing controversy about lifting the ban on Government employees' participation in its activities.

RSS supremo Rajendra Singh, sending a strong signal to the cadres to desist from pressing the issue, has said the issue whether or not to lift the ban was matter entirely for the Government to decide. The RSS has not sought the lifting of the ban, he clarified in a statement being published in the forthcoming issue of the Sangh journal, *Panchajanya*.

The RSS chief's statement, coming close on the heels of the Prime Minister's remarks at the Panchajanya awards function on Friday, is clearly aimed at defusing the snowballing political controversy on the ban issue. Three of NDA's allies have spoken out on the subject thus far.

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In his statement, Mr Singh emphasised that the RSS has at no point in its 75 years of existence looked up to the Government of the day for any patron-

Digvijay's warning

MADHYA PRADESH CM Digvijay Singh has warned that any state employee or officer found participating in RSS *shakhas* would be dismissed. The CM alleged that both the BJP and RSS were spreading communalism. The MP Govt would never allow such a thing to happen as long as he was the CM, he said. In Jaipur, Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot said that he had written a letter to the PM last week that his Govt was opposed to State Govt employees participating in RSS activities.

PTI and ITC, Bhopal/Jaipur

age. On the contrary, it has grown and broadbased its activities despite numerous hurdles. All this growth has been mainly due to the inherent strength of

Hindustva, he said.

The ban on Government employees from participating in the RSS activities was first imposed under British rule, he recalled and said if this had continued even after Independence, it was because of the "pseudo secularism" propagated by successive governments.

Mr Singh said the controversy over reviewing the ban on Government employees' participation in RSS activities was "unfortunate and not in the interest of the country". The RSS's own stand on the issue had been vindicated by several judicial pronouncements against the ban, he said.

While clarifying his remarks after the PM's address at the Friday function, Mr Singh said he had merely cited the example of Britain where all government employees except those in judiciary and police were free to participate in activities of "socio-cultural organisations like the RSS" and even political parties.

He said that by making a reference to the British practice, he was only seeking to make his point.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 FEB 2000

Sail restructuring, population policy cleared

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 15. — From Kargil to communications, steel to civil aviation and population to petroleum, the Union Cabinet today took several decisions with major economic and political implications.

Briefing the Press after the Cabinet session, Mr Pramod Mahajan said the report of the Kargil review committee will be placed in Parliament in the budget session. Asked whether it will be accompanied by an action taken report, Mr Mahajan said he could not clarify any further since all he had was a note from the PMO.

Mr Mahajan was more forthcoming on the other decisions, including the controversial issue about extending the deadline for payment of outstanding licence fees by basic and cellular telecom operators. The earlier deadline had lapsed on 31 January and the issue had been in a limbo till the Cabinet today announced a new deadline of 15 March but with additional financial penalties.

The other major decision in communications was the clearance of the private ISP Dishnet's ADR/GDR issue — Rs 1.61 crore/50,000 shares. The clearance comes with a rider — the money can be used only for Internet-related expansion. For other communications activities, the company will have to take the go ahead of the usual regulatory authorities.

Sail and Indian Airlines, came to the Cabinet's reformist attention today. Sail's financial and business restructuring proposal worth Rs 8,454 crore was cleared today, after hanging fire for three years. The steel ministry proposal, cleared by the law ministry, had been held up at the finance ministry.

The Cabinet today resolved the contentious issue — whether or not the money con-

note does not explain how.

IA, with a disinvestment proposal already cleared, was allowed to revert back to a retirement age of 58 for its employees. Mr Mahajan said lowering the limit by two years will save the airline more than Rs 190 crore. The saving as well as the consequent pruning of IA's staff strength are expected to make the disinvestment proposal a little more attractive for any potential strategic partner of the airline.

"Strategic themes", 12 of them, were identified by the Cabinet for the National Population Policy, 2000, which has set a long term objective of achieving a "stable" population by 2045. Relatedly, and more interestingly, the Cabinet also decided that the number of Lok Sabha constituencies from each state will remain unchanged till 2026, in effect delinking electoral map-making from demographics and not punishing states which have met population control targets.

The target of \$230 million, for covering the portion of equity the Indian side has in an Indo-Vietnamese oil exploration joint venture, has been given to a newly formed "empowered" committee to be headed by the petroleum secretary. This committee will have to meet the February end deadline.

NFL privatisation

NEW DELHI, Feb. 15. — The government today decided to privatise National Fertiliser Ltd by divesting 51 per cent equity to a strategic buyer along with management control.

The Cabinet committee on disinvestment also approved the appointment of a merchant banker through global bidding to work out the details. — PTI

tributed by Sail to the Steel Development Fund could be used for its restructuring — and the lion's share of the package will be funded from the SDF. The Cabinet was, however, silent on the issue of disinvesting or privatising Sail. Though it cleared disinvestment of "non-core assets": the power plants in Bokaro, Durgapur and Rourkela. This will be done by "protecting the jobs of existing employees". But the Cabinet

■ Editorial: Sell Sail, page 6
■ More reports on pages 8 and 10

RSS readies for year-end showdown

Temple trouble ticks on Atal

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Feb. 19: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is preparing for a year-end showdown with the "liberal-leaning" Atal Behari Vajpayee government.

RSS sources said the simmering tension between the government and the Sangh could snowball over the issue of the Ayodhya Ram temple, threatening the survival of the ruling coalition.

An RSS functionary from Uttar Pradesh maintained that spadework for the temple was being carried out "quietly and at a steady pace" under the supervision of Uttar Bharat leader Champak Rai, who was at the forefront of the mandir-masjid "agitation".

A final blueprint, flagging off its construction, is expected to be unveiled by November or December. "This is when we expect the BJP's allies to react and pull out, especially those like the DMK, Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam which swear by secularism," said the Sangh functionary.

A BJP leader partially confirmed the RSS game-plan, saying: "If this government falls, the main catalyst will be the Sangh's so-called hidden agenda."

Asked what was the compul-

sion to upset Vajpayee's applecart, RSS sources posed a counter question: "What are we gaining from this government, except being ordered to deep freeze our agenda all the time?"

Sources said the Sangh feared it was losing its "identity" thanks to the BJP's necessity to placate "secular" allies, its cadre was demoralised and even declining in strength while those in power were allegedly feathering their own nests.

"We will force the BJP to reckon with the need to consolidate Hindu militancy all over again by the time the next election takes place," RSS sources said.

The Sangh is peeved at the manner in which the Bajrang Dal was forced to call off its Bhopal convention because of the Congress government's tough stand.

"The BJP will have to grapple with the fact that Digvijay Singh has overnight succeeded in consolidating the minority votes in his state and send the signal to Muslims elsewhere that it is the Congress, and not leaders like Mulayam Yadav and Laloo Yadav, who can look after their interests. If the BJP does not regroup its Hindutva voters after this, what good is it?" said an RSS source.

Although the Prime Minister's Office has denied that Vajpayee

had persuaded the Bajrang Dal to call off the convention, BJP sources admitted his speech at an RSS function last week — where he asked the Sangh not to create "new problems" — was meant to "precisely" hammer home the message that his government would not tolerate a repeat of the Varanasi-type vandalism.

Sources said Vajpayee had reiterated "informally" to Digvijay and Jyoti Basu that law and order was a state subject and if anyone, including Sangh outfits, over-stepped the norms of "civilised conduct", they should be brought to book. BJP leader Uma Bharti and the Bengal party unit have threatened to disrupt the shooting of Deepa Mehta's *Water* if it was resumed in either state.

While the RSS has reportedly assured the government it will allow Vajpayee to pursue with his economic reforms, it is unwilling to yield on Hindutva. Sources said while Vajpayee had managed to coax RSS chief Rajju Bhairya into soft-peddalling the controversy on allowing government employees to join the outfit, his successor may not be "so obliging".

K.S. Sudarshan, who is widely tipped to succeed Rajju Bhairya by mid-2001, has indicated his priority would be to "breathe life" into the Sangh.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 FEB 2000

BJP's allies sore over fuel price hike

Water, Gujarat Govt move to lift ban on RSS add to partners' ire

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, February 23

ALLIES OF the National Democratic Alliance today conveyed their strong displeasure to the BJP leadership for the Government's move to hike the prices of fuel as well as for the controversies generated by Gujarat's decision to allow its employees to join the RSS and the agitation against Deepa Mehta's film, *Water*.

At a meeting of the NDA leaders at Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's residence this evening, representatives of the allies made it clear that they would not be able to defend the Government on such issues, which provoked a negative reaction among the people.

They said the Prime Minister must review the proposed hike and other "hard decisions" to minimise the burden on a majority of the people, NDA sources said.

Leading the allies was again Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, who questioned the very

basis for Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan's announcement on the hike in prices of LPG and kerosene when the Cabinet had not discussed it thoroughly.

Yesterday, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, who met the Prime Minister, reportedly conveyed his opposition to the big hike in prices of LPG and kerosene, citing the civic elections due in the State.

Supported by allies including Haryana Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala and Union Minister of State for Social Justice Maneka Gandhi, Ms Banerjee said today that the NDA's "unity" depended on the Government avoiding "anti-people" policies.

She said the Government must seek alternative means to meet its deficit instead burdening the poor.

Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha then try to explain to the leaders about the compulsions

behind the Government's decision to effect total fiscal discipline by reducing subsidies.

Ms Banerjee, who left the NDA meeting quite early, is understood to have said that the Prime Minister must review the Government's plan, taking into account the views of all members.

Later, Mr Mahajan declined to say anything about the opposition to the hike from the allies. He said Mr Sinha had explained the situation at the meeting of the NDA leaders and there was "broad" agreement on the line to be adopted by the Government. On the RSS issue, he said the Prime Minister had already clarified that there was no move to lift the Central ban on employees to join the Sangh.

At the NDA meeting, the allies described controversy caused by Gujarat's decision to allow employees to join the RSS as an avoidable controversy and disapproved violence against the making of the film, *Water*.

Hike to be deferred till next month?

THE GOVERNMENT tonight deferred the proposed hike in petroleum product prices till the middle of next month, reports PTI quoting highly-placed sources. The TDP and the Trinamool Congress had expressed strong reservations on the move. "The proposal for hiking the prices of products like kerosene and cooking gas has been deferred by more than a fortnight," highly placed sources said. The hike was expected to be announced in Parliament tomorrow. The government's decision comes in the wake of a strong demand put forward by AP Chief Minister and TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu that the government should go slow on the price hike in view of Panchayat elections in his state on March 9 and 10.

PTI, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
24 FEB 2000

President defends govt's move to review constitution

Address to Parliament details govt's political and socio-economic agenda, 17-point medium-term economic strategy

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: In his address to members of both Houses of Parliament on the opening day of the budget session on Wednesday, President K.R. Narayanan defended the government's resolve to set up a panel to examine the constitution while keeping its basic structure and salient features intact.

The exercise was aimed at examining the experience of the past 50 years "to better achieve the ideals enshrined in the constitution", he said. His address also spelt out the political and economic agenda of the government for the coming fiscal year.

Mr Narayanan said the panel's recommendations would be presented to parliament, which was the supreme decision-making body in Indian democracy. Immediately after the presidential address, the government notified formation of the review panel.

The 45-minute speech, the longest in many years, listed the government's achievements and its political, economic and social agenda for the year, including a 17-point medium-term economic agenda. However, even as the President spoke of the 'Agenda for a proud, prosperous India', noisy protests, usually an opposition ploy to attract attention, came from members of the Shiv Sena, a partner in the ruling coalition. Raising saffron banners and slogans, they demanded the restoration of the voting right for

their chief, Bal Thackeray, who has been disenfranchised after a court conviction for making speeches that had spread communal hatred.

While no objections were raised when the President spoke on children, older persons and the women's reservation bill, his refer-

ence to the formation of new states invited protests from two members from Assam, Sansum Kungur Bwiswmuthiary and Jayant Rongpi, who shouted, "No Bodoland, no other state."

The President's observations on foreign affairs formed the highlight of his speech. With barely a month to go before U.S. President Bill Clinton's visit to India, Mr Narayanan made no mention of the CTBT, but he congratulated defence scientists for developing the Trishul and Nishant missiles.

He asserted, while addressing multilateral disarmament initiatives and treaties, that India would continue to abide by the imperative of preserving its "strategic autonomy". At the same time, he reaffirmed India's commitment to "global nuclear disarmament in a time-bound manner on a comprehensive and non-discriminatory basis". Touching on Indo-U.S. ties, he hoped Mr Clinton's visit next month would pave the way for a "broad-based and multi-dimensional expansion of our bilateral relations".

Budget at 2 p.m. on February 29

NEW DELHI: The general budget, expected to contain tough measures to check the mounting fiscal deficit, will be presented at 2 p.m. after the lunch break in the Lok Sabha.

This was decided at the Lok Sabha's business advisory council meeting on Wednesday, official sources said.

Last year, finance minister Yashwant Sinha had broken the colonial tradition of presenting the budget at 5 p.m. on the last working day of February, and presented it at 11 a.m. for the first time.

Since February 28 fell on a Saturday last year, there was no difficulty in presenting the budget at 11 a.m. as the Lok Sabha does not usually meet on weekends.

This year, February 29 will fall on a Tuesday and the budget cannot be presented at 11 p.m. without suspending question hour, sources said. The business advisory committee had therefore decided to present the budget at 2 p.m., so that question hour and zero hour were not disturbed. (PTI)

RSS issue rocks LS, RS

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 24

THE OPPOSITION today succeeded in stalling work in Parliament on the first full working day of the Budget session to convey their anguish over the BJP-ruled Gujarat's decision to allow its employees to join the RSS. Both the Houses adjourned for the day without transacting any business.

The Opposition members raised slogans to demand withdrawal of the State Government's decision and for admission of an adjournment motion on the issue.

Lok Sabha Speaker G M C Balayogi rejected the Congress-sponsored adjournment motion resulting in strong protests from the Opposition benches.

The House was first adjourned shortly after it met in the morning and for a second time soon after the lunch break.

The members belonging to the Samajwadi Party, the BSP and the RPI (Athawale) moved into the wall of the House shouting slogans.

Amid the din and bustle, reports were tabled, including that of the Subrahmanyam Committee, which went into the events and circum-

stances leading to Kargil incursions by Pakistan.

Earlier, the Congress' demand to have the question hour suspended was not accepted by the Speaker after ten minutes of pandemonium.

As soon as the Lok Sabha assembled, the Congress members, led by Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Deputy Leader Madhavrao Scindia, were on their feet.

Mrs Gandhi and other Congress leaders entered the House after staging a dharna near the statue of Gandhiji in front of the main entrance of Parliament House.

Other agitated Opposition members, including Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh, RJD leader Raghubans Prasad Singh and CPI (M) leader Basudev Acharya also joined.

The Speaker requested the Opposition members to join in felicitating a visiting Moroccan delegation, which was present.

After that was over, the Opposition members resumed their chorus for discussing the RSS issue.

Mr Scindia said the matter was of grave public importance. Therefore, his party had given notice for suspension of the ques-

tion hour.

Some BJP members shouted that the question hour should go on.

Mr Balayogi adjourned the House at 2 pm when Samajwadi Party and BSP members trooped into the well.

The situation was no different when the House re-assembled at 2 pm forcing him to adjourn the House for the day.

Similar scenes were witnessed in the Rajya Sabha, with Chairman Krishan Kant rejecting the Opposition plea for taking up discussion on the RSS issue by suspending the question hour.

He said that it went against the unanimous August 1997 resolution adopted during the Golden Jubilee of Independence on the inviolability of question hour.

He said that the issue of the adjournment motion could be discussed through an appropriate notice. Suspending the question hour would, however, weaken the House and go against the spirit of the unanimous resolution, he remarked.

Introducing the motion, leader of Opposition Dr Manmohan Singh said that the Gujarat Government's decision struck at the very root of secularism and the

carefully nurtured apolitical character of the civil services.

Leader of the House and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh opposed the move, saying that it was not a constitutional issue as was being made out but a political issue. By bringing such a motion, the Congress was obviously trying to get over the great embarrassment it would face in the just held State Assembly elections, he said.

The Opposition, he said, would get an opportunity to discuss the issue during the discussion on the President's address.

But the Opposition kept demanding that the motion be allowed.

Mr Suresh Pachouri (Congress) raised the issue in the afternoon session.

Ms Najma Heptulla, Deputy chairperson, said that the Chairman of the House decided on the form, time and day of the motion after consulting the Leader of the House and the mover of the motion.

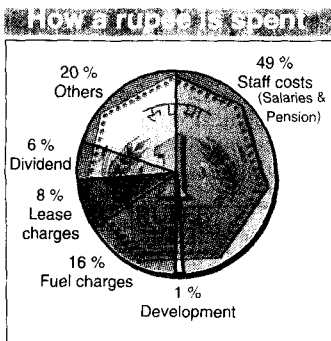
She wanted papers to be laid but Mr Pranab Mukherjee objected to it. Ms Najma Heptulla then adjourned the House for the day.

19 NEW TRAINS INTRODUCED, BONANZA FOR BENGAL

Mamata spares passengers, hikes freight rates

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB 25. There has been no increase in passenger fares in the Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee's maiden Budget. However, freight rates have been increased by five per cent to mobilise an additional Rs. 600 crores but Ms. Banerjee has spared essential commodities such as foodgrains, sugar, edible oils, kerosene, cooking gas, magazines, medicines, fruits and vegetables from this increase. Keeping up her populist stance, Ms. Banerjee, during the course of her presentation in the Lok Sabha today, said she had no "moral



right" to hike passenger fares in the absence of commensurate amenities to passengers. A major thrust to information technology, innovative methods of income generation and a generous package for West Bengal were the other highlights of the 2000-2001 railway Budget.

The hour-and-half long address was interrupted by protests from MPs belonging to Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar who charged Ms. Banerjee with discriminating against their States. Dissatisfied with the Minister's assurance that she would look into their demands, MPs from Kerala, cutting across party lines, staged a walk-out and sat in dharna near the main gate of Parliament House. Protests in the Lok Sabha could not be sustained after the Minister proposed no increase in passenger fares and assured

consideration on metro projects in Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Calcutta.

Ms. Banerjee has proposed higher allocation in the coming financial year for measures to ensure safety in rail travel and faster operations. These include new lines, track renewals and improved signalling. Helped by a Rs. 300 crore grant from the cess on diesel, the railways plan to set up specialised funds for constructing level crossings and road over/under bridges. However, the allocation is more or less the same as this year for doubling and electrification of routes but the comparison with the actual expenditure this year turns out to be flattering because the railways had made mid-year cutbacks due to a severe financial crunch. A drastic reduction has been made for the acquisition of wagons and coaches and gauge conversion. With no increase in passenger fares, increased cost of operations because of higher diesel prices, additional expenditure because of damage to railway property during the Orissa cyclone and higher outgo on account of staff costs, mainly pension payment, the railways have been kept financially afloat by the Union Finance Ministry's unprecedented generosity.

Although Ms. Banerjee bemoaned the under-financing of the railway network by the Central Government, the support given by the exchequer in the form of dividend waiver helped her avoid the embarrassment of presenting a deficit Budget. The railways would have registered a deficit of Rs. 900 crores but for a deferred dividend of Rs. 1,500 crores. Similarly, higher budgetary support of Rs. 3,540 crores helped Ms. Banerjee announce an annual plan of Rs. 11,000 crores to fund track renewals, signalling, doubling of tracks and gauge conversion.

Despite the pressure on finances, there was no let up in announcements of new trains, lines and other projects. West Bengal figures prominently in most of them. The State gets five out of 19 new trains, two out of seven new lines, five out of 10 projects which will be expedited, five out of 15 doubling projects, one out of three electrification projects and three out of four line projects proposed to be extended. However, the spread of 25 new line surveys and faster work on gauge conversion projects was more uniform. The Minister also indicated a major thrust to mass rapid transport projects in metropolitan cities by

revealing that the railways was giving serious thought to proposals submitted by Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh for their State capitals.

The railways would revamp and utilise its extensive telecom network to provide a parallel nationwide telecom infrastructure which will be leased to internet and phone companies. An agree-

ment with HUDCO will enable the railways commercially utilise land along seven sections.

Concessions were announced for widows of soldiers killed in the Kargil conflict and job opportunities for their kin. Free travel for girl students up to class XII from home to school is proposed.

Excerpts from speech: Page 15



The Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, and the Minister of State for Railways, Mr. Digvijay Singh, arriving at Parliament before presenting the Railway Budget in New Delhi on Friday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

Highlights

- No increase in passenger fares.
- Gross traffic receipts estimated at Rs. 35,929 crores.
- No increase in the freight rates for essential commodities like foodgrains, sugar, edible salt, edible oils, kerosene, LPG, fruits and vegetables.
- A general increase of 5 per cent in the rates of all commodities except those mentioned above.
- Urea exempted from increase.
- To commemorate the 50th year of Indian Republic, freedom fighters to be given a millennium gift for travel of one journey by the Rajdhani or the Shatabdi train of choice from any station to any destination and back to be valid for the millennium year only.
- Millennium card at a cost of Rs. 10,000, valid for one year, for assured reservation in first AC and second AC classes on any train, to be introduced.
- Free travel facility available for students up to class-X now extended to girl students only up to class-XII for travel from home to school/college and back.
- Widows of the martyrs of 'Operation Vijay' in 1999 in Kargil to be entitled to 75 per cent travel concession in second class and sleeper class.

Trade-off divides Cabinet, Advani offers to quit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 31. — The decision to free three militants against the release of 154 passengers and crew members on board IC-814 was taken late last night by the Prime Minister himself, despite strong opposition from the Home Minister.

Mr LK Advani reportedly offered to resign, but was dissuaded by Mr Vajpayee. The Cabinet was divided, as it were, on the issue, with Mr Advani and some other members arguing that a few more days of negotiation would wear the hijackers down and secure the hostages' release without compromising national security.

The first decision on a partial release of militants, sources said, was taken a day before,

but the number was finally pared down to only three men.

Several senior members of the Cabinet were more in favour of a deal, while the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, was unhappy that he had been left out of the loop for a period. There was also pressure from the BJP's allies for an early release.

Predictably, the "exchange", though not morale-boosting, is being touted in government circles as more than a partial victory, and all efforts are on to discourage comparison with the climbdown during Mr VP Singh's tenure as Prime Minister when terrorists kidnapped Ms Rubaiya Sayeed, daughter of the then Home Minister, Mr Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, but were still let off the hook.

This time round, the negotiations, government sources pointed out, were being held in an alien land, ruled by an administration not recognised by India.

Both Pakistan, instrumental in the hijacking, and Afghanistan, were either wholly or partly hostile to India. Under such circumstances, it could not but boil down to a numbers game. Only three terrorists had been released, but that secured the lives of 154 passengers, they said.

Also, the Centre reportedly had indications that Maulana Masood Azhar might not after all be accepted by Pakistan. "We are waiting to see if Pakistan accepts Maulana Masood Azhar. If they don't, it will be more than a half-victory."

THE STATESMAN

- 1 JAN 2000

IGNCA Trust reconstituted

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. The Government today reconstituted the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) Trust while retaining Mrs. Sonia Gandhi as a trustee along with Mr P. V. Narasimha Rao, Prof. Yashpal and Dr. Abid Hussain. All other "sitting" trustees were dropped and replaced with the Government's nominees.

The former President, Mr. R. Venkataraman, who resigned as a trustee last year after a controversy over the complexion of the Trust is back in the new 20-member Trust announced by the Union Minister for Culture, Youth Affairs and Sports, Mr. Ananth Kumar, today. Other prominent trustees include Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Ms. Anjolie Ela Menon, Ms. Sonal Mansingh, Ms. Aparna Sen, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan and Dr. L. M. Singhvi. Also included were Mr. Vidya Niwas Mishra, Mr. M. V. Kamath, Dr. H. Narasimhiah, Dr. N. R. Shetty (member-secretary), Dr. Vedantham Sathyanarayana Sharma, and the Union Ministers for Culture and Urban Development.

Those who were dropped include Dr. Kapila Vatasayan; Mr. H. Y. Sharada Prasad; Mr. K. Natwar Singh; Ms. M. S. Subbalakshmi; Mr. Ashok Vajpeyi; and Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha. Also out are Mr. Sam Pitroda, the Union Minister of Finance and Human Resource Development, the chairperson of the University Grants Commission and the Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia.

With the appointment of the new Trust, the controversy over the changes made to the original Trust Deed in 1995, which brought in Mrs. Gandhi as the life President, has ended, at least for now. Mr. Kumar said this had been done after obtaining legal advice and was in accordance with an order of the Delhi High Court that the Government could take appropriate steps with regard to the Trust. The court gave its order while admitting a writ petition against the 1995 amendments.

He said the 1995 amendments were now infructuous and the original Trust Deed had been restored. There would now only be one category of trustees, as against the three created by the amendments and the president would be elected by the trustees in a "spirit of democracy." All members would have a ten-year term each, while the four "sitting" trustees would retire as and when they completed ten years from the date of appointment.

The Minister avoided queries about Mrs. Gandhi's term. She took over after the death of her husband, Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991, and it is not clear whether her term would end in 2001 or she has another four years to go considering that she became a life trustee in 1995.

Major approvals by Cabinet

- Skies opened to private satellites
- Four airports to be corporatised
- New panel to probe 1984 riots
- Rs 860 cr package for Orissa

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 12

THE UNION Cabinet today cleared a proposal to allow registered Indian companies to set up and operate their own satellites. A cap of 74 per cent has been set for any foreign direct investment, including that by NRIs, in such companies.

The Government also decided to lease out the airports in Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai and New Delhi to private parties for 30 years.

Indian companies will also be allowed to provide telecommunication and broadcasting services by uplinking of TV signals with Indian satellites. The department of telecommunications or the ministry of broadcasting will deal with these cases.

The cabinet has also decided to set up an Insat co-ordination committee for allocation of time to private companies on Insat. Until now only Doordarshan, All India Radio, defence services and other government agencies were allowed to make use of Insat.

The government had approved a policy to liberalise satellite communications in June, 1997. However, the terms and conditions for the liberalisation had still to be worked out. These guidelines were later worked out and had been put up for cabinet clearance.

The revenue generated by leasing out Mumbai, Calcutta, Chennai and New Delhi airports to private parties for 30 years would be utilised by the Airport Authority of India (AAI) to provide subsidy to the loss-making airports in the country.

The proposed international airport at Bangalore would also be leased out, Civil Aviation Minister Sharad Yadav said during an informal chat here. The AAI Act would be amended by the Government to provide the enabling legislation for the lease plan. Decisions to this effect were taken at a meeting of the Union Cabinet here today.

The leasing plan is likely to be executed over a period of two years. The proposed Bill to amend the AAI Act would be tabled during the Budget session of Parliament. Since AAI is now authorised only to run the airports, the amendment will empower the Authority to lease out the function of running the airports to private parties, Civil Aviation Secretary Ravindra Gupta explained.

Global consultants are to be hired by AAI to work out the lease plan. Once the details are finalised, Cabinet approval would be obtained again. The lease plan replaces the Government's earlier decision to corporatise the five airports. IT Minister Pramod Mahajan said the Cabinet clearance was in line with the recommendations of the Task Force on Infrastructure headed by deputy chairman of the Planning Commission. Briefing media persons after the Cabinet meeting, he clarified that the revenue generated from the lease would not go into the Consolidated Fund.

The Cabinet preferred lease to privatisation since the ownership of the airports would remain with the AAI under the amended plan. The requirement for amendments to statutory laws would be minimal.

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 12

THE CENTRE today announced it is to set up a new Commission of Inquiry to probe the November 1984 anti-Sikh riots that broke out in Delhi and other parts of the country following the assassination of Indira Gandhi.

The Commission is to be headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court whose name will be finalised in consultation with the Chief Justice of India. It will have to submit its report within six months.

The Government's announcement followed clearance of a proposal to this effect by the Union Cabinet here this morning. The hour-long Cabinet meeting chaired by the Prime Minister also expressed its inability to accept the recommendations of the Bakshi Committee with regard to the pay revision of the employees including senior faculty members of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Post-Graduate Institute (PGI), Chandigarh.

Among other decisions taken by the Cabinet were a new relief package worth Rs 860 crore to Orissa's super-cyclone victims and grant of freedom fighters status to 82 persons who helped in liberating Dadar, Nagar Haveli from the Portuguese in 1954.

The Cabinet also cleared a proposal to hold an international stamp exhibition this year. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan told media persons that the new probe panel will inquire into the causes and course of the criminal violence and riots

(targeting members of the Sikh community) which took place in NCT Delhi and other parts of the country on October 31, 1984 and thereafter.

Mr Mahajan said that even after the completion of inquiries by the Ranganath Commission and two other sub-committees, 147 police officials had been booked for dereliction duty for the riots. "Forty-two of these either died or retired before formal prosecution could be initiated against the remaining 105," he revealed saying that 77 police personnel had already been exonerated.

The Minister further indicated that 14 police personnel had been punished while prosecution of 13 others was in progress. "Out of 707 criminal cases registered against suspects involved in the riots, 374 cases were pressed for prosecution leading to 320 acquittals," he said.

Asked whether the constitution of a fresh inquiry commission would affect the cases presently under prosecution, Mr Mahajan replied in the negative.

Mr Mahajan said that the setting up of the Commission was in no way politically motivated.

Reacting to a query on Bakshi Committee's recommendations, Mr Mahajan said that while refusing to go along with its recommendations, the Government had offered the employees and faculty members of the AIIMS and PGI with a package that included two additional increments to Additional Professors with provision of promotion to 50% for such persons with seven years record of continuous service irrespective of vacancies.

Vajpayee invites minister to Delhi for talks

Uma resigns to protest assault on corporators

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHOPAL, Jan. 15. — Miss Uma Bharti resigned as Union minister of state for tourism today to protest against the police assault on BJP corporators here on Thursday.

The Prime Minister has received the faxed resignation and has invited Miss Bharti for talks. It is unlikely he will decide either way immediately, said a PMO official. Miss Bharti is expected to be in Delhi in a couple of days.

She had quit to be able to take to the streets freely to lead a sustained BJP agitation against "misrule" of the Digvijay Singh government, Miss Bharti told a press conference here.

"My ministerial position had been coming in the way of my registering protest against the disgraceful state of affairs under the Digvijay Singh government, and, therefore, I decided to resign to break completely free".

(She had been feeling "suffocated" at not being "in the forefront of protests against incidents of all kinds," PTI quoted the minister as saying. Now, "I am feeling extremely relieved and relaxed after sending my resignation from the Union council of ministers to the Prime Minister.")

The minister did not say if the resignation was "final," or whether she might "reconsider" the step if Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee requested her to.

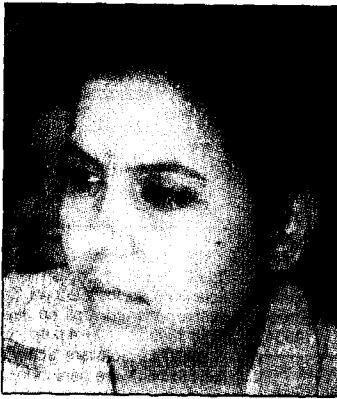
But she said she would not ask Mr Vajpayee for President's rule in Madhya Pradesh despite "the breakdown of law and order."

Police and RAF had, allegedly

under orders from the Bhopal collector, Mr SK Vashisht, "forcibly" removed from a Bhopal Municipal Corporation building BJP corporators protesting against the "absolutely illegal and partisan" election under way for the post of the city civic body chairman.

It was "utterly shocking," Miss Bharti said, that even women and Dalit corporators were not spared.

According to the minister, Mr Vashisht, presiding over the poll as election officer, had



Miss Uma Bharti

thrown all rules to the winds to get the Congress candidate, Mr Sunil Sood, elected. BJP corporators, in a 33-23 majority over the Congress in the 66-member BMC, had boycotted the polls. Yet, the collector had — acting on behalf of the "principal accused" in the episode, the chief minister — gone ahead with the "illegal" election, Miss Bharti said.

Law and order under the Digvijay dispensation had gone completely to the dogs, said the Bhopal MP who flew to her constituency in a special plane

on Thursday night to take charge of the BJP agitation against the alleged irregularities in the BMC chairman's election. The police assault on party MLA, Mr Vijay Shah, last year and the recent murder of the state transport minister, Mr Likhiram Kanvra, were cases in point, she said.

Miss Bharti demanded the Digvijay government immediately scrap Thursday's election, remove the Bhopal collector and SP, and bring criminal charges against all the "guilty" policemen.

Bhopal shuts down: A BJP-sponsored bandh against Thursday's police action brought life to a halt in the city today. Senior BJP leaders kept up their protest fast, and state party working president, Mr Vikram Verma, announced plans to carry the agitation to every town and village in the state. Starting Monday, Mr Digvijay Singh would be burnt in effigy in all urban areas.

The chief minister has rejected the BJP's outcry. The party should consider legal action if it is not satisfied with the outcome of Thursday's election, he said.

Mr Singh described the agitation as a "stunt" to gain "political mileage." According to him, BJP corporators should not have boycotted the election which has now established that the Congress enjoys a majority in the BMC.

Both Mr Vashisht and the minister in charge of Bhopal, Mr Arif Aqueel, denied the BJP's charges. The election did not contravene any rules, they said. Nor was any BJP corporator manhandled nor assaulted by police.

Treasury secretary tests common ground

Vajpayee tastes Clinton agenda

FROM PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Jan. 18: US treasury secretary Lawrence Summers today held a series of meetings with Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, as part of Washington's efforts to work out a comprehensive package to be signed during President Bill Clinton's proposed visit in March.

Summers handed over a letter from Clinton to Vajpayee. "I carry a letter from the President making clear how much he is looking forward to visiting India and also making clear that the set of issues around economic potential was important to him," he told reporters. The treasury secretary also met his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha.

Summers' visit coincides with foreign minister Jaswant Singh's meeting with US deputy secretary of state Strobe Talbott in London on nuclear non-proliferation and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Though Washington says Clinton's trip is not linked to Delhi's signature on the test ban pact, US officials believe it can make the difference between "a good visit and a great one".

Asked whether it was unusual for the US President to visit a country on which it has imposed sanctions, Summers said: "Washington has friendly relations with India and desires to have close relationship in the years ahead. If the President visits India, he will

be looking forward rather than backward."

The treasury secretary's meeting with Vajpayee focused on three issues — outcome of the Seattle trade talks, areas of economic and business cooperation between the two countries and Clinton's proposed visit.

Apart from trying to enlist India's support in resolving disputes between the rich and poor nations, Summers sought details of the second wave of

commerce and industrial tariffs.

Summers, who will leave for Japan to attend the Group of Eight finance ministers' meeting, is also trying to look for areas in India where American companies can invest. But for this, Washington needs an assurance that Delhi will go ahead with reforms in the banking sector and take steps to bring down the ballooning fiscal deficit.

Summers' trip is part of a series of visits to the country by senior US officials and Senators in the past few weeks, indicating that Washington is keen to pave the way for Clinton's tour which will trigger "qualitatively different and meaningful" relations between the two nations.

In London, Singh began his two-day talks with Talbott to finalise the discussions they have been having for over a year on non-proliferation and the test ban treaty. The BJP government believes that by initialling the pact, India will gain considerably — it will not only cement relations with the US, but also win the confidence of other global powers.

The Centre has kicked off its campaign to build a consensus on signing the treaty. The government has held discussions with the Congress and has lined up meetings with other Opposition parties to enlist their support.

A section of the government feels India should sign the pact now without ratifying it. Last year, in a blow to Clinton, the US Senate voted against ratifying the treaty.



Atal Behari Vajpayee with Lawrence Summers in South Block. (PTI)

reforms, particularly in banking and insurance.

India and the US have agreed on all major issues discussed at the World Trade Organisation's Seattle summit. But Delhi stuck to its stand that trade cannot be linked to labour standards and the environment. The two countries, however, agreed on what the millennium round agenda should be on issues like agriculture, e-

THE TELEGRAPH
19 JAN 2000

Uma Bharati is determined to resign from ministry

The Times of India News Service

BHOPAL: Minister of tourism

Uma Bharati is determined not to withdraw her resignation from the Union ministry although chief minister Digvijay Singh has instituted a judicial inquiry into the alleged police lathi-charge on the party's corporators during the election of the Bhopal civic chief.



Uma Bharati

The BJP, on its part, ended its eight-day agitation and decided against going ahead with the planned march by party legislators and others to the CM's house on Friday.

Talking in this newspaper, Ms Bharati admitted to being under pressure to withdraw her resignation, now that the dispute had ended with at least partial concessions to the party's demand. Even Mr Digvijay Singh had requested her to resume her ministerial duties. However, according to her, taking back the resignation at this stage

would tantamount to confirming the general public impression that threats to resign were just a gimmick.

Ms Bharati added that she had already told Prime Minister Vajpayee that she would serve the party better as a MP.

Earlier on Thursday, BJP strongman and Union minister Sunderlal Patwa had conceded some political ground to Ms Bharati by addressing a joint press conference on the ongoing campaign against Mr Digvijay Singh.

Although Mr Patwa told re-

porters that he was hurt by the incident, it was apparent that he was not ready to play second fiddle to Ms Bharati over the issue which the BJP was threatening to expand into a statewide movement.

Also evident was his inclination to soft-pedal the attack on the CM with whom he shares a good rapport, although beneath the garb of hostility.

Mr Patwa, in fact, shifted the onus for the "unfortunate" happening on to Rajya Sabha MP Suresh Pachauri whose presence inside the BMC premises during the election

was strictly against orders. The minister said it was clear that the collector had acted on Mr Pachauri's directive to ensure the Congress candidate's victory.

Ms Bharati, on her part, said she had pleaded with the PM during her meeting in Delhi on Wednesday to accept her resignation as she wished to devote her time to fighting the Digvijay regime. She said she had apprised Mr Vajpayee of the ground realities in the state and he had counselled her to keep L.K. Advani and Kushabhau Thakre posted of her plans.

President delivers reform warning

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 25: Timing his economic policy red alert with the longest strike against reforms, President K.R. Narayanan today cautioned the government: "Beware of the fury of the patient and long-suffering people."

Narayanan's Republic Day speech was steeped in strong socialist emotions redolent of the pre-Narasimha Rao Congress. Three of its six pages were devoted to the misery of the poor. The note of caution was sounded on a day the government decided to privatise Indian Airlines and sell another public sector enterprise to a multinational.

Twenty years into our life in the Republic, we find that Justice — social, economic and political — remains an unrealised dream for millions of our fellow citizens."

The President said: "We (not only) have one of the world's largest number of illiterates, the world's largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition. Our giant factories rise from out of squalor; our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor."

Narayanan has long shown signs of going by the popular mood, except for a brief while last year when he failed to gauge the surging support for the

PRESIDENT'S PUSH GOVT'S AGENDA

- Our three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation must provide safe pedestrian crossings for the unempowered Indian also
- Cabinet panel clears Indian Airlines privatisation
- Nod to sell Modern Foods to a multinational
- Ports to be corporatised

power sector employees were locked in an 11-day tussle over trifurcating the state electricity board. The strike ended late tonight. For much of last week, 11 ports were paralysed by another strike.

The President's speech was acerbic in its criticism of the way liberalisation was being pursued. "Tragically, the growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest tier of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence," he said.

Narayanan was critical of the new money coming into the hands of a few since the economy opened up. He said:

"Violence in society has bared a hundred fangs as the advertisement-driven consumerism is unleashing frustrations and tensions in our society. The unabashed, vulgar indulgence in conspicuous consumption by the nouveau riche has left the underclass seething in frustration."

Narayanan added: "One half of our society guzzles aerated beverages while the other has to make do with a palmful of muddied water." He said in a tone of finality: "Our three-way fast lane of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation must provide safe pedestrian crossings for the unempowered Indian also...."

Development, he said, "should not cause environmental devastation and the uprooting of human settlements, especially tribal and the poor."

Narayanan targets Constitution review

President, PM in statute face-off

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 27: After questioning the government on its economic policy, President K.R. Narayanan today struck out at the decision to re-examine the Constitution, prompting the Prime Minister to argue that a review is imperative to ensure "stability in the Centre and the states".

Addressing the special Parliament session to mark 50 years of the Republic, Narayanan said: "Today, when there is so much talk about revising the Constitution, we have to consider whether it is the Constitution that has failed us or whether it is we who have failed the Constitution."

The President's acerbic response to the BJP's call for a second look at the statute comes two days after he virtually indicted the government for its overt thrust on privatisation without doing enough for the welfare of the poor.

Narayanan quoted constitutional experts — from former British Premier Anthony Eden to B.R. Ambedkar — to say that the Constituent Assembly, while opting for the parliamentary form,

was not imitating the British. The system, he argued, had its roots in the panchayats and reflected the "immensity" and "perplexing variety and diversity" of the country.

"In such a predicament described by a writer as one of 'a million mutinies', there must be in the body-polity a vent for discontent and frustrations to express themselves in order to prevent major explosions in society. The parliamentary system provides this vent more than a system which prefers stability to responsibility and accountability," Narayanan said.

Vajpayee, in his speech, rebutted the President's assertions, point for point. He cited stability and development to justify the need for a committee to review the Constitution, but maintained that its "basic structure and core ideals will remain inviolate".

"Five decades after the adoption of the Constitution, India is faced with a new situation. The need for stability, both at the Centre and in the states, has been felt acutely," Vajpayee said.

The Prime Minister argued that the people were "impatient" for speedier socio-economic development. "The country is also faced with a pressing challenge to

quickly remove regional and social imbalances by reorienting the development process to benefit the poorest and the weakest."

Narayanan appears to have anticipated the twin arguments. "What makes our Constitution relevant to the conditions and the problems of India and the developing world is, in fact, its socio-economic soul. Its uniqueness is that it has combined this harmoniously with the liberal rights and freedoms as conceived by the Western democracies," he said.

Taking a pot shot at the BJP proposal for a fixed tenure for the Lok Sabha, the President said: "The possibility and the facility of a change in government is itself a factor in the stability of the political system in the long term because then the people will be more inclined to tolerate a political situation they do not approve or find difficult to cope with for long."

Vajpayee countered that even as the Constitution served the "needs of India's diversity and her innate unity", the "mightiest of forts", too, needed repairs. "One has to repair the parapet from time to time, one has to clean the moat and check the banisters. The same is true about our Constitution," he said.

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THE TELEGRAPH
28 JAN 2000

Govt in statute review snub to President

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Jan. 28: A day after the President questioned the proposed Constitution review, the government today stuck to its decision but tried to paper over the apparent differences between K.R. Narayanan and Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"Carefully read, the President approves of a look at the Constitution after 50 years' experience of its working. My reading of the President's speech is that he has approved of the process of keeping the Constitution under review and making changes where necessary," law minister Ram Jethmalani said. S-V 967

Jethmalani, the prime force behind the move, announced that a review committee will be set up within 10 days, making it clear that the government has chosen to ignore the President's warning.

"We are waiting for the consent of those contacted to constitute the committee... once we get

the confirmation, we will go ahead with the review," the minister said. He refused to divulge their names, but added that a maximum of 12 people would be on the panel.

At Parliament's special session yesterday, Narayanan had said: "We have to consider whether it is the Constitution that has failed us or whether it is we who have failed the Constitution". His biting response to one of the BJP's pet issues provoked the Prime Minister to shoot back that a second look was imperative for the sake of the country's stability.

Jethmalani spelt out the committee's twin terms of reference: whether the aims set out in the Constitution have been achieved; and, if not, whether it is a constitutional failure or a fault of those implementing the statute.

"Under these two broad terms of reference, the committee would review the entire Constitution," he said, adding that the basic features would not be tampered with.

Echoing Jethmalani, home minister L.K. Advani said the government's intention was "not to create a new Constitution but to review certain aspects".

Jethmalani's assurance was immediately followed by a statement that the BJP's critics might interpret as revealing its "hidden agenda". The minister said expressions like "socialism and secularism" in the preamble should be re-examined.

Hand in hand with a re-assertion of the intention to push ahead with the review, the government mounted a damage-control exercise, the contours of which were drawn yesterday after the headline-grabbing public display of a conflict of opinion between the President and the Prime Minister.

Blaming the media for "blowing out of proportion" the President's speech, Jethmalani said: "Why are you allergic to the word review? If you do not want to call it a review, call it by any other

term then: say a fresh look or an introspection."

Justifying the move, the minister said: "There are obvious areas which require constitutional amendments. The empowerment of women is one such area. The power to supersede a state government under Article 356 requires to be narrowly confined to genuine cases of failure of constitutional machinery. Centre-state financial relations is another area which requires a close look. Removal of just grievances of Scheduled Castes and Tribes is also a matter of priority, so also electoral reforms."

Jethmalani brushed aside fears that the BJP might use the review to push through its agenda. "Two-thirds majority in both Houses is required to bring into effect the changes. In that case, the government needs the cooperation of all parties, especially the main Opposition. So where is the fear that any hidden agenda would be imposed?" he asked.

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